Statement of Teaching Philosophy

In my eleven years at Iowa State University, I have been fortunate to teach multiple sections of courses of vastly different levels of difficulty and aimed at student groups with dissimilar needs. These courses are Econ 102 (“Principles of Macroeconomics”), a principles of macroeconomics course for undergraduate students; Econ 672 (“Econometrics II”), a core econometrics course for PhD students in economics; and Econ 521/621X (“Advanced Labor Markets and Labor Demand”), a field labor economics course also for PhD students in economics. I teach these courses with distinct objectives in mind.

My main goal in 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 is particularly critical in view of a large number of international students enrolling in the course. To illustrate, I post templates of my lecture slides online that students can fill out as I go through the lecture material and gradually unveil the filled-in slides in class. Furthermore, I assign 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 Canvas, an online platform offering instantaneous feedback to each student on the submitted homework answers. I offer review sessions prior to each in-class exam to address student questions. Moreover, I post additional practice problems and suggested solutions, as well as customized study guides online to facilitate exam preparation. I also make myself available to students both via email and during regular office hours to address individual requests. When feasible, I offer a session following exams to analyze mistakes in the student solutions.

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 several years, I have developed a few specific techniques to stimulate student interest in economic principles and to overcome the challenge of keeping everyone engaged in a large lecture hall setting. For example, I open each new topic with a quote from a recent 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 the whiteboard. 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 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. This includes 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. These approaches have helped me run a more student-centered classroom.

My main objective in Econ 672, which I taught in 2009–2017, was to equip first-year PhD 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 PhD core sequence, I placed an emphasis on rigor in the classroom, especially when deriving properties of econometric estimators. Still, on the advice of colleagues’ peer evaluations of my teaching, I also devoted lecture time to explaining why these properties are important from a practical standpoint and illustrating the use of econometric methods on carefully selected empirical examples. The purpose of the homework assignments was not only to assess whether the students understand the econometric theory, but also to help them develop data analysis skills. In fact, the assignments included customized empirical problems that involve estimating econometric models on publicly available data. In a similar vein, each exam was designed to both serve as an assessment tool and provide a comprehensive learning experience for the students. In particular, many exam problems required the students to explore econometric issues that were mentioned only in passing in class. To facilitate student learning, I posted a complete set of lecture slides, as well as problem sets (including data files for empirical exercises) and additional practice materials online. I also strived 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 asked 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 significantly modified the structure of the course. For example, I replaced several onerous programming assignments with more straightforward computational problems and adopted software packages that are popular among applied economists and econometricians and are most likely to be used by the students after completing the PhD program. Furthermore, I adjusted the lectures to more frequently involve use of the whiteboard in addition to the lecture slides. I also told jokes to ease tension when a class topic was particularly hard.
Since 2018, I have been teaching Econ 621X, a PhD field course in labor economics. It is intended to provide second-year PhD students with a review of theoretical and empirical methods employed in current labor economics research. I focus on the topics of labor demand, job search and matching, unemployment, market determination of wages, compensating differentials, employment contracts and incentives, and wage inequality and discrimination. The course blends rigorous theoretical analysis with a review of recent empirical research and aims at transitioning the students from PhD classwork to independent dissertation research.

Since Econ 621X is a PhD-level course, I have adopted nearly all pedagogical practices from Econ 672, but also added new approaches and assessment techniques specifically tailored for students of a field class. For example, I ask the students to choose and formally present in class a recently published paper in a top economics journal on one of the topics covered in the course and then grade each other’s presentation performance. Also, in response to student teaching evaluations after having taught the course for the first time in 2018, I have modified the lectures to include an open discussion of five selected articles with the goal of exposing students to a variety of empirical methodologies employed by labor economists. I believe that these innovations and my commitment to continue improving this challenging course have helped me turn it into an enjoyable experience for every 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 as a major or co-major professor for four graduate students (one master’s and three PhD students), sat on eleven program of study committees, and reviewed and provided feedback on many graduate student papers and presentations. One of my formal advising projects has resulted in a joint publication 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, including a full series of workshops on the use of Canvas at ISU.

My ideas for the principles of effective teaching of economics have been shaped by working as an assistant to Prof. 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.