

## **Teaching statement for Nilufer Ozdemir**

The following is a brief description of my teaching background, my approach to teaching and some specific examples of how I implement my objectives throughout the semester. A comprehensive teaching portfolio is also available and I will be more than happy to forward it on request.

### **Teaching Background**

My interest in teaching began when I was working at the research department of the Central Bank of Turkey. I taught in internal education programs which provide training to branch managers on topics related to current monetary policy applications.

I've had formal training through the Teacher Training Program at UNC-Chapel Hill, prior to taking on teaching duties. This was taught by Dr. Michael Salemi. In addition, I took a course offered by the graduate school designed specifically for international instructors. This course taught me how to better communicate and work with undergraduates. I also attended workshops offered by the Center for Teaching & Learning at the University of North Carolina which offered various workshops on administering courses. I have had a number of independent teaching opportunities as a graduate student at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill; including six sections of Intermediate Microeconomics and three sections of Introductory Economics in summer, fall and spring semesters. While graduate students are given only one teaching assignment per semester at UNC, the department awarded me with two teaching assignments this semester, which has not been done in the past.

### **Philosophy**

My experience both as a student and a teacher of many undergraduates has convinced me that teaching has a significant and rippling impact on a person's life in many respects. Among these, a deep understanding of the concepts may in fact not be the most significant. A student picks up critical skills and habits that will shape their lives while learning course materials- critical thinking abilities, fundamental analysis skills, discipline, professionalism, ownership of work, communication, teamwork. As a teacher, I believe it is my responsibility to ensure that they get the best with respect to all of these dimensions during my class. In short, my philosophy is that learning is a comprehensive process for producing a more capable student in addition to a more knowledgeable one; and the teacher is responsible for ensuring this happens. I feel this is true particularly for the quantitative courses I teach where the development of capability can be easily overshadowed by the challenge of teaching technical details.

In my teaching, I try to remove the obstacles to learning such as anxiety and a fixation on grades. I also recognize the various types of students and provide support for multiple learning styles. My overall objective is for the students to leave the course feeling that have bettered themselves in addition to having learned the material. If in several years, the students have forgotten the material but still feel that the course has enriched them, then I have done a good job.

## **Objectives**

I have two specific objectives when I administer a course:

- 1) Teach the concepts: My approach to teaching the course material is one of continuous learning- for a student in my class, the course becomes a part of their regular life throughout the semester. With this approach, I aim to keep the stress level low and the interactivity high as we progress through the materials.
- 2) Develop critical thinking skills: Many students, through studying their books, can solve textbook problems but falter when they are asked to tie the concepts they learned to open ended situations, such as cases and daily events.

## **In practice**

For teaching the course materials effectively, my strategy is to reduce the emphasis on grades and time pressure, as these two elements frequently interfere with the students' concentration on understanding the concepts. Instead of having a few graded elements that are worth a lot of points, I give at least three exams and several projects that are individually worth around 15-20% each. In addition, I maintain a stream of homework assignments designed to repeat and enforce the classroom exercises. As a result, the students are constantly working on the course rather than being in a cycle which alternates intense periods of study with long periods of little work. I find that this approach also reduces the fixation on grades, since each graded element does not by itself have a critical impact on the final grade. The students can think more about what they missed and how they can improve rather than worry about how to make up for low grades. I emphasize the low pressure environment by providing the students with old exam questions and describing the experiences of former students in the exams so they know exactly what to expect.

Still, I remain demanding and since there are many graded elements, I can push the students harder without having to worry about a low average bringing down morale. This way, there are more opportunities to challenge students.

I recognize that many students learn outside the lecture period, studying materials at their own pace. To support these students, I try to make a lot of material available, in the forms of extra textbooks on library reserve, exam and homework problems from previous semesters. I also post daily class notes for the upcoming classes on the internet so they can come to class prepared. The projects and homework assignments also give me an opportunity to work with the students during office hours, when I can provide more customized help. The interaction during the office hours can have a significant impact in getting to those students who rarely speak up during class.

Developing critical thinking skills is definitely more difficult than teaching the concepts. Economics is well suited to exploring "what if?" types of questions which helps develop interpretation and reasoning skills. I dedicate a considerable amount of time to these exercises in class where I put students in groups and ask them various questions. I also regularly bring economics related newspaper articles to the

classroom and discuss the concepts mentioned in the piece. Not only does this establish relevance to daily events, but it also provides an opportunity for discussion and moves students to ask questions. It is gratifying to see students excited about understanding daily events. I believe if the students cannot explain current affairs using concepts they learned from class, being able to do textbook problems is worth very little.

Overall, I believe this approach has been successful with my students. The comments I read on the evaluations typically mention how my approach guided them effectively through the difficult material and the course has challenged them to apply themselves. The students find the daily handouts to be a good resource and the organization of the course helps them keep up with the material. I looked forward to many years of working with students.

### **Courses I am interested in Teaching**

My research interest falls into international finance and open economy macroeconomics fields. In my research, applied time series and panel data techniques have been heavily used. I also have experience in teaching outside my research areas, so I can teach a wide variety of courses. A selection of courses I am interested in teaching are as follows:

- 1) Intermediate Macroeconomics, Monetary and Open Economy Macroeconomics
- 2) International Economics: International Trade and Finance
- 3) Development Economics
- 4) Applied Statistics and Econometrics
- 5) Money and Banking

I also have experience in teaching

- 1) Principles of economics
- 2) Intermediate microeconomics