Teaching Statement

Teaching economics effectively can be challenging, but through careful attention to student feedback and years of experience, I have grown in my ability to help students succeed. For most of my time at UC San Diego, I have been a teaching assistant (TA) for introductory- or intermediate-level microeconomics. Both of these courses are designated as "high-failure" courses by the campus, and I saw the potential for me as a TA to have a substantial impact on student success. Based on student evaluations, trial and error, and understanding the differences across instructors, I developed strategies to be a more effective TA for my students. When I got the chance to TA a difficult economics course for master's students, I relished the opportunity to carefully break down content in a manner tailored to students who found economics overwhelming. Patience and an ability to meet students at their level have also made me effective in office hours and as a TA of more project-based courses. I published academic research inspired by my teaching, demonstrating my commitment to the field. Overall, my time at UCSD has equipped me to effectively teach a wide range of economics courses, from large lectures to smaller, project-focused classes, understanding student's needs and tailoring content accordingly.

One of the primary jobs of a TA at UC San Diego is to teach the small sections that are associated with large lecture courses. TA sections are designed to give students a small-class environment in which to ask questions and to learn how to solve problems. In my first quarters as a TA I focused on covering each difficult problem type in every section. While I got reasonable reviews, students noted I was a "bit unorganized and rushed for my liking" despite being "clearly a brilliant IA" (ECON 100B Spring 2021). After receiving this feedback, I tried to slow down my teaching by allowing time for student questions after each problem we solved. While I enjoyed the increased engagement, in sections where students asked many questions, I could teach fewer topics and cover fewer problems. Occasionally, a critical topic was omitted. To ensure all students heard the key topics for the week, I started by highlighting all the key takeaways for the section in a mini-lecture at the beginning before engaging in the problems. Covering the intuition up front both made the sections more organized and helped ensure key learning goals weren't lost. Students appreciated the changes noting, "Best teacher ever, super understanding and great knowledge of the material." (ECON 100A Fall 2023).

Changes to my teaching are also driven by a desire to align instructor expectations with student abilities. Intermediate microeconomics is calculus-heavy at UC San Diego and the instructor I have worked with the most places a high value on students' mastering first-order conditions. When I realized that calculus errors cost students many points, I searched for an online tool to help my students. I discovered that WolframAlpha Pro, which the university subscribed to, had a feature that would generate unlimited basic derivative practice problems. I promoted this resource, and the instructor incorporated it into his syllabus and teaching. In addition, during sections for this instructor, I changed my pedagogy to highlight derivative rules when working out problems and sometimes deliberately making derivative mistakes. Students noticed, noting I "would correct [my] mistakes and let us know about common mishaps made during exams, which were beneficial for the students" (ECON 100A Winter 2023).

The culmination of my career helping students get through difficult courses was when I TAd a trade class for masters of international relations students. Many of these students hadn't done serious math since high school before graduate school, and after struggling with an earlier economics course in their sequence, needed good grades to keep their program scholarships. I worked hard to explain the intuition behind the different trade models and their relationship to each other while taking time to slowly and carefully work through the math highlighting common mistakes such as forgetting to distribute a negative sign. This all led to the following review:

> *A very compassionate, kind individual who empathized with his students. Very knowledgeable and able to simplify concepts for students to understand. Would absolutely recommend him to anyone taking this course.* (GPCO 403 Spring 2024)

I also had the opportunity to TA a more project-style course where my patience and enthusiasm were crucial. Students were struggling with the basics of independent research, but patient and careful advice led to excellent reviews and students with comments such as "REALLY REALLY REALLY helpful I woulda gone crazy without steven" (ECON 129). Patience and understanding during office hours are things students clearly value and are mentioned in many of my reviews, even from my early days when I was still honing my skills as a section leader.

Some threats to student success, like academic integrity violations, are hard to address directly in the classroom. When I was confronted with an academic integrity violation in a course I taught, I tried to pilot solutions through an academic study. After a case of exam cheating, I was puzzled as to why students were risking so much just to gain a few points on exams. I wondered if they were underestimating the probability of being caught. I tested this theory in a small RCT I designed in collaboration with the academic integrity office. The results were inconclusive, the treatment only worked for overestimators and backfired for underestimators. However, I learned a lot about using courses for research and collaborating with administrative departments.

Overall my time at UCSD has given me immense experience teaching a diverse range of students. Further, I am well versed at balancing my research and teaching commitments consistently teaching throughout my PhD career, including during part of my dissertation fieldwork. I had to carefully balance fieldwork and class commitments and work closely to balance responsibilities across the TA team.

I look forward to teaching a broad range of classes from elective classes in development to core introductory and intermediate classes. I am happy to teach large lectures or smaller courses where helping students with their individual projects is the focus. I also look foreward to advising graduate students. I participated in group advising even as an advanced graduate student and really enjoyed helping my peers shape and explore their early ideas. By remaining kind and approachable while structured and precise, I hope to help all students reach their fullest potential.

UCSD does not make it easy for students to review their TAs in large classes as they have to click through all of the instructional assistants associated with sometimes 1000-person courses. Further, unless 4 people in a section respond, the results are suppressed. Further, although we are technically assigned to sections students are allowed to choose sections at their convenience fragmenting reviews for large classes. In the table below, I pooled results across sections for clarity.

Teaching Assistantships Held

Quarter	Course and Instructor	Level	% Students Recommend	Response Rate
FA20	ECON 1 - Principles of Microeconomics, Tocoian, Oana	Introductory	100%	1.39% (6/431)
WI21	ECON 2 - Market Imperfections & Policy, Tocoian, Oana	Introductory	75%	5.97% (8/134)
SP21	ECON 100B - Microeconomics B, Sinitsyn, Maxim	Upper-division	100%	1.51% (4/265)
FA21	ECON 1 - Principles of Microeconomics, Famulari, Melissa	Introductory	80%	3.73% (35/937)
WI22	ECON 100B - Microeconomics B, Tocoian, Oana	Upper-division	89%	3.47% (9/259)
SP22	ECON 100A - Microeconomics A, Newhouse, Herbert S	Upper-division	100%	10.45% (7/67)
FA22	ECON 100A - Microeconomics A, Newhouse, Herbert S	Upper-division	91%	1.95% (11/563)
WI23	ECON 100A - Microeconomics A, Newhouse, Herbert S	Upper-division	80%	1.35% (5/370)
SP23	ECON 129 - Cities, Inequality, Innovation, Eckert, Fabian Paul	Upper-division elective	100%	2.34 % (11/47)
FA23	ECON 100A - Microeconomics A, Newhouse, Herbert S	Upper-division	90%	4.09% (19/464)
WI24	ECON 100A - Microeconomics A, Newhouse, Herbert S	Upper-division	75%	1.06% (4/376)
SP24	GPCO 403 - International Economics, Bowen, T. Renee	Policy Masters Core Course	100%	5.15% (5/97)

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