

Teaching Statement

A good education in economics encourages students to think critically, charitably, and collaboratively about the world around them. Doing that takes effort and persistence – non-cognitive dimensions of learning that much of my research centers on – and my teaching practice is designed to make both a routine part of the learning experience. In practice, this means material broken into steps students can execute before they are asked to combine them, sections wherein every student is expected to contribute, and help that is easy to ask for and encouraged from the first day. I developed this approach across sixteen courses at UC Santa Cruz between 2020 and 2026, from introductory microeconomics through graduate econometrics, as a teaching assistant and as instructor of record.

I break material into steps small enough that effort on each one pays off. When I teach constrained optimization, practice problems name each step as its own task – write the budget constraint, find its slope, compute the marginal utilities, set up the Lagrangian – and the graded problems that follow remove the scaffold, so students assemble a solution they have already built in parts. I also write practice problems in the format of the course’s own exams; in my most recent course, three students independently named these as the practice that helped them most. For me, section design and assessment design are two sides of the same coin: both should follow from the learning outcomes of the course. As instructor of record for Intermediate Microeconomics, I set both – learning goals stated at the outset, and assessments that directly connected to the learning goals of the course – in a format that reward effort and correctness at each crucial step.¹ All nine respondents to the item said the problem sets prepared them for the examinations, and 82 percent reported understanding the course’s learning goals from the first week. Two courses I have designed – Principles of Economics and Current Debates in Economics – carry the same alignment through a full grading scheme: every assignment supports a stated learning outcome, and concept-mastery quizzes stay open for a week with unlimited attempts, so the grade rewards persistence rather than a first attempt.² Across the thirteen courses with comparable evaluations, a weighted 95 percent of respondents say I explained concepts in ways that supported their learning (Appendix Figure 1).³

“He was able to break down concepts in ways to where I actually understood course material instead of just going through the motions of solving problems using set equations.”

Sections are built so that every student is expected to contribute, and mistakes are treated as a part of how the work moves forward, and not a reason to stop. I call on students in turn to supply the next step of a problem, and when a step is wrong, we work out why before moving on. A weighted 93 percent said I designed sections that frequently included opportunities for students to contribute and interact. In graduate econometrics, the same expectation runs through code: rather than distributing finished Stata programs, I build them with the class, with students proposing each step before we implement it. In that course, sections were optional; every survey respondent attended at least three of the ten weekly meetings, and 88 percent attended eight or more.⁴

“Gagandeep Sachdeva also made us pass around a talking stick to answer what step/method of the question we do. This made me stay on my toes and be engaged with the material even if we would say the wrong thing Gagandeep would help guide us and learn our mistakes in a way that didn’t

¹The course was scheduled in person and moved to asynchronous online delivery two weeks before the term; I redesigned the materials and assessment sequence for that format. $n = 11$ respondents.

²Sample syllabi for both courses are available on my teaching page.

³Percentages exclude respondents answering “unable to comment.” Weighted averages weight each course-item cell by the number of respondents and recency. Response rates to teaching-assistant items vary across courses and are reported with Appendix Figure 1; reports for merged sections can include respondents evaluating a different section’s TA. The full set of evaluations is available at my teaching page.

⁴Seventeen of nineteen enrolled students responded to the survey. Across my five most recent courses pooled, 77 percent of respondents attended three or more sections where attendance was optional.

make us scared to make mistakes.”

“I appreciated how interactive Gagandeep made sections. It was helpful that he encouraged every student interact instead of letting one or two students answer everything. Being somewhat put on the spot, or expected to engage helped me learn and engage with the material.”

I make asking for help routine from the first week of a course. Questions are expected and encouraged, class time includes regular low-stakes opportunities to ask them, and office hours are informal. In the courses I have designed, the same expectation is written into policy: every student receives dropped attendances and no-questions-asked extensions automatically, so a difficult week never requires asking for an exception. A weighted 96 percent of respondents across all courses say I made them feel as though they could succeed in the class.

“I appreciate your approachability, I am typically pretty shy but I never felt hesitant to ask questions during or outside of section.”

My teaching work extends past my own sections. As the department’s Graduate Pedagogy Fellow, I created its workshop series for graduate teaching assistants – four sessions on defining learning goals for a section, building active-learning activities for introductory and intermediate courses, and giving effective feedback – and led it each year for three years. In a separate quarter-long workshop, TAs met with me weekly to design their upcoming sections together. In feedback collected after the first round of the series, participants who had attended the department’s earlier trainings noted the difference, and several described practices they had already carried into their own sections.⁵ As a peer mentor on the Teaching and Learning Center’s Summer GSI Support Team, I reviewed syllabi and assessment plans with first-time instructors across STEM fields.

“This training had a strong emphasis on pedagogy and good teaching practices which was completely absent from previous trainings. This was a glaring gap, as many of the entering graduate students are teaching for the very first time.”

“As a fairly experienced TA, I was stuck in a rut ... these workshops gave me ideas [for] how to prepare for sections differently and make it more interesting. For example, while teaching my students about production costs, I conducted an exercise wherein I asked the students to come up with their own business ideas and frame a cost table ... These and other active learning exercises have helped me to engage with my students more and it seems to be helping them too.”

⁵*n* = 8 participants; feedback was collected after the Fall 2023 round.

Appendix Figure 1: Student evaluations of teaching, 2020–2026. Weighted shares of respondents answering “frequently” or “very frequently” are between 90 and 97 percent on all ten items.



Notes: Each dot depicts the share of respondents who answered “frequently” or “very frequently” on a given evaluation item for a given course. The size of the dot is the course’s weight in the weighted average for that item – based on the number of respondents and recency. Filled dots are in-person courses, Fall 2023–Winter 2026; open circles are remote- and hybrid-era courses, 2021–2022. Maroon bars mark weighted averages.