

Teaching Statement

David Martin

Teaching Philosophy

Good teaching can make a big difference in a student's life. I was lucky enough to experience this firsthand with the many passionate, thoughtful professors I had as an undergraduate at Pomona College. I have seen it reinforced through relatives who are career educators and the lasting impressions they have made on their students, even years after those students have moved on from the classroom. More recently, I have seen it in my dissertation research through candid discussions with teachers in New York City public schools about overcoming the challenges facing educators serving underprivileged students. In my own teaching, I strive to emulate these role models through three primary aims: (1) *creating a supportive learning environment*, (2) *building careful, logical reasoning skills*, and (3) *fostering enthusiasm for learning*.

Creating a supportive learning environment

My work on graduate student mental health outreach has reinforced the importance of creating an inclusive and supportive classroom environment for all students. Stress and anxiety can impede a student's ability to learn, think creatively, and most importantly, enjoy the educational experience. My goal in all of my classes is to alleviate stress by demonstrating my commitment to the success and well-being of my students.

In particular, I try to acknowledge difficult material and normalize struggling with it as part of the learning process. For example, with sophomores who had little-to-no experience reading academic papers and limited math training, I told them explicitly that there would be parts they would not understand at first, and that it was okay. My expectation was only that they improved at the difficult task over the course of the semester. In all classes, I use positive reinforcement to reward effort and progress, no matter how small.

I also demonstrate my support through availability and effort. I encourage students to schedule one-on-one meetings if they are struggling to grasp certain material or can't make designated office hours. I often follow up with students if I think of a better answer to their question after class. And I make an effort to get to know students, where they come from, and where they want to go. I have continued to meet with several of my students for years after having them in class to advise them informally on course selection, thesis work, and career plans. I believe that by showing I am invested in their success, students will feel more comfortable and confident learning difficult material. I aim to challenge students, but to create an environment that allows them to rise to that challenge.

These connections are especially important with students who have non-traditional backgrounds; they may be more likely to perceive a lack of support because they have received less support in the past or because they don't see many people like them finding success. I saw this firsthand when teaching incarcerated students in state prison. I worked hard to build enough trust with these students for them to believe that they *could* learn the material.

Building careful, logical reasoning skills

To me, being a good economist is about creating logical connections between incentives and behavior, and then evaluating those connections with rigorous empirical evidence. Building these skills will not only help students succeed in class, but also help them make sense of the larger world around them.

My role as an instructor starts with being thoughtful about structuring my courses and presenting material, in order to provide students with a clear framework on which to build their understanding. At the start of each class, I like to remind students where each lesson fits within the progression of the course and why I am spending time on a particular topic. I have also found it useful to create simple, visual schematics that outline the structure of the course and refer to these figures repeatedly during the semester. This helps students make connections and gives them a base for thinking more deeply about the material.

Then, through class discussions and assignments, I press students to explicitly articulate the assumptions and logical arguments underlying each conclusion and to critically evaluate the evidence of their validity. Importantly, I try to frame this process as constructive rather than destructive. The goal is not to tear down a theory or a paper, but rather to figure out what we can learn from it and what further questions it motivates. I owe this particular aspect of my teaching philosophy to my own liberal arts education.

Fostering enthusiasm for learning

Beyond simply understanding the material, I want to foster enthusiasm in my students, both for economics and for learning in general. I believe that enthusiasm is contagious, and try to model it through my own behavior. As reflected in my course evaluations, students see me as passionate, enthusiastic, and excited about teaching.

I also try to link the classroom material to real life and to my students' own, unique experiences. I think that finding these connections is what gets students the most excited about learning. In a seminar about the economics of education, I asked students to share their own experiences in primary and secondary school during our first class. Then over the semester, I encouraged them to evaluate academic papers with those experiences in mind. The same principles apply to an introductory micro course, even if the connections are not as obvious. Students are implicitly optimizing all the time; they just may not think of it that way. I remember realizing, during my first undergraduate economics class, that the intuition we were learning applied so much more broadly than supply-and-demand diagrams. This recognition set me on the academic path I am on today.

Teaching Interests and Experience

I am eager and willing to teach a wide range of courses, including core courses, statistics, and econometrics. Methods-heavy courses in labor economics or education would allow me to share my passion for research. But introductory courses would allow me to instill the same excitement in students that my undergraduate professors instilled in me.

More than anything, I am excited to be part of a community that invests deeply in its students, challenging them to rethink their assumptions, reason carefully and logically

in all areas of their lives, and see connections between their studies and the outside world.

ECON 970: The Economics of Education (Harvard University, Spring 2018)

Instructor

As part of a tutorial series for sophomore economics majors, I independently developed and taught a small course (10 students) on The Economics of Education. Through discussions about seminal works in labor economics on returns to education, racial achievement gaps, and a wide variety of interventions aimed at closing those gaps, I helped my students learn to read and reason like economists. I also guided students through, for many of them, their first attempt at independent economic research in the form of a final paper featuring original empirical work.

MET MA113: Introductory Statistics (Boston University Metropolitan College - Prison Educational Program, Fall 2017)

Teaching Assistant for Dr. Thomas Peteet

This course is part of an undergraduate program for incarcerated students at MCI-Norfolk, a medium-security state prison. We taught basic statistical concepts like hypothesis testing to a diverse group of students, many of whom had experienced significant disruption to their formal education. Through group problem-solving exercises and targeted one-on-one instruction, we tried to keep statistics accessible and interesting in a setting where we were prohibited from bringing outside materials and had no access to technology in the classroom. For their final projects, we helped students collect their own survey data to test a hypothesis of their choice and present the results to the class.

ECON 1030: Psychology and Economics (Harvard University, Spring 2017)

Teaching Fellow for Professors David Laibson and Tomasz Strzalecki

In this introductory behavioral economics course, we covered standard models from decision theory, limitations of those models highlighted by lab and field evidence, and modifications that have been proposed in response. Examples included bounded rationality, social preferences, and problems of self-control. Along with the other teaching fellow, I developed an entirely new set of section materials to review and extend the content covered in lectures, sometimes using examples from our own research.

MET PY105: Introductory Physics (Boston University Metropolitan College - Prison Educational Program, Fall 2016)

Teaching Assistant for Dr. Thomas Peteet, MD

In another course for incarcerated students at MCI-Norfolk, we covered the basic principals of Newtonian mechanics. Many of our students understood the logic of certain concepts but struggled with basic mathematical literacy. We relied on word problems and lots of one-on-one attention and encouragement to help them see the links between the concepts and the math, thus building confidence.