

Ryan Cumings-Menon
Teaching Statement

A statement of philosophy of teaching is best prefaced by recognition of the influence ones past life experiences and environment have played in who we have become as educators. The educators I have encountered throughout my life, including everyone from family members to the professors in my Master's program, afforded me the opportunity to have conversations regarding what constitutes quality instruction as I ventured into my initial mentoring and teaching responsibilities. As I widened my experiences and responsibilities as an Assistant Instructor and Teacher's Assistant in my Ph.D. program these discussions often led to reflection on my own experiences as a student. I thought about which teachers created a safe, yet challenging, classroom environment, including a mathematics professor at the University of Iowa, who played a key role in awakening my own passion for mathematics and economics. This reflection was instrumental to me as I built a vision of the educator I wanted to become, the legacy I wanted to leave, and how I wanted students to reflect on my practices.

As a result, my philosophy of teaching began to form, a process that I am sure will continue in the coming years as an Assistant Professor of Economics. Part of this philosophy is an aspiration to create a classroom environment in which relationships are valued and where students feel safe and supported. I strive to achieve this, in part, by connecting with my students through examples with which they can relate. For example, when leading discussion sections for Principles of Microeconomics at the University of Missouri, I learned of the blank stares and deafening silence that can be caused by directing statements like, "the marginal cost curve intersects average total cost at its minimum," toward large groups of undergraduate students at 8:00 in the morning. On the other hand, I also learned of the enthusiastic participation that can be elicited by explaining the same concept as the average height of celebrities in a room, first with only LeBron James, then after Danny DeVito enters, then after someone marginally taller enters, and so on. When these students saw that this concept was not foreign, they were comfortable taking risks, asking questions, and interacting with the content of economics at their level. This style of engaging my students on a personal level requires that I am aware of the diverse array of cultural and academic backgrounds of my students to allow students to master economic content that is interwoven with their life view and their foundational knowledge of economics.

Through these early teaching experiences, I have also learned the value of clear and open communication with students regarding course material and evaluations. Aside from communicating this directly, I also provide students opportunities to practice and to receive feedback. This allows students to have a clearer picture of their own level of understanding.

Exams and quizzes, along with the content of classroom discussions and questions during my office hours, have the equally important purpose of serving as a valuable source of insight into students' level of understanding. In my experience as an Assistant Instructor for Microeconomics, a master's level course, and as Teaching Assistant in Econometric Analysis II, a Ph.D. level course, I have found that this is particularly important, as the students often have already taken a wide array of economics courses. Continuously asking the class questions, going over the more challenging exam exercises, and modifying lesson plans with questions from office hours is especially key to adapting to graduate students' levels of understanding and the

diversity in their initial stock of knowledge. Although these habits formed while teaching these classes, they are now a part of my teaching style more generally, and these techniques have proven to be useful in my current position as a Teacher’s Assistant in Intermediate Microeconomics.

My journey to becoming the type of educator described throughout this statement of philosophy of teaching has been, and will continue to be, one of ongoing self-improvement. From my fledgling attempts with my first classes in my Masters program, I have become a better educator through practice, through the feedback provided by professors and my students and through reflecting on the educators that have been exemplars throughout my years as a student. As an Assistant Professor I look forward to mentoring and teaching students at the undergraduate, master’s, and Ph.D. levels, and nurturing their passion for theoretical and applied econometrics in the same way that my mentors did for me.

The average response of students to the prompt, “Rate the instructor’s overall teaching effectiveness,” for each semester and each class that I have taught at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is provided below. Each student’s response is on a scale from one to five, with five corresponding to most effective.

In the Fall of 2014, the Spring of 2016, and the Fall of 2016, I was on the list of “Teacher’s Ranked as Excellent,” which means that my teaching effectiveness ratings in these semesters were above the 90th percentile at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

<i>Average Student Ratings of Teaching Effectiveness (By Semester)</i>						
<i>Fall 2014 (Master’s)</i>	<i>Spr. 2015 (Ph.D.)</i>	<i>Fall 2015 (Master’s)</i>	<i>Spr. 2016 (Ph.D.)</i>	<i>Fall 2016 (Master’s)</i>	<i>Fall 2017 (Undergrad.)</i>	<i>Spr. 2018 (Undergrad.)</i>
4.8*	4.6	4.3	4.6*	4.6*	4.3	4.0

* Included in List of Teachers Ranked as Excellent

<i>Average Student Ratings of Teaching Effectiveness By Class</i>	
<i>Microeconomics (Master’s):</i>	4.6
<i>Econometric Analysis II (Ph.D.):</i>	4.6
<i>Intermediate Microeconomics (Undergraduate):</i>	4.2