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Teaching Statement

I love learning and I love teaching. I could attempt to restate that first line in more florid and impassioned terms, but regardless of how I choose to phrase it, the intensity of my feeling simply cannot be captured without my sounding either hackneyed or hyperbolic. However, I make no claims of being exceptional, especially not at a college such as Davidson where I find myself surrounded by colleagues who are just as passionate as I am about teaching and learning.

I have been a student for as long as I can remember and consider myself to still be one. In middle school, I started off informally tutoring my peers and the younger children in my neighborhood. That experience was so rewarding that I continued with informal tutoring throughout my high school and undergraduate years. During summers, I volunteered as a substitute teacher at my high school and I continue to do so whenever I am in my hometown, Jamshedpur, India. Although the joy of teaching is its own reward, I was pleasantly surprised during my senior year at Trinity College when the Dean of Students recognized my service as a volunteer and informal peer tutor by granting me the Human Relations Award for Outstanding Citizenship and Sportsmanship. As a graduate student, I started to teach in more formal positions as either a teaching assistant or an assistant instructor. Upon graduating from my doctoral program, I decided to work at Deloitte Tax LLP as a transfer pricing consultant. My brief one-year stint in the corporate sector was an invaluable and exciting learning experience, but I quickly realized that I sorely missed teaching. I was fortunate to be able to return to academia – first as a visiting assistant professor at my alma mater, Trinity College, and subsequently as an assistant professor at Davidson College. I can say without any hesitation or hint of exaggeration that I am currently employed in my dream job, since every day offers me a bountiful opportunity to learn and teach to my utmost potential.

In the remaining sections of my teaching statement, I briefly discuss my teaching philosophy, the courses I teach, and the student research I have mentored. In conclusion, I offer a few additional observations and summary remarks.

Teaching Philosophy

Both as a student and as a professor, I have had the rare privilege of witnessing superlative teaching in a liberal arts environment. Some of my exceptional professors at Trinity College and my outstanding colleagues at Davidson serve as role models for me. Two common characteristics of my favorite professors stand out: first, they are truly passionate about their discipline and second, they generously devote time and attention to the individual needs and challenges of every sincere student. I attempt to emulate these best practices while simultaneously adapting them to my own style.

The world is truly fascinating and studying it through the prism of economics is incredibly exciting, since the core concepts and basic tools of economics can shed light on almost any aspect of human affairs. Moreover, since economic intuition can be developed and communicated through any combination of verbal explanations, graphical representations, and mathematical formulations, students of economics can choose their preferred method of learning to bolster their understanding of the other two. Finally, economics, especially macroeconomics, is an extremely contentious discipline where leading academics and professionals advocate drastically different policy measures on the basis of reasonable but conflicting models that differ in terms of their positive assumptions and normative criteria. By carefully studying these different models and examining the applicability of their various positive assumptions and normative criteria, students can learn to simultaneously appreciate and engage opposing viewpoints.

As a teacher, I try to harness these features of economics to spark the interest of my students and make my classes come alive. While I recognize that students need to obtain a thorough understanding of certain common topics, through the different courses that I teach and the research projects I mentor, I offer students the opportunity to further explore the questions that interest them the most. I expect and require students to be adept at explaining economic concepts verbally, graphically, and mathematically but they are free to use any of the three as their primary approach. Similarly, though I teach various different macroeconomic models, I emphasize that no one model is uniquely correct and encourage students to evaluate the merits of each of those models on their own. Ultimately, my goal is to foster critical thinking, analytical skills, and a deeper appreciation for the broad applicability of economics in several important contexts relevant to individual students and of significance to society at large as well.

