

## TEACHING STATEMENT

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Since 2020, I have taught economics to undergraduate students for nine semesters, most often as a teaching assistant in core courses in applied econometrics and intermediate microeconomics. In my final year of teaching, I served as the department's sole research consultant, which entailed meeting with undergraduate and master's thesis writers and research assistants one-on-one for between 2-7 hours a week. In this role, I also designed and led a series of workshops teaching final-year honors thesis students quantitative research methods, including data management and version control. Throughout my graduate studies, I have also supervised small teams of interdisciplinary research assistants and administered a workshop on sexual harassment.

This period also coincided with difficult external circumstances as students and teachers were made to navigate a year of online instruction and a transition back to mixed-modality and in-person teaching. Even after a return to campus, instruction over the next several years was disrupted by multiple work stoppages and an indefinite closure of campus. These were unusually challenging circumstances in which to learn how to teach but it also made for some of the most fulfilling experiences of my graduate-school career. Below I describe some of the values I've honed and learned to prioritize in this time.

**#1 Adaptability** The year of remote instruction imposed unprecedented difficulties on both students and teachers. My cohort had the misfortune of experiencing both, alternating between receiving and delivering lectures and between taking and administering exams in isolation through a computer screen. Having direct experiences of the challenges confronting both sides helped me identify opportunities where flexibility and adaptability could vastly improve the learning environment. As one example, I observed that students joining from inconvenient home environments—e.g., vastly different timezones, crowded households, or unreliable internet—were particularly inconvenienced by a strict attendance requirement and the unavailability of important resources. In response, I successfully appealed as a TA to remove the strict attendance requirement and record and disseminate my lectures and slides, thereby removing a major source of disadvantage unrelated to the course objectives. I find it is often implied that accommodations along these lines are dismissed as a compromise of high standards. My experiences with highly motivated students have actually suggested to me the opposite: accommodations are often the only way to include the people who elevate these standards. This brings me to my next point.

**#2 Accessibility** Since my undergraduate studies, I've learned to appreciate academics who take an "open-source" approach to both their research and their teaching, making participation in our discipline as free, transparent, and inviting as possible. The pedagogical value of this philosophy became apparent in my first teaching role as an econometrics TA where one of my main responsibilities was to teach students how to use statistical software for the first time. The steep learning curve was consistently found to be the most intimidating aspect of the course and the one requiring the most guidance to follow and it was an accepted phenomenon that enrollment into econometrics precipitously drops shortly after this introduction. Adding to the problem was that the course was exclusively taught using Stata, a subscription-based private software that required an expensive upfront commitment from students to use.

Recognizing this issue, I voluntarily reproduced all course materials—recitation notes, problem sets, solutions, and exams—using R, an open-source alternative with a robust online community to troubleshoot coding problems and facilitate self-teaching. This not only prevented students demonstrably interested in econometrics from prematurely selecting out of the course but also saved students entirely unnecessary expenses during an economically stressful time. Finally, it also allows students to continue applying and refining the valuable analytical skills they developed beyond the semester course without the prohibitiv expense of renewing a subscription.

**#3 Intuition** I remember my first time grading exams as a frustrating experience because I could infer from my students' mistakes exactly the mistaken reasoning that led to their error and what minor point of clarification would have pre-empted it. Indeed, the moments I feel the most useful as a teacher are when a student's face lights up mid-explanation and a concept visibly clicks into place for them. I've found that a significant part of effective teaching is in anticipating these opportunities where targeted emphasis or alternative framings would give shape to an entire lecture's worth of information, allowing students to find their bearings. I've found that I'm particularly adept at identifying these opportunities for 'nudging' precisely because I can recognize them as mistakes I may have made myself when confronting the same topics for the first time.

#4 Autonomy I see teaching as a service whose primary function is to support and structure how students encounter new ideas. As such, I find it important to encourage students to draw from their diverse perspectives and backgrounds to critically interrogate the ideas they are being presented with so long as they are presented with informed challenges to these interpretations. I would derive great joy if my students were to find the subject I've devoted my adulthood to as inspiring as I do; indeed, my year helping the department's highly motivated undergraduate and master's thesis students with their chosen research topics was by far the most fulfilling part of my career thus far. But having taught an economics course tailored to non-economics students, I've come to appreciate how successful teaching does not require it. I know from personal experience that not even the most passionate and talented educator in the world could inspire in me a personal intellectual interest in chemistry and I have to reluctantly and humbly accept that the same must be true about my passions.

## Teaching interests

I have extensive experience teaching core courses in intermediate microeconomics and econometrics to advanced undergraduates and would feel comfortable continuing instruction of these courses or their more basic or advanced levels. I would also be interested in teaching elective courses aligned with my research expertise in development economics, environmental economics, and political economy. I derived great satisfaction from my year of advising undergraduate and master's students on their independent research projects and would welcome the responsibility to supervise the work of student researchers in a similar capacity.

With more experience, I would be very interested in the opportunity to design a topics course targeted towards graduate or advanced undergraduate students on the political economy of climate change. I believe that the immediate relevance of sustainable development would find wide appeal among highly motivated students and that I am uniquely equipped to lead its instruction given the interdisciplinary expertise required.

## Select student feedback, 2020-2024

### ECON-4999 Senior Honors Thesis Workshop (×2)

- “Matthew is very organized, knowledgeable, and accessible. Even though he’s not a specialist in my area of research, he went above and beyond in familiarizing himself with my data, and he’s an expert at coding.”

### ECON-3211 Intermediate Microeconomics (×2)

- “I love him! Posted all his recitations online, which really helps.”
- “William Matthew Davis is one of the smartest people I have ever met. He is ridiculously prepared and extremely knowledgeable. The amount of resources which he gifts to students is astounding, and I am so grateful for his help.”
- “Really accessible guy who seems to really care about his TA work!”
- “Very clear TA with an emphasis on student experience.”

### ECON-2257 The Global Economy<sup>1</sup>

- “Great TA. He was always available for students, and made sure all the course material was understood.”
- “Always prepared and good with questions.”

### ECON-3412 Econometrics (×4)

- “Matt is a great TA! As a student who used R, I depended heavily on Matt’s notes. He was always super responsive and helped us whenever we needed.”
- “He is very organized and helpful. He would prepare weekly R recitation notes and share them, which were a great help for problem sets.”
- “Matthew did a nice job going over practice problems during each recitation as well as explaining the significance of the concepts we were learning.”
- “Great TA. He goes through the stata examples in details. His solutions to the examples are clear and straightforward. Super intelligent! And he makes his recordings available. Thank you!”
- “Literally the best TA I’ve ever had. Always open to answering questions. Has the best study guides for learning R which was a relatively new language for me. I could not have done it without him.”
- “Matt is a great TA who went above and beyond by making additional study notes that explained very clearly what some of the most difficult concepts meant”

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<sup>1</sup> Elective course on international trade for non-economists.