TEACHING STATEMENT

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One student wrote: "Shivangi was the best TA I've had so far in my college experience. She explains things thoroughly and wants us to understand the material rather than just memorize." Three different sections have offered the same description of my teaching: I teach for learning rather than memorizing. That has become the clearest description I have of what I try to do in a classroom. I want students to leave understanding *why* the answer is the answer.

My teaching is built around the gap between what students can reason through on their own and what they can reach with help. By the time they walk into Principles of Economics (ECON 102), students already have real economic intuitions: they know about rent, trade-offs, wages, and the cost of showing up to a Friday morning lecture. My job is helping them find those intuitions inside the formal model. A classroom is where that translation happens. I try to do three things well.

The first is to **explain it a different way when a student is stuck, rather than repeat myself louder.** The same idea has to move between words, graphs, and numbers, and the student needs to grab whichever version lands first. Much of that translation happens on the chalkboard. My colored-chalk habit comes from my late economics mentor, Bob Elder, who taught me that a supply curve drawn in three colors reads very differently from one drawn in white. One student wrote that "the color coded chalk really helped me to understand the specific areas." Sometimes explaining differently means admitting the concept is genuinely hard. A Master's student in my Microeconomic Theory section noted in an evaluation that I was willing to say when something confused me, and that if I could not answer in the moment, I would come back the next class with one. That kind of honesty stops confusion from feeling like a verdict on the student and starts making it feel like a stage they are passing through.

The second is to **start from what students already recognize**. Opportunity cost stops being abstract when freshmen at 10 a.m. on a Friday tell me what they are giving up to be in the room. A dining-hall sandwich becomes a monopoly problem the moment students ask why the price sits so far above the marginal cost. One student described this as "many good examples that related specifically to college students." The point is to make the formal model reachable through reasoning students already trust, and the trusted reasoning is almost always personal.

The third is to **write the practice materials myself**. I design a sequence of problems that carries a student from a worked example to an independent answer. Textbook practice problems are not always built for how most students actually learn a new topic: they can assume too much or too little, and they rarely sequence from a fully solved example to a question the student is ready to attempt alone. Over six semesters of leading Principles of Economics discussion at Illinois, I have developed roughly twenty custom handouts, each sequenced from a worked example to a guided problem to an independent one, and each refined across multiple sections as I have learned what works. The idea is straightforward: seeing a completed example first frees the student's attention for the economic reasoning, rather than getting stuck on the mechanics of setting the problem up. One student wrote that "the individual handouts really helped me . . . during the discussion it was a lot easier to break down the work." That is exactly the effect I am aiming for.

None of these moves work if students do not feel safe speaking up in the first place, so I design participation deliberately. My teaching is discussion-driven. I open every class with a plain-language question, one no student can be wrong about, and use the answers to gauge where the room actually is before deciding what to do next. Harder questions come only after students have had a chance to try the logic with a neighbor. This diagnostic approach matters most in the introductory course, where students can quietly lose their footing in the first few weeks and stop identifying as economics students long before they officially drop the major. I want students to experience economics not as a test of whether they already think like economists, but as a language they can learn to use. The same logic shapes my office hours and email: I hold office hours during the academic day, and I treat email questions as openings for conversation, because students bring better questions when access feels routine rather

than exceptional. Two students described the result in similar terms. One wrote that the discussions had "made me comfortable answering questions in a class that I have never been confident in." Another, last fall, described the room as one that "facilitated a very welcoming learning environment" where she was "very comfortable with sharing my thoughts, ideas, and asking whatever questions I had." That comfort makes more ambitious learning possible.

The value of the live classroom has become even clearer to me in the past two years. Large language models have made summaries and explanations cheap, which makes class time more important, not less; that is only true if the room offers something beyond content transmission. In any classroom I lead, that means more board work, more diagnostic questions, more opportunities for students to explain a graph to a neighbor, and less time spent simply restating lecture. One student wrote, "Even though discussions are not required, I find myself going every Friday, as I feel I understand more from her teaching." That is the closest thing to a measure of success I know in an era when staying in the dorm is always an option. End-of-semester feedback has pushed me to make my examples more current, my worksheets more sequenced, and my sections more interactive. When students describe my sections as "high-energy" or "personable," I read that not as a personality trait but as part of the practice: attention is easier to earn when the person at the front of the room is visibly invested.

My teaching experience is unusually wide by graduate-student standards, and each part of it has taught me something specific about the craft. TAing across the economics curriculum at Beloit College, from principles and microeconomic theory to game theory, quantitative methods, environmental economics, and agricultural management, taught me that the same three moves work in almost any subfield, though the examples change. As Head Teaching Assistant for ECON 102 at Illinois, I coordinate a course that enrolls roughly 900 students each semester and run live exam-review sessions four times a term, building in diagnostic questions and collective graph work so the session does not slide into a second lecture. Across six semesters that work has reached more than five thousand undergraduates, and I have learned how the same philosophy scales from a section of fifty to a hall of hundreds. Designing the structure and materials for ECON 437, an upper-division Game Theory course, showed me what full-course design demands beyond week-to-week teaching; the progression I built was strong enough that the faculty member adopted it for the PhD-level Microeconomic Theory II course. As Assistant Instructor for Microeconomic Theory for Master's Students (ECON 500), evaluations placed me in the 96th to 99th campus percentile. That role tested whether the techniques that help first-year students enter a model also help Master's students interrogate one. They do. Along the way I was named to the campus's List of Teachers Ranked as Excellent by Their Students in the substantial majority of my discussion sections, and in 2025 the Department of Economics awarded me its Robert E. Demarest Memorial Teaching Award, given annually to one graduate student for outstanding undergraduate teaching. One student last year wrote that she sees me as "a legit teacher that can teach a real class." Several of my Principles students have since declared an economics major. That last outcome, more than any rating, is what I most want to be responsible for.

I am prepared to teach Principles of Economics in either small-section or large-enrollment formats, intermediate and advanced microeconomic theory, graduate microeconomics, and undergraduate courses in empirical methods. I would especially welcome the chance to design an upper-division course in **Empirical Research in Economics** that would study how papers in the empirical literature have made original contributions by digitizing new data, and ask each student to propose how a fresh act of digitization could close a gap in the literature. The claim is simple: language models have opened access to a vast body of historical and archival data that no one has yet turned into a dataset; economics students should learn to notice that opportunity and to design credible empirical strategies around it. Students would identify a literature gap, choose a primary source, construct a research-grade dataset with AI-assisted extraction alongside hand-coding, and write a proposal for the paper the data would make possible. My own work uses large language models to digitize and clean historical data, and the workflow translates directly. The same tools that are changing how students study are changing how empirical economists work, and I want students to learn how to use them, question them, and discipline them as economists.