

TEACHING STATEMENT

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Introduction

I find tremendous joy and satisfaction in sharing my knowledge with others, in exchanging ideas, debating and solving problems with others. There is no better means of doing so than through interactive teaching. Teaching offers an opportunity to interact with students as they discover and explore a field, often for the first time. It is always a privilege to take part in this initial stage of their journey. I know from personal experience how important an encouraging and creative teacher is, and I strive to be that for my students.

As an academic, teaching also acts as a good source of research ideas, and provides a platform for personal skills-development.

Previous Experience

My first teaching experience was during “school practice” for my postgraduate diploma in education where I taught mathematics and physics at Secondary- and High-School levels in Uganda. It was during this time that I discovered my passion for teaching. I enjoyed both the methodological and practical aspects of my school practice and I was awarded distinctions in both.

During my school practice, I experimented with different techniques to increase students’ engagement in the classroom and with the subject. I learnt that, beyond presenting the subject in a practical manner (e.g. by using visual aids, providing real-life examples and performing experiments with students), it is also very important to engage with each student at an individual level – knowing their names, their individual challenges inside and outside the classroom, and appreciating the difficulties they face with the subject matter. Such interpersonal but professional relationships with students improved their classroom engagement and, in turn, their interest in the subject.

During my two years as a lecturer at Maastricht University School of Business and Economics, teaching micro- and macro-economics, I gained experience with what is known there as

“Problem Based Learning” (PBL) – a learning method that is widely adopted by all departments at the University. The PBL method is student-centred, whereby students set their own learning goals and go through the experience of discovering the solutions to questions that constitute the learning goals. During this process, the teacher acts more as a facilitator, ensuring that students’ learning goals meet the objectives set in the curriculum. Due to the set-up of a typical PBL class session – it involves a round-table discussion of typically 10-15 students – there is direct interpersonal interaction between students and the teacher. The teacher thus becomes aware of the learning challenges that each student faces. The PBL method was extremely popular with the students at Maastricht University, and appeared to yield better learning results than the traditional lecture-based teaching method.

At Maastricht University, aside from teaching through the PBL method, I also conducted lectures for both micro- and macro-economics to undergraduate classes, some with as many as 300 students.

The additional teaching experience I gained at Maastricht University includes course development. I developed a course module called “Globalization Debate” for third-year undergraduates in Economics and Business. This course module examined ways in which globalization is shaping trade, intellectual property rights, inequality and overall economic growth. I was also responsible for students’ assessment (deciding assessment criteria, setting and grading exams) for most of the courses I taught. For some technical courses, I used varied assessment criteria, with the final grade comprised of three elements: participation (accounting for up to 10%); assignments and projects (accounting for up to 30%); and final exam (accounting for 60%). Such grading encouraged greater participation and engagement throughout the course.

Teaching Philosophy

If my teaching experience has taught me anything, it is that each student is unique and requires a stimulating educational environment where they can grow physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially. As a teacher, my desire is to create an atmosphere where students can meet their full potential and to provide a safe environment where students are encouraged to share their ideas and are not afraid to take risks.

Based on my experience with the PBL learning method, I believe that a teacher's role is to act as a guide during the learning process. In particular, I believe that my role as a teacher is to create an interactive environment in the classroom so as to inspire students' curiosity as they learn new concepts and techniques. I also encourage discussion sessions on open-ended topics so that students discover the joys of exploring their academic field without focusing on end results.

In large classes which require lecture-style delivery, I prefer to spend some time brainstorming with the students before starting to lecture on the topic. This enhances interest and general understanding of the topic. I also prefer to explain reading materials on the white board before beginning my formal presentation through slides. I try to remain mobile while delivering my lectures in order to keep students engaged and focused.

Plan for the future

I have experience teaching both micro- and macro-economics at undergraduate levels and I would be happy to take up some courses in these areas, in addition to any other quantitative courses. I am also keen on developing and teaching game theory courses, ranging from an introductory course for undergraduate to advanced courses for undergraduate and master levels.

Aside from the usual courses in micro- and macro-economics, I am also very interested in introducing a course on social and economic networks for undergraduate and masters students, or for PhD students who are interested in applying network analysis to their research.

Network analysis is increasingly becoming integrated into economics. After the financial and economic crises of 2008, economists are recognizing that the traditional representative agent models are not sufficient to capture the complexities inherent in most economic interactions. Network analysis offers useful analytical tools for studying complex interactions, as evidenced in its application to the study of peer effects, industrial economics, financial markets, macroeconomic input-output analysis, and international trade. I am keen on developing a course that emphasizes the empirical applications of network analysis in economics.