

## Teaching Statement

Noah McKinnie Braun, University of Pittsburgh

As a teacher, my main goal is to help my students develop skills and ways of thinking that will benefit them in my class and in their future endeavors, both in school and in life. The best approach for fostering these skills will vary based off of the material and the group of students I am working with, though I believe there are core tenets that hold true regardless of these factors. The first is to center students in the learning process with active learning techniques that invite students to engage with the material, their fellow students, and the instructor. I believe that an active learning approach enhances the classroom experience by promoting higher level thinking through continuous application of the material and by creating a more open and fun environment that encourages cooperation and attentiveness. The second is that learning happens when students feel welcomed and valued within the classroom, which requires open dialogue with your students and an awareness of existing barriers to equity and a commitment to dismantling them. Lastly, I believe that successful teaching requires flexibility, a commitment to continuous growth, and the willingness to adapt to the specific needs of your students.

I have had the opportunity to teach two classes as an independent instructor: Introduction to Microeconomic Theory and Intermediate Microeconomics. I have also served as a teaching assistant for Game Theory, Environmental Economics, Health Economics, Economic Data Analysis, and Introduction to Microeconomic Theory. My success as a teacher is evident from my teaching evaluations, which improved from a 4.42 average to a 4.85 average across my two summers of teaching, and by winning my department's Graduate Student Teaching Award for 2023.

I was also asked to develop and teach a new class in Economic Modelling Skills, which I am currently teaching this semester. My collaborators and I have designed this course to help students with differing math backgrounds learn how to integrate calculus into economics while taking Intermediate Microeconomics, a course that is often a stumbling block on the road to graduation. We are implementing new teaching strategies, such as error analysis to help students to identify their mathematical mistakes, utilizing additional preparatory instruction to boost students' self-efficacy, and spending time teaching students how to effectively study.

Incorporating active learning techniques is the foundation of my teaching philosophy. Using active learning approaches invites students to engage with the material, myself, and their classmates on a deeper level. To facilitate this, I begin the semester by discussing my goals for the class, including that I want my students to become comfortable asking for and providing help in small groups with their classmates. This conversation establishes clear classroom expectations: students should arrive ready to learn, ready to ask questions, and ready to help their classmates. Setting clear expectations ensures that we are all on the same page and that students from all backgrounds know what is necessary for success in my class. I believe having these conversations with students and treating them as adults helps build trust and respect within the classroom that provides the foundation for future interactions.

My classes provide students multiple opportunities to test their own learning, deemphasizing lecturing and refocusing the class on the students. To do this, we take time for students to work through practice problems or discuss the class readings in small groups. While working through example problems, I pause and use the learning technique of "think, pair, and share" to have students think individually and then think through with a partner what the next step in the problem will be. Once a section is completed, I ask them to try and provide the intuition for why we derived the results that we did. At the beginning of the semester, this can lead to awkward silences as students wait for me to give them the answer to write in their notes. But, within a few classes, students have gotten into the rhythm of being prepared to think through the problems and try to answer my questions as best they can. Asking students probing "why?" questions about the material helps build up important critical thinking skills and helps them to understand why they

are learning the material. These approaches are adaptable to any material I need to cover and I believe are a large reason for the success of my classes and the success of my students.

Another benefit of applying active learning techniques is that they create a positive feedback loop: students are able to immediately test their knowledge of the new material while it is fresh in their heads and I am able to quickly identify problem areas that require more instruction, more practice, or a different explanation. This ensures students have opportunities to ask questions and helps them leave class with a complete understanding of the material. Thanks to these interactions, I find that I learn a lot from my students as I teach, both in terms of developing a greater understanding of the material and about how best to teach it going forward. This feedback loop is amplified when students feel comfortable talking with me and their classmates about areas they are struggling with and meet with me outside of class.

To encourage inclusivity in my classroom, I am intentional about creating a learning environment in which each student feels welcome regardless of their background. Seemingly small steps, such as knowing and correctly pronouncing all of my students' names and using a diverse set of situations in my practice questions, helps ensure that every student feels comfortable in class. Utilizing examples that relate to my students' lives, such as using the decision to attend college to understand opportunity cost, and the news of the day, such as how gas tax rebates impact the markets for cars and bus rides, also create opportunities for students to share more about their own lives and see how it connects to economics. An example I particularly enjoy is using the musical artist Taylor Swift and group BTS to explain how pricing goods below equilibrium will lead to a shortage and the development of secondary markets, like StubHub and Ticketmaster. Learning more about my students and adapting material to meet their interests inspires more students to want to study economics; a former student of mine, who is now an undergraduate TA in our department, went as far as to propose that I teach a full class on "The Economics of Taylor Swift" and uses this example herself when helping her fellow undergraduates.

Material in economics courses often uses outdated and insensitive language, such as the "battle of the sexes" game and classifying workers as "low- or high-skilled." When these phrases appear in our textbooks, I use it as an opportunity to take a step back and remind students that while some academics may use this language, many more of us are moving away from it. I then provide students with better alternatives to these phrases, such as calling the "battle of the sexes" game a "coordination game" and referring to workers by industry, education, or wage levels; not only are these replacement terms less insensitive, they also provide more accurate information. These sorts of discussions are important for ensuring that students feel a sense of belonging while studying economics.

In addition to teaching undergraduates, I was also appointed as my department's Teaching Mentor for graduate students during the 2021-22 and 2023-24 academic years. In this role, I co-taught Teaching Economics, which focuses on helping new teaching assistants learn the skills necessary to successfully teach undergraduates. In this role, I provided guidance on how to implement active learning techniques, encourage participation, and integrate inclusive practices into teaching material. This included conversations about racial and gender disparities in classroom participation, and how to address them with in-class techniques, setting clear expectations in our syllabi, and directly engaging in conversations about the value of diversity and mutual respect with our students.

I am prepared to teach a wide range of courses at the undergraduate level, including Introductory and Intermediate Micro and Macroeconomics, and would be particularly excited to teach and design courses in applied microeconomic topics related to my research such as public economics, the economics of race, urban economics, and political economy. I would also be prepared to teach courses in econometrics, mathematics/statistics for economists, and other elective courses like labor, health, and environmental economics. For graduate students, I am prepared to teach and advise on topics related to my research and in quantitative methods. I am excited to help my students develop research projects and view advising and mentoring students as a critical part of my role in academia.