Statement of Teaching Philosophy
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Although I have sought out numerous opportunities to teach during graduate school, I've had much more experience in my life as a student rather than as a teacher. Now, when the tables are turned and I'm the one standing in front of the class, my teaching style is shaped by my conjectures of what it would be like to be my own student. Thinking about the classes I teach in this way helps me keep the material relevant and the students engaged.

Both as a student and a teacher, I find that one of the greatest challenges in the classroom is crossing the boundary from passive to active understanding. New concepts and methods might seem to make sense while the professor is explaining them and you're dutifully copying down notes, but that doesn't mean you're able to apply them on your own. Too frequently, I think, students only come to this realization as they work on homework or prepare for an exam. Under the pressure of a deadline, the goal of learning falls prey to the goal of finishing the task or scoring well, and the student never really masters the material.

As a teacher, I avoid giving my students opportunities to be passive observers. I lecture only as much as is necessary to convey new ideas, and even then I intersperse my presentation of new material with questions that help students to anticipate the next step or think critically about what I've just said. I don't expect students to really learn just by listening to me, so I spend just as much time preparing activities that will guide students through new material as I do deciding how to introduce that same material in lecture.

In general, I find that it's much easier to learn something when you know what you need to learn. For example, it's obvious that you need to remember the shape of the lines in a graph, but it's easy to forget that you also need to know what those lines correspond to – a student who can't label the axes clearly doesn't understand the phenomenon the graph depicts. When reviewing a graph in class, I ask students to try to draw it by themselves first; I wait to draw it on the board until they've had a chance to struggle for a moment. This way they'll realize which aspects of their graphs are incomplete. Those who couldn't remember how to draw it on their own are much more likely to remember how to do it at this point, now that they know what they need to learn, than if I'd let them passively watch me draw the graph and explain its meaning.

I think it is important for students to engage in the learning process beyond just solving problems from a text book or answering questions in class. To that end, I generally structure class time around an activity or worksheet I have designed with the intention of pushing students to think about variations on the version of the material that was presented in lecture. I also frequently bring in 3-D models for the students to reference or manipulate (e.g. a quasi-concave utility surface). Working in groups gives everyone a chance to deepen their understanding of the material, as weaker students learn from stronger ones and those who have a good sense for the new material get a chance to truly master it by explaining what they understand to someone else.

I don't want students to struggle to the point of frustration, but I can tell my pedagogical approach is working when activities or worksheets initially generate more questions than they do answers. The important thing is for students to ask the questions themselves before they come to the answers. That way, the answers will sink in.

I look forward to a career that lets me express my passion for teaching. Although my fellowships did not require me to teach for funding, I purposefully chose to serve as a graduate student instructor for undergraduate intermediate microeconomic theory (calculus-based) and econometrics in order to prepare myself to teach these important foundations of the economics major. At the same time, I would be quite excited about teaching economic principles to students from other disciplines, as evidenced by my experiences designing and teaching courses on impact evaluation methods for gifted high school students (during a week-long special studies program), practitioners from the Nigerian Ministry of Health (during a 3-day workshop sponsored by the Center of Evaluation for Global Action), and a wide range of graduate and undergraduate students at UC Berkeley (during a semester-long student-initiated course).