

Teaching Statement

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My goals and approaches to teaching differ somewhat depending on the kind of course I'm teaching. In courses that are in the core of the subject and/or are prerequisites to other courses, it is important to me that the students leave the class with a solid understanding of that material and an ability to use it. For electives, I am more comfortable with allowing students with somewhat different interests to take somewhat different things from the class. (My grading reflects this: a student who truly masters half of the material in the class and has a poor grasp on the other half will get a higher grade in an elective class than in the core class.) My approaches and other aspects of my philosophy are perhaps best illustrated in terms of my experience teaching at Rutgers. While at Rutgers, I have taught undergraduate classes in Financial Economics, Econometrics, and Game Theory.¹ My approaches to these classes have differed from each other, in part because I tried different things and saw which succeeded and which failed, but also because of how the courses fit into the Rutgers economics program.

Econometrics at Rutgers is a course that is required of all undergraduate economics majors, and is a prerequisite for other courses. My primary goal, then, was somewhat pragmatic: I wanted as many students as possible to finish the class with the skills and knowledge that future instructors would expect of students who had passed Econometrics. This especially meant that they should be able to run a linear regression on a computer and have a decent understanding of the output. I taught the course twice. I made

¹I have been a TA for Introductory Microeconomics, Public Economics, Game Theory, and have graded for Intermediate Microeconomics, Health Economics, and a few other classes for which that involved feeding a scantron machine. I focus in this statement on the classes for which I was the sole instructor.

sure the students were exposed to certain ideas — perhaps most notably instrumental variables — that I expected many of the students would need to review if they planned to use them in practice, but would at least leave the class with an awareness of the concept. I presented some theory where I felt it would be interesting or useful to help the students understand the material, but presented less theory the second time I taught the class, as the students found less of it interesting or useful than I did. Going in, I overestimated the students' intuitive grasp on basic algebra; the second time I taught the course I spent more time reviewing that, and would further increase it if I taught the course again.

Financial Economics and Game Theory are both upper-level electives; the students are, to a greater extent than with the core classes, self-selected. Financial Economics is a prerequisite for some other classes, and preparing the students for possible later classes was part of the consideration when deciding what material to cover and what material to emphasize. Game Theory is not a prerequisite for any other class, and I had more flexibility with the curriculum; on the first homework I asked students whether they had particular interests, and (for example) incorporated some Evolutionary Game Theory into the class because one of the students expressed an interest in that.

Two ways in which I improved as a teacher as I went along were in giving more frequent homework — providing students more opportunities to get feedback from me, but also for me to get feedback on which concepts students were finding confusing — and in retaining more flexibility. In the Game Theory class in particular (the last class I taught), I accepted electronically submitted homework, and I often responded to homework in time for students to resubmit it, occasionally iterating again for a third submission.

Some of the students who took advantage of this benefited from it greatly. I was also more flexible than in previous classes, both on a minute-by-minute basis and on a class-by-class basis. In Game Theory I lectured almost entirely from the chalkboard, rather than from overhead slides, which made it easier to pivot if the first way I tried to present an idea wasn't working. I might use slides again when teaching in the future, but would want to be careful to remain more connected to the students than to the slides, and to be willing to throw out the script on occasion if the dynamics of the class called for it. I also had a greater willingness than in previous classes to change the plan for the next week on the basis of feedback in class, in office hours, or on written assessments.

My teaching evaluations have been improving over time, and were well above department and course averages for the last class I taught; I intend to continue to experiment and learn.