

A Teaching Statement

By M. Aykut Attar

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This short teaching statement serves for three purposes: I first discuss the principles guiding me as a teacher in graduate and undergraduate classes. Second, I give some information about my past teaching at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) and at Hacettepe University. Finally, I briefly reflect on my engagement with graduate students as a mentor.

Principles of Teaching Economics

I surely believe that a teacher should admit the notion that students' background and diversity are not trivial matters. Teaching methodology should respond to particularities of the student body. To push this notion to its extremes, it is not optimal to use the exactly same syllabus and to follow the exactly same pace of progression in an honor class of 10 students at an Ivy League university and in a class of 90 students at some newly-established university in Turkey.

The main principle that guides me in classes such as undergraduate Macroeconomic Theory and graduate Economic Growth is the three-layered thinking that in general fits beautifully with economic thought. A student must first understand the narrative of the theory in plain English; this is the story-telling level. Then should come a nice picture or a figure telling the very same story to visualize it in a simple way. Eventually, to remove all misunderstandings and vague argumentations, it is essential to work with the mathematical models of the theory. In any class I have thought to this day, there has been at least one mathematical model involved, and I have always focused on one critical question throughout the semester: What does it mean to solve a model? Interestingly, many economics majors (including some graduate students) do not know that solving a model simply means expressing its endogenous variables (y) as functions/correspondences of the model's exogenous variables (x) and structural parameters (α). For this reason, I always write $y = f(x, \alpha)$ on the board for a couple of times throughout the semester and make sure that a student attended to a class that I teach learns this elementary but crucial thing.

Another thing that I follow as a guiding principle—and that I am proud of doing so—is to try my best of relating the course content with the real world. The great example of this comes from undergraduate Macroeconomic Theory where I follow a textbook that teaches intermediate macro without the LM curve and with an equilibrium adjustment allowing for positive inflation rates. I strongly believe that the time cost of updating a course syllabus cannot be larger than the epistemic cost of not doing so, especially for graduate classes that educate next generations' professors.

Teaching Experience at the UNC-CH and at Hacettepe

At the UNC-CH, I first attended a 6-weeks long, intensive Teacher Training Program taught by a large number of senior and distinguished economics professors. I then taught recitation hours for an intermediate macro class taught by Richard Froyen in Fall 2010.

In the semester following this, I assisted Mike Aguilar in another intermediate macro class taught to honor students. Mike's approach to teaching was quite formative for my understanding of best teaching practices. Other than written assignments and a short term paper, students were required to login to their Blackboard accounts each week to give responses about overall economic activity, prices, and employment by building upon prior week's news published in the Wall Street Journal and the Economist. This endeavor was called MacroJournal and helped generations of UNC-CH economics majors to prepare for and win the nation-wide Fed Challenges.

At Hacettepe University, it is not usually feasible to require all students to participate in activities such as MacroJournal, but I have tried to follow the best practices since Spring 2012. At the undergraduate level, I have taught introduction to economics, mathematics for economics, and political history to the freshmen, mathematical economics and macroeconomic theory to the sophomores, and an elective on computable general equilibrium models to the seniors in various combinations. At the graduate (master) level, I have taught a course mainly focusing on nonlinear programming and dynamic optimization and another one on economic growth theory.

Mentoring Experience and Principles

I have been mentoring three graduate students to this day at Hacettepe by supervising their thesis researches, and I may have influenced a few advanced undergraduates that exhibited some interest in becoming a research economist.

Seda Basihos has defended her master thesis in June 2016 and has been working at a local think-tank called TEPAV until very recently. She is going to be a full-time Ph.D. student and a teaching assistant in the University of Lausanne starting this fall. Ataman Icer, another master's student, has defended his thesis in this June, and he has been working as a research assistant at TED University (Ankara, Turkey). Ataman is going to start seeking a Ph.D. admission abroad. The third graduate student I have been mentoring since Summer 2016 is a doctoral student directed to me temporarily because his advisor is on sabbatical. This student currently works on his dissertation research.

I do not draw a bold boundary between master-level and doctoral-level research projects. What I believe is that good research always starts with a good question and should not be method-driven. I have always taught my students to focus on the question first and then let that question and the literature take them to the correct methodology and data. Both Seda and Ataman have done this very well, but Seda's performance has been truly exceptional.

Other than this methodological viewpoint, I strongly force our graduate students to think about causality and identification issues very seriously in designing their researches. The ones without a theoretical structure and the ones that do not attempt at isolating the causal effects are not acceptable. Teaching a seminar class to the master-level students in Spring 2017 has given me a good opportunity to put these ideas into practice.