

Emily Pakhtigian—Teaching Statement

As an instructor of economics and public policy, I take seriously the responsibility and opportunity to facilitate student learning. Through experiences gained as a teaching assistant and tutor; feedback from colleagues, professors with whom I have worked, and students; and trainings in college teaching, I continue to cultivate my teaching skills and become a more effective instructor. My experiences have ranged from working as a teaching assistant (TA) for an undergraduate intermediate microeconomics course and graduate courses in environmental economics and microeconomics; tutoring undergraduate students in econometrics and environmental economics; and teaching a short math course for Master of Public Policy students.

Throughout these experiences, I have developed three core teaching principles, which I incorporate into all of my interactions with students. First, in both the classroom and office hours, I prioritize an active learning environment, conducive to a variety of learning styles and preferences. In so doing, I work hard to establish high, yet achievable, standards for my students, which they can attain through sufficient motivation and determination. Second, I believe students learn best in an environment in which they feel respected and valued. By encouraging participation and collaboration in class and on assignments, my students have the opportunity to work together to develop creative solutions to difficult problems in economics and public policy. Third, I make coursework relevant to a diverse population of students, demonstrating connections between course concepts, assignments, and real-world applications.

As a TA for intermediate microeconomics, I developed slides and practice problems for weekly review sessions. While short lectures were an integral part of these sessions, I found that students became more comfortable with the material when working through practice problems themselves. By having students practice review questions individually or in small groups, students could work at their own pace, while I provided individualized help to students who were struggling. These review sessions demonstrated the importance of facilitating an active learning environment in my classroom to reinforce the learning of difficult course material. I saw students become increasingly self-motivated and determined as they began to grasp challenging microeconomic concepts; this positive learning cycle helped them reach the high expectations set in the class.

I have also found that intra-student collaboration, whether group assignments or in-class partner activities, provides valuable learning experiences for students beyond those obtained through interacting with the instructor or completing individualized work. Just as instructors become more familiar with material the more often they teach a course, so too do students learn by teaching material to one another and sharing knowledge within small groups. Cooperative learning and the ability to

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work well in groups are useful skills many undergraduate students need for employment. Furthermore, collaborative learning requires a respectful learning environment that values different approaches to solving complex computational problems. Peer feedback is another important example of intra-student collaboration. In an environmental health economics class for which I was a TA, students regularly presented their work to the rest of the class and received relevant, timely feedback. Students worked hard to incorporate their peers' feedback into future iterations of the work, making the final projects much stronger than they would have been in the absence of this collaborative environment.

Finally, there are many times when students must take courses outside of their immediate interests and disciplines. It can, therefore, be challenging as an instructor to engage all students in the material. This was particularly apparent when I was a TA for intermediate microeconomics, a required course for many students. Students became more interested in the material when they saw connections to current events or relevant topics such as higher education, healthcare, or the environment. I designed review questions with this in mind; instead of using generic textbook examples, I used current events to frame problems when possible, demonstrating to students how concepts from the course were applicable outside of the classroom. Students responded well to these applications, inquiring less frequently about the merit of the coursework beyond the confines of the classroom.

I anticipate changes to my teaching as I learn new innovations from colleagues, adjust to the needs of particular courses, and adapt to changing technologies; however, I believe my teaching will evolve within the framework of these three core teaching principles. Technologies come and go, class sizes change, new and exciting research and theories must be incorporated into course materials, and best practices evolve in an ever-changing academic space, but the principles of active learning, an atmosphere of respect and collaboration, and helping students bridge the gap between course material and real-world applications are three concepts that have helped to shape and improve my teaching, and I expect will continue to do so in the future. I hope to become a more effective instructor in economics and public policy as I gain more teaching experience, to explore innovative ways to promote active learning in the classroom, and to develop assignments that engage and motivate students. I look forward to overcoming the challenges that will undoubtedly surface and to sharing my passion for economics and public policy with the students with whom I interact in courses covering a range of topics in microeconomics, public policy, environmental economics, development economics, and statistical methods.