Statement of Teaching Philosophy

In my five years at Iowa State University I have been fortunate to teach multiple sections of two courses of vastly different levels of difficulty and aimed at student groups with dissimilar needs: a principles of macroeconomics course for undergraduate students (Econ 102) and an econometrics course for Ph.D. students in economics (Econ 672). I teach these two courses with distinct objectives in mind and draw on different personal experiences.

My main goal in the principles of macroeconomics course (Econ 102) is to help undergraduate students learn how to think more clearly about the effects of monetary and fiscal policy in our daily lives. Another key objective is to promote basic economic literacy so that a typical student walking out of the final exam can be a better citizen and live a more productive and fulfilling life.

To achieve these goals in Econ 102, which is a large service course aimed at a diverse group of freshmen and sophomores, I structure lectures and homework assignments so that everyone has an opportunity to master all of the basic concepts and successfully complete the course. Notably, I make an explicit effort to accommodate different learning styles and disparate initial student preparation levels, which has become particularly critical in view of a growing number of international students enrolling in the course. To illustrate, I post templates of my lecture slides online for student use, which can be filled out as I go through the lecture material and gradually unveil the filled-in slides in class. Furthermore, I assign carefully selected readings from an accessible principles of economics textbook that overlaps with, but does not necessarily duplicate, the lectures. An integral component of the course is a continual assessment of student learning using homework administered on Aplia, an online platform offering instantaneous feedback to each student on the submitted homework answers. In addition, I complement the in-class exams with review sessions before each exam, in order to address student questions, and after the exams when feasible, in order to analyze mistakes in the student solutions. Moreover, I post online for student use additional practice problems and suggested solutions, as well as customized study guides to facilitate exam preparation. I also make myself available to students both via email and during regular office hours to address individual requests.

I strive to continually improve my teaching methods in Econ 102 based on student course evaluations and the advice and best practices of colleagues. Over the last five years, I have developed a number of specific techniques to foment student interest in economic principles, and to overcome the challenge of keeping everyone engaged in a large lecture hall setting. For example, each new topic is opened with a quote from a recent, specifically selected news article that provides a compelling real life illustration of the theory to be discussed in the lecture. The conventional lecture routine is periodically broken-up in order to solve practice problems using pencil and paper (I project the solutions on-screen using ELMO). I also frequently utilize highly customized pedagogical tools when explaining topics that can be too abstract for many undergraduate students. For instance, a dramatic impact of long-term economic growth on quality of life is illustrated by comparing and contrasting selected photos of the reconstructed
Jamestown Settlement and Colonial Williamsburg, which are eight miles and 150 years apart. A discussion of advantages and disadvantages of the gold standard as a monetary system is framed in the context of *The Wizard of Oz*, an allegorical novel known to most Americans and many international students. Moreover, on the advice of colleagues’ peer evaluations of the course, I have developed many numerical examples to discuss in class, including a detailed illustration of the derivation of a money multiplier formula for a fractional reserve banking system, which can be a particularly challenging subject to less mathematically inclined students. I believe these approaches help me run a more student-centered classroom.

My main objective in the graduate econometrics course (Econ 672) is to equip first-year Ph.D. students in economics with the knowledge of fundamental econometric methods and set the students on the path to become successful applied economists. Because Econ 672 is a component of the Ph.D. core sequence, I place a particular emphasis on rigor in the class, especially when deriving properties of econometric estimators. Still, on the advice of colleagues’ peer evaluations of my teaching, I also devote a substantial fraction of the lecture time to explaining why these properties are important from a practical standpoint and illustrate the use of econometric methods on carefully selected empirical examples. The purpose of the homework assignments in the course is not only to assess whether the students understand the econometric theory, but also to help them develop data analysis skills. In fact, the assignments include customized empirical problems that involve estimating econometric models on publicly available data. In a similar vein, each exam is designed to both serve as an assessment tool and provide a comprehensive learning experience for the students. In particular, many exam problems require the students to explore econometric issues that were mentioned only in passing in class. To facilitate student learning, I post online a complete set of lecture slides, as well as problem sets (including data files for empirical exercises) and additional practice materials for student use.

I make an effort to instill in the graduate students the importance of high quality empirical research in economics by exposing them to examples worthy of emulation. For instance, a homework problem asks the students to replicate the results of a famous study by Angrist and Krueger on the impact of education on earnings. In response to student course evaluations, I have significantly modified the structure of the course. For example, I have replaced several onerous programming assignments with more straightforward computational problems. I have also adopted software packages that are popular among applied economists and econometricians, and most likely to be used by the students after they complete the Ph.D. program. Furthermore, I have adjusted the lectures to more frequently involve use of the whiteboard in addition to the lecture slides. I also tell jokes to ease tension when a class topic is particularly hard. I believe that the changes and my commitment to continue improving this challenging course have helped me turn it into a more enjoyable experience for every graduate student.

Mentoring graduate students in economics is a critical component of my teaching responsibilities at ISU and a logical extension of regular in-class instruction. I have served on program of study committees and have reviewed and provided feedback on many graduate student papers and presentations. To date, one of my formal advising projects has resulted in a joint working paper with a master’s student. I have also informally advised several graduate students regarding the choice of research area and thesis topic, conference participation, refereeing papers, and academic job market practices.
I am firmly committed to continual self-improvement and to upgrading of my teaching skills and style. I also believe that investing time into studying new and effective learning technologies for possible adoption in my courses has a potentially large payoff in terms of improved future student learning outcomes. To that effect, I have attended workshops organized by the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT), including a full series of workshops on the use of Blackboard at ISU.

My ideas for the principles of effective teaching of economics have been shaped by working as an assistant to Kenneth Elzinga, a nationally recognized expert on undergraduate education at the University of Virginia. I have also had the privilege to observe in class and obtain advice from colleagues at ISU. I am indebted to my dissertation advisors Steven Stern and Leora Friedberg and to T. Wake Epps for examples of best practices in graduate-level course instruction and graduate student mentoring.