As a graduate student I have had the opportunity to be a head teaching assistant and instructor for an undergraduate intermediate macroeconomics course as well as a teaching assistant for a master's level microeconometrics course. As a teaching assistant I have at various points been responsible for writing problem sets, assisting with writing exams, designing exam grading rubrics, guest-lecturing, and assisting in the general administration of courses which often sat over one hundred students. I have also written slides for, and held, (midterm and final) review sessions, as well as created or edited course materials, such as a handout reviewing relevant mathematical concepts. Further, I have been responsible for managing teams of teaching assistants, coordinating with and managing course graders, and planning as well as holding discussion sections. As an instructor I had the chance to experience teaching in a smaller class environment, and was responsible for all facets of the course.

The most valuable part of my teaching experience has been learning how to effectively communicate with students. I have found that when helping students it is better to talk through the question with the student, rather than to just immediately answer with no further student input. In this way, the student is more directly involved in their own learning while the instructor takes on more of a facilitating role. In my course, discussion sections were structured with this idea in mind. We would begin by exploring how students approached the previous week's homework assignment. After, I would introduce new scenarios and problems for students to consider. They were given time to think, and then given the opportunity to discuss their answers; I only chimed in when students drifted off track.

Though my classes were based around the traditional lecture paradigm, I would often have students guide me through certain examples and practice problems. I found that students responded positively to this collaborative approach, and as I increased active learning opportunities as the semester went on, I noticed an improvement in student understanding, retention, and engagement in the course. I also encouraged participation and discussion in other ways. Sometimes this was explicit, such as pausing lectures from time to time to ask students to recall a relevant concept. A major factor, though, was giving positive reinforcement by acknowledging and very briefly expanding upon relevant observations or questions mentioned students.

This reinforcement was part of fostering a welcoming environment, which is crucial to student development. I know from my own experience that the attitude of the instructor was paramount in determining how much I asked for help or participated in class— I have had instructors that I avoided because I was worried about making a bad impression or annoying them. Thus, when interacting with students I find it is important to be approachable, relatable, and patient, where students feel safe to be forthcoming about any issues they are having and are not afraid to say the wrong thing. I believe students have found this approach to be beneficial. In reviewing my teaching assistant and instructor evaluations, I was pleased to find that I "helped clear up a lot of concepts," "did a great job of explaining the concepts in an understandable way," and that a student "enjoy[ed] [my] class so much."

I believe that the most successful courses find a balance between a rigorous, theoretical approach and real world applications. Theory and technical instruction are essential for developing students' analytical tools and preparing them for further economic study; however, without continually relating course material to current events, research, and policy discussions it is easy for these concepts to become too abstract, making it difficult for students to understand their relevance. Further, incorporating data and current research into the course gives students not only a sense of the strengths, but also the limitations of models covered in class. Having students think about the applicability of models in certain scenarios gives the instructor an opportunity to expose students to higher-order thinking, as well.

My course was centered on developing a self-consistent, general equilibrium neoclassical model while continually connecting the model to the real world. For example, when discussing consumption smooth-
ing. I outlined the testable implications and introduced research showing that the response of consumption to temporary income shocks was higher than theory predicted. This led to a discussion on possible explanations for this finding, such as liquidity constraints. Homework and exam questions were written with application of course concepts in mind, as well. For example, one exam problem asked students to analyze the effect of the increase in the price of oil in 2004 on Norway’s aggregate measures, while another had students explain the recent disparity between inflation and money growth in Venezuela.

Though less exciting than discussing teaching techniques, it is important to mention the necessity of clarity in course structure and expectations. A poorly thought out course design can lead to confusion and myopic thinking among students, where they fail to see the linkages between concepts and overarching themes of the material. Further, opaque course goals cause students to waste time and energy trying to figure out what is expected of them. Thus, one of my priorities was to construct a syllabus that was comprehensive and clear about my expectations and goals for the class, and structure the course such that topics flowed naturally and built upon one another.

Finally, it is important for the instructor to realize that there is always some way to improve the classroom experience. To this end I enrolled in the Certificate of College Teaching Program at Duke. This program offers classes as well as a peer review program, in which program participants observe one another and provide feedback on their teaching techniques. Already it has helped me transition from a more traditional teaching style to a more open and active learning style, as well as introduced me to novel ways to incorporate technology into the classroom. For instance, in my course I asked students to fill out a mid-term evaluation on Qualtrics, to get feedback and gauge how well they felt they were doing with the material. Adding technology to the classroom experience is one avenue I would like to further explore, such as periodic, short non-graded online quizzes that can give a real time indication of how well students are grasping concepts. I look forward to learning more ways to improve in the future, as well.