Courses

I. Core Courses

1. Eco 203 – Intermediate Macroeconomic Theory: I begin this course by introducing various important macroeconomic definitions and data sources. Next, I teach students several different macroeconomic models with a focus on their mathematical and conceptual structures as well as their different underlying assumptions and policy implications. In addition to quizzes and reviews, I assign five article discussions and three essays. In the former, students write a brief page-long note connecting any article of their choice (that they have read over the past week in a newspaper or reputable economics blog) to material taught in the course. In the latter, students are required to analyze a contemporary macroeconomic issue using the models presented in class. For full credit, their essays need to include some discussion of two or more distinct perspectives on the macroeconomic issue as well as some supporting data. Although the pace of this class is somewhat accelerated, I try to make it manageable for students by posting detailed notes online and conducting weekly evening review sessions.
2. Eco 205 – Basic Econometrics: In this course, I teach students the elements of regression analysis. Students learn basic econometric theory, they understand how to carefully read and interpret peer-reviewed empirical economics literature, and they become familiar with SAS, a widely-used econometrics software package. While the coursework includes lab assignments, homework, and

reviews, the central component is an independent project – each student chooses a topic of her liking, collects data on that topic, analyzes the data appropriately, and communicates her findings in the form of a research paper. Students find this to be a challenging but ultimately rewarding endeavor. Teaching this course effectively is a time-intensive task since I have to familiarize myself with the literature in many different applied economics fields, help motivated students get data from various sources, and answer individual-specific questions on several different topics.

II. Electives

3. Eco 232 S – The Economics of Migration: This is a new course I am developing that will be offered for the first time in the spring of 2016. The area of study ties closely with my own personal and professional research interests. In this course, I will examine the causes and consequences of international migration on the residents of migrant-sending and migrant-receiving countries as well as on the migrants themselves. As a writing-intensive ‘S’ course, a significant component of this course will revolve around various written assignments.
4. Eco 316 – Computational Economics: This too is a course that I have developed independently. My focus in this course is on agent-based modeling (a computational technique) and its application to economics problems. Each week, I present students with sample models and associated computer programs (that I have pre-written myself in MATLAB) related to prominent papers in the literature. Students are then asked to manipulate the code and use it to answer a different problem that interests them. It has been exciting for me to find out that many students at Davidson, when given the opportunity, have a penchant for academically ‘wandering off’ on their own, often into uncharted territory spanning different disciplines. On the one hand, I find it important to encourage creativity and sustain their passions, while on the other, it is necessary to limit their models to a manageable level. Although somewhat challenging, on the whole, this course has been an extremely positive experience for me and it has led to many diverse collaborative and mentored student research projects that are listed further below in the next section.
5. Eco 337 – International Trade: I enjoy teaching this important and popular upper-level course since it involves discussing current trade policies and their implications with students who are already trained in intermediate economics. Together, we investigate why nations trade, what they trade, and the consequences of international trade. In addition to reviews and homework assignments, this course also includes a term paper. For the term paper, each student chooses to either work on an empirical project or conduct an analysis of some international trade policy.
6. Eco 395 – Advanced Macroeconomics (Offered as an Independent Study): I offer this course as an intensive independent study to students who have a keen interest in pursuing graduate studies in economics. In my five years at Davidson College, I have taught this course to four students; three have gone on to top economics Ph.D. programs – Alison Rauh successfully completed her Ph.D. at the University of Chicago, Mali Zhang and Stephanie Schauder are current Ph.D. students at Caltech and Cornell respectively, and Liz Engle is currently an applicant to top Economics Ph.D. programs and has very good prospects in my view.

Three of the courses above, Eco 203, Eco 232 S, and Eco 316, relate most closely to my own fields of research interest and they have both spawned student research collaborations and provided an opportunity for me to integrate my own research. In Eco 203 I teach several different macroeconomic models and that relates closely to my research interest in macroeconomic methodology, in Eco 232 S, I intend to incorporate some discussion of my own working papers on the macroeconomics of migration, and in Eco 316 I teach agent-based modeling, a method I use extensively for my own research.

In addition to the above courses, I have taught a course titled “Economic Policy Debates,” for July Experience in the summers of 2013 and 2014. I have also co-authored a chapter titled “Classical and Keynesian Models” with Clark Ross for “AP® Macroeconomics: Challenging Concepts” as part of the collaboration among Davidson College, College Board, edX, Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools, and 2Revolutions. I am willing and eager to develop new courses and to add other core courses to my portfolio based on the confluence of my interests and departmental needs. Two new courses I have contemplated developing include “Macroeconomic Growth and Development” and “Competing Macroeconomic Models.” I would also be glad to organize and participate in an inter-disciplinary course on migration, along the lines of Zoran Kuzmanovich’s course on fragance.

Student Research

I. Collaborative Research

1. “The Consequences of Social Pressures on Partisan Opinion Dynamics.” Co-authored with Scott Jeffrey (Davidson College Student, Class of 2015). (Under Review: Eastern Economic Journal): This paper originated with one of the assignments for Eco 316. Scott was curious about how to model opinion dynamics and preference falsification and we decided to explore this more thoroughly in a collaborative project.
2. “Customer Heterogeneity and Optimal Firm Location,” with Stephanie Schauder (Davidson College Student, Class of 2015). (Accepted for Presentation at the Eastern Economic Association’s Annual Conference, 2016): This paper also originated with one of the assignments for Eco 316. Stephanie wanted to model the formation of food deserts and I suggested that we could extend the Hotelling model to two dimensions, include customer and product heterogeneity, and conduct our analysis using agent-based modelling techniques.
3. “An Analysis of Impact Investing,” with Dave Martin and Emma Park (Davidson College Student, Class of 2014): I was intrigued by Emma’s presentation on a project related to impact investing and offered to extend her analysis to include a computational analysis of multiple firms and portfolio options.

II. Mentored Research

4. Kevin Roberts. “Knowledge Spillovers and Entrepreneurial Activity: An Agent-Based Approach to Modelling Schumpeterian Growth for Developing Countries,” presented at the Issues in Political Economy Conference at the Eastern Economic Association's Annual Meetings (February 2015). Awarded Best Paper. Paper published in: Issues in Political Economy 24 (2015). 28-47. (Davidson Research Initiative).

5. Scott Jeffrey. "Is All Foreign Aid the Same? An Empirical Comparison of the Effect of Multilateral and Bilateral Aid on Growth," presented at the Issues in Political Economy Conference at the Eastern Economic Association's Annual Meetings (February 2015). Paper published in: *Undergraduate Economic Review* 20, no.1 (2015). (Davidson Abernathy Grant).
6. Scott Jeffrey. "Spreading Sickness on a College Campus: The Effect on Utility," presented at the Big South Undergraduate Research Symposium at High Point University (April 2013).
7. Faculty Mentor for Ryan Malden. "The Economics of Crime in an Agent Based Model," presented at the Issues in Political Economy Conference held at the Eastern Economic Association's Annual Meetings (March 2013).

Of the mentored research projects listed above, the first two were facilitated through summer research opportunities for students and faculty at Davidson. The latter two were both initially class projects for Eco 316 that the students then chose to develop further with mentoring help from me. In addition to all the aforementioned projects, I was also the main advisor for honors thesis candidate Jaime Dybuncio (2012-2013). And though some of them have been outside my areas of expertise, I have also been a member of several economics honors theses committees: Brian Happell (2015-2016), Spencer Perry (2014-2015), Jessica Palfrey (2012-2013), and Will Marshall (2011-2012). Next semester, I will be mentoring Will Robertson in an independent study that involves a collaboration between Davidson College and Pratt & Miller.

The opportunities for mentoring and collaborating with high quality students is doubtlessly one of the highpoints of my work at Davidson. Many of the students I have worked with have gone on to graduate programs or research positions at organizations such as the Federal Reserve.

Concluding Remarks

At Davidson, teaching and learning often extend beyond the classroom and permeate into the very atmosphere of the college. To capture some of that spirit, I created 'Econversations,' an economics discussion forum for interested students and faculty. These weekly meetings have been successful far beyond my expectations. Several Economics faculty and some of our best students – Amy Pugh (valedictorian, 2013), Genevieve Nielsen (valedictorian, 2014), Liz Engle (valedictorian, 2015), and Noah Bricker (Marshall Fellowship finalist and Econversations co-founder), to name just a few among many – have participated regularly. Consequently, the quality of conversations is phenomenal. Students love it too: at her graduation, Genevieve's mother told me that Genevieve would call home on Wednesdays to excitedly talk about our discussions at Econversations. Noah's parents also effusively expressed how much their son enjoyed Econversations.

To summarize, I consider myself extremely fortunate to be a teacher at Davidson College where my extraordinary students and colleagues are a source of constant inspiration. It was therefore an incredible and unbelievable honor for me when I was awarded the Omicron Delta Kappa Teaching Award at the Spring Convocation in 2014. I will remain forever grateful for that award and am determined to continue learning more and improving myself as a teacher every day.