

Teaching Statement
Daniel Hubbard
danielhdh[at]umich[dot]edu

1 Teaching Philosophy

Economics can be an intimidating subject. It calls for a great deal of mathematical dexterity, which is enough to scare off many students with an interest in the material, but knowing the formulas is not enough. Successful economics students must also approach problems from an analytical point of view, looking very carefully at the costs and benefits of every decision, in a way that other subjects do not teach. Even very strong students have trouble adjusting to the combination of mathematical challenge and intellectual rigor presented by economics. My goal, and what I believe every good economics teacher's goal should be, is to take some of the intimidation out of economics, connect it to the real world, and to remind students why they were interested in studying it in the first place.

This mission begins on the first day of class. After I introduce myself and the course, I distribute a small slip of paper to each member of the class. The paper asks students for their preferred name (not every student wants to be called the name listed on the course roster), their year in the program, the last math class they took, whether they are interested in majoring or minoring in economics, and any other information that they think I should know. While the last question is designed to let student-athletes and students with disabilities let me know of their special accommodations, I leave it open-ended on purpose; I've had students tell me about their passions for sports, their balancing schoolwork with other commitments, their concerns about the class, and even "I want to be an econ professor in the future, just like what you're doing now!". The survey makes it immediately clear to my students that I care about them as individuals, not just as entries in the gradebook, and it helps me to tailor my teaching and office hours to their needs.

I want to hear more of their feedback as the semester continues, and I distribute a "mid-semester check-in" for students to assess the course and my teaching style. When I received requests for more original practice problems in addition to questions from the workbook, I improvised an question that used my childhood love for grilled-cheese sandwiches to illustrate an example of perfect complements. The mid-semester check-in also helps me to determine whether the pace of the class is appropriate, and it lets me know if I need to reallocate class time between conceptual and mathematical material.

I also believe that learning and teaching are not limited to the classroom, and that good teachers can meet students where they are, within reason. I have held office hours in a library and in an empty classroom, and I have scheduled appointments in evenings for students with other commitments during the day. I take pride in my thorough emails and my detailed explanations during office hours, and several students have commented on how valuable my exam review sessions have been.

My most rewarding moment as a teacher (even more rewarding than the round of applause I got on the last day of one of my intermediate microeconomics courses!) did not come from a student who consistently scored at the top of the class. One of my intermediate microeconomics students was an extremely meticulous problem solver, writing out every step

of her math and the thinking that was behind it. Unfortunately, many of those thorough explanations turned out to be of incorrect answers, and she scored below the course average on the first two exams. After the second exam, she came to my office hours every week, asked insightful questions, and took diligent notes, and I could see the light bulb start to come on for her. I jumped in the air with excitement when I saw how well she performed on the final - all of her work finally paid off. I give her all the credit, but I take pride in how she got there.

2 Teaching Experience

Several of my teaching roles have revolved around helping students learn how to read and write an economics research paper. I served as a graduate student instructor (GSI) for an upper-level writing course in the economics of education (ECON 325), which was most students' first exposure to academic research in economics. Students were required to choose a policy topic, read and critically evaluate several published papers about it, and write a policy recommendation based on what they learned. This course's only prerequisite was introductory microeconomics, but students learned how to interpret sophisticated research designs such as regression discontinuity, instrumental variables, fixed effects, and difference-in-difference estimates. I did not teach a separate discussion for this course, but held office hours by appointment to guide students in navigating the literature and writing their own papers. I also helped write exams and graded exams and homework. My role as an undergraduate teaching assistant for an honors seminar in economics (ECON 495) was less formal but somewhat similar; I helped students with Stata questions, guided them in navigating the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, and reminded them that sometimes, a precisely-estimated zero is an interesting result.

My most formal teaching assignment was as a GSI for an intermediate microeconomics course (ECON 401). Students must take this course before taking almost any other upper-level economics course, and it has a not-unwarranted reputation for difficulty and intensity; it is the most demanding course for GSIs, and many students struggle with it. I taught two discussion sections of this course, one in the late afternoon, and one in the evening. This entailed going over homework problems, reviewing conceptual items from lecture, and then demonstrating how to solve mathematical problems based on those conceptual items, generally using carefully-chosen items from a workbook. I also held office hours and review sessions, wrote exam questions, and proctored evening exams.

I am confident in my ability to teach graduate or undergraduate coursework in labor and education economics, as well as research seminars and undergraduate courses in microeconomics, statistics, econometrics, and development economics. I can teach courses in a liberal arts, public policy, education, or business environment.

3 Teaching Evaluations

I was not evaluated for my work in ECON 325 and ECON 495 because I did not teach a discussion section. Below are selected questions from my evaluations from two sections of ECON 401. Each question is measured on a scale from 1 to 5.

Table 1: ECON 401 Teaching Evaluations

	4:00 Section	5:30 Section
The instructor was an excellent teacher.	4	4.38
The instructor explained material clearly and understandably.	4.13	4.38
The instructor seemed to enjoy teaching.	4.38	4.2
The instructor treated students with respect.	4.71	4.6
The instructor seemed well prepared for each class.	4.81	4.38
Response rate	11/29	9/25

Selected comments:

“I think Daniel went out of his way to be accessible and approachable for all the students in his discussion sections. I really enjoyed his discussion section, even if I found the course on the whole to be frustrating.”

“Daniel was a very good GSI. He always came to discussion prepared and tried extremely hard to assist our class with the material.... Daniel handled questions in class well and seemed to really care about his students. ”

“I’m terrified that I’ll end up with a ‘C’ on my transcript because of 401, but I think I have a better shot at a ‘B’ because you were my GSI. 401 is hard to teach...and you were in a difficult situation teaching in your first year and having a section that not a lot [of] kids came to. But you didn’t get discouraged and you continued being receptive to questions and giving good advice.” (email from a student who transferred into my evening section from another GSI’s section)