TEACHING STATEMENT

I believe that students learn the most when: 1) they are taught not only ideas, but the thinking that leads to ideas; 2) teachers employ strategies to maintain student interest; and 3) teachers are approachable and empathetic. I’ve come to these beliefs in part from my own experience as a TA and course instructor and in large part from observing the teachers I’ve had over my years as a student. I expand upon each idea below.

**Teaching thinking**: Great teachers don’t just explain each idea listed in the syllabus, they tell the story of how these ideas were discovered, or at least how they could be discovered from principles already known to the student. Teaching students how knowledge is generated makes the subject more interesting and makes it easier for the student to recall—they only need to remember the question and the method to get to the answers instead of memorizing all the answers. In addition it teaches critical thinking that is invaluable for all walks of life. This requires the teacher to have a mastery of the subject matter, an understanding of the students’ prior knowledge, and great organizational skills. The first and last of these may be developed over time with experience, the second, student’s prior knowledge, ought to be assessed before the course begins and again regularly as the course goes on.

**Strategies to maintain interest**: Students may lose interest if they feel the topics in class are esoteric, or of limited practical relevance to their lives. Use of relatable examples whenever possible helps to keep students engaged. For example, in my summer undergraduate principles course, a large share of the students were athletes, so I used the example of protein powder vs protein shakes to illustrate substitutable goods and protein supplements vs gym memberships to illustrate complements. Often such attempts elicit laughter, which makes class more enjoyable for all. Another strategy is to break from a traditional lecture format to include more question and answer, in class problem solving and games that simulate the concepts being taught. These strategies make class a welcoming and fun atmosphere, which I believe is most conducive to learning.

**Empathy and approachability**: Perceptions about a professor’s friendliness can influence whether students who fall behind reach out for help or stay isolated and fail. For this reason it is extremely important or teachers to encourage office hour visits and to reassure students that it is normal to struggle with the often difficult material economics classes. As a first generation student myself, I can relate to the anxiety many undergraduates feel when transitioning to a University setting. I find sharing my story with struggling students often makes them feel better about their own condition.

These are the principles that guide me as I seek to become a better teacher now. While I expect the specifics of my philosophy may change as I gain more experience and learn from other educators, the primary aim of my teaching will always be to maximize the value of the course for the students enrolled.