Teaching Statement

Since I began my training as an economics researcher, I have always been conscious of the privileged education I have received. Coming from a small town in Peru, I have always done my best to learn as much as I could from every instructor I have ever had, both at the undergraduate and graduate level. I consider teaching not only as a serious responsibility but as a great opportunity to give back for the fortunes I have encountered in my academic formation. In my experience as student, teaching assistant and instructor, I have come to the realization that a good teacher is the one that inspires students to continue learning beyond the scope of the class. In order to achieve this goal, my teaching includes four main components: (i) an organized and clear transmission of knowledge (ii) which allows students to interact with the material, (iii) relates it to hypothetical and real-world situations and (iv) finally, incorporates it into their own career development.

Organized transmission of knowledge

Every course should be planned and prepared in advance. As a student, I have seen professors reading the slides for the first time in front of the class. This behavior generates confusion and discourages any pre-existing interest in the content. The usual outcome was that half of the class stop attending the lectures and review the suggested material right before the exams. I am convinced that a good class should be thoroughly organized, both within and across lectures.

As teaching assistant of Economic Theory at the graduate level, it was a challenge to provide substantial contribution to the learning process of students. The solutions to problem sets were prepared and posted online before every TA session. Therefore, many students, specially those who needed more support, stopped coming to the sessions. After brainstorming with the professors of this class, we introduced some changes in the organization of each session. We decided not to cover every exercise but to focus only in a couple of them, prioritizing those in which they had more mistakes. Then, I prepared extended solutions to those problems highlighting when and how I was using the new concepts from the lectures, as well as complementary mathematical background. Before solving any problem, I clearly set milestones to make clear the use of concepts and tools.

The relevance of organizing the material across lectures became clearer to me while teaching Introduction to Economics. Right after I finished undergrad, I taught this class during two semesters. In the first one, I followed the ambitious outline suggested by the textbook the department recommended. It did not only include a large number of topics in micro and macroeconomics, but also it delayed the discussion of the government and its role until the end of the class. Given the challenges to cover all the topics and to connect the content along the sessions, I suggested some changes to the department. The second semester, I reduced
the number of topics and I concentrated mostly on microeconomics. Then, I covered the role of government and finished the class with a small introduction to macroeconomics. These changes allowed me to clearly set the goal and milestones of each session, to connect the concepts across them and to motivate discussion around these concepts while studying the role of government.

Interaction with new concepts

Learning is smoother and more successful when students are encouraged to think critically about the rationale and usefulness of new tools and concepts. On the one hand, professors should create spaces in which students connect new concepts with previous knowledge. On the other hand, students should feel comfortable enough to speak their doubts and to question the material. While working in my PhD, I had the fortune to TA Econometrics for professor Duncan Thomas. I attended all the lectures before preparing my TA sessions. Even when it required some knowledge of calculus, this undergrad class highly prioritized intuition and students were constantly encouraged to interact with the new material. I remembered students were amazed to realize that the R-squared in an univariate OLS of Y on X is a monotonic transformation of the correlation between Y and X (correlation to the power of 2). It was much easier to grab a new concept when they can relate it to an intuitive term they know in advance.

The main challenge in the class was to encourage students to openly share their doubts. In the process of improving the class, we agreed to take small quizzes in random days. Students started reviewing the material of previous sessions which increased their confidence to participate in class. Second, professor Thomas started alternating volunteered and randomly selected participation. It was interesting to see how the pool of volunteer participants increased over the weeks. Students are more comfortable to participate whenever they observe their peers are contributing to build the intuition behind new material.

Application to hypothetical and real-world situations

As a student, I have always found rewarding when I was able to creatively combine new concepts to propose solutions for challenging questions. Specially when they were link to reality. In my years as teaching assistant, I came to realize that a good set of questions combines direct applications of new material with slightly more complicated problems in which the rationale/assumptions for the new concepts and tools are challenged.

As I mentioned before, the second time I taught Introduction to Economics I reduced the number of topics covered in the class. I used part of the extra time to ask students for an applied assignment. In groups, they were asked to comment on recent Peruvian public policies. Students prepared short presentations in which they used the concepts from class and took a stand in favor or against the chosen policy. During the presentations, all students showed great interest in the content of the class and useful discussions were generated.
Integration of class experience into students careers

In my view, an instructor should motivate students to continue learning beyond the scope of the class. In addition to the content of a class, a teacher should provide analytical tools. Students can learn how to organize concepts and to highlight key milestones in a reading, how to be critical about new information available and more important how to apply conceptual frameworks and knowledge to real world situations. Finally, a good instructor should spread enthusiasm among their students. Students are heterogeneous and a professor should encourage them to integrate the class experience into their own careers.

I find teaching is a fulfilling activity. It is exciting to spark knowledge, intuition, creativity and drive among other individuals while helping them to grow as professionals. I am thrilled to continue learning from every teaching experience and to contribute to the science of Economics as a developer and a communicator.