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1 Teaching Statement

“Shomak seemed like he really cared about the students. His weekly emails were encouraging and him and his team provided feedback on each assignment which helped on the exams. He returned grades quickly and always provided his own notes on the lessons each week. The extra homework problems on canvas really helped.”

The care and dedication reflected in the above student review typifies the atmosphere that I typically strive to achieve in any class that I teach. My lectures, interactions and pastoral care in general is geared to foster academic and social inclusivity among my students. My teachers have been instrumental in developing my interest in economics, and helping a new generation of students develop the same spark of curiosity fills me up with as much pride as getting a new publication. In what follows, I elaborate on this core philosophy that guides my scholastic efforts and describe ways in which I have tried to implement them within a classroom. Before delving into these details, I provide a brief overview of the kind of courses that I have had the opportunity to teach.

I am currently employed as a lecturer at the University of Manchester where I am scheduled to teach a variety courses. I will be leading the module in mathematical economics, while also teaching courses in microeconomic theory and quantitative methods. Moreover, I was fortunate enough to be a teaching assistant for a plethora of courses: *applied courses like the economics of the corporation and intermediate econometrics, as well as theoretically advanced course like intermediate microeconomics and the economics of law and regulation.* I have also had the opportunity to serve as an instructor for intermediate microeconomics and macroeconomics courses. My duties broadly included conducting lectures, holding review sessions, regular pastoring of undergraduate students, and co-ordinating with my team of TAs and graders. I believe that the diversity of experiences gathered over the last five years at Penn State is a great asset to bring to any department. My penchant for teaching is not just restricted to classrooms - I’ve often taught in online classes even before the pandemic. I received the Graduate Student Online Teaching Certificate from Penn State in Dec 2017 and qualified for the National Eligibility Test in Economics conducted by the Govt of India in Dec 2015. At this point I am currently preparing to apply to the HEA as an associate fellow.

The basis of my teaching philosophy lies in understanding and utilising the **feedback loop** between teaching and research. Let’s start with the first loop - *the one from teaching to research.* A typical class at Penn State comprises of a large number of international students with diverse cultural and academic background, and thus students would look at the same topic through different lenses. It was from them I realised that concepts that I thought obvious needed much more clarity than is typically mentioned in a textbook. Once again, I had to rethink these concepts again, and come up with better (and probably simpler) explanations. This definitely provides a new perspective as a researcher, especially when I present my research or write a paper. In fact, it may be surprising that I learnt as much about teaching from sitting as a student in their classes as I have from my own time as an instructor. After every class, I would go back home and ask the question, How would I teach this class if I was the instructor? I would prepare my class notes accordingly. This training got stuck with me, and helped immensely in designing my curriculum. The ability to reconcile different view points among a diverse group of subjects is an essential to *level the playing field* in the classroom. For instance, I recently taught the Intermediate Microeconomics course which introduces the mathematical foundations for microeconomic theory to third year undergraduate students. At the outset, I spent a couple of lectures conducting a *“math camp”* - introducing students to the concepts of optimisation, a bit of algebra and linear analysis. Many students came back to me subsequently to tell me how beneficial the crash course was for a better understanding of my course, as well as other courses that

they took. On the other hand, I made it a point to provide tips on improving English in any assignment and encouraged students to come and discuss their issues in my office hours without inhibition. I often gave them simple essay questions (*e.g. summarise the lecture that I gave today*) to make them practice their writing skills.

The reverse direction, *linking research to teaching*, is equally important. It is easy to teach an economic concept in an opaque and extremely convoluted manner, with students learning little apart from a lot of notations. This was in fact what I enjoyed as an undergraduate student- the more notations in my class-notes, the fancier I felt. But as I developed as a researcher, and thanks in no small amount to the wonderful teachers who taught me¹, I changed outlook completely. I could look beyond the most dense mathematics and understand the fundamental forces driving the model. This helped me immensely in designing my courses. I have always stressed on simplicity and an understanding of fundamental forces, something which is essential for early career students. This skill to simplify would not be possible without my research and the training I received. Thus research thus fosters clarity in a discipline, which in turn imparts **simplicity** when teaching. How does one implement this link? The best way, in my opinion, to implement this is simply through careful preparation of lectures and notes. For example, I spend a lot of time developing mathematical arguments among the students before formalising proofs. Similarly, I spend considerable time interpreting objects like relative prices in general equilibrium theory and where they may be useful in practice (*e.g. in calculating price indices*). However, this is certainly *not* the only way to implement this link of the loop. Incorporating one's own research into the curriculum is another natural way to implement this link, something that is typically easier in post-graduate courses. For example, I have helped develop *lecture notes on decision theory* with Prof Lamba for graduate micro courses.

No learning environment can thrive without fostering a sense of **inclusivity**. Students irrespective of their gender, social, or economic identity should be given the same opportunity to develop their academic career in my class. I believe that active participation and group discussions are extremely useful tools to foster a sense of inclusivity. To this end, I conducted weekly "coffee hour" meetings in my macroeconomics course where students could engage in discussions on the material that had been covered: there have been extensive discussions on the extent to which FED policies can be explained by the models they learnt, how these models could be improved, among other things. This allows students to engage in critical thinking, and the informal atmosphere allows them to speak without the anxiety of a classroom. However, a lot of students are too shy to engage in discussions. This is often the case among international students who find it difficult to express their opinions in English. I actively try to engage with them during discussions, and often ask them to pen their arguments if they are unwilling to talk. Being patient with these students seem to be beneficial for them to start voicing their opinion. My role as an instructor does not end with textbook theories. Students have often approached me with with concerns they have faced in the university with respect to their identities. I have always lent them a helping hand, and provided necessary assistance wherever it was required on my part. I have been immensely fortunate to have worked in a place where my identity as a person of colour has been celebrated. But not all students are as fortunate, and I've spent time during my office hours help students cope with the difficulties they have faced. My commitment to inclusivity, albeit at an unofficial level, goes back before my graduate school days. As a MA student, my friends and I started tutorial sessions for students entering their MA program from underprivileged communities. My job was to teach students introductory game theory and parts of real analysis. Similarly, during my undergraduate days, I used to tutor students in the junior years (including students who took up Economics as Honours as well as Pass subjects). These experiences, albeit unofficial, was instrumental in shaping my desire for teaching.

This collaborative approach to critical thinking and the ability to freely communicate forms the core of my teaching philosophy. The diverse composition of students across departments is a great fit to utilise and improve upon these ideals. Students from other fields like politics and policy sciences who attend the

¹I had the immense pleasure of being taught by teachers like Prof Krishna, Prof Ali and Prof Haghpanah whose simplicity in teaching extremely difficult concepts and papers have been exemplary. This in turned helped us understand limitations and merits of the models we were taught in a transparent way. I have actively tried to emulate them in my own teaching, trying to teach students abstract concepts through the lens of simplified setups and real world illustrations.

undergraduate classes will definitely provide me a new perspective as an economist. Moreover, teaching at the Masters level courses can allow me to incorporate my own research into the academic curriculum. I hope to contribute to this thriving interaction between teaching and research if given the opportunity. I have been lucky in life to have been taught by some truly wonderful teacher and have always dreamt to be in their shoes one day. I hope to ignite the same passion for Economics among my students, and motivate them to push the frontiers of our discipline.