Teaching Statement

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Economics gives students a way of reasoning about choices, trade-offs, and evidence that outlasts any particular model. My goal as a teacher is to help students get there: to understand why a model is built the way it is, to see how it can be taken to data, and to judge for themselves what the evidence does and does not show. As a teaching assistant, I have led tutorials at two very different institutions, the University of Houston and the African School of Economics in Benin, and at every level from mathematics for economists and principles of macroeconomics to the Ph.D. macroeconomics sequence, as well as intermediate microeconomics, econometrics, and industrial organization. Three principles guide how I teach: build intuition before formalism, connect every model to data, and make sure every student, whatever their preparation, has a way into the material.

Intuition before formalism. Students arrive with very different mathematical preparation. Some meet constrained optimization for the first time in a mathematics-for-economics course; Ph.D. students are fluent in the mathematics but want to know what a model is for. In both cases I start from the economic question and the trade-off at its heart, ask students what they expect the answer to be, and only then introduce the formal tools that make the argument precise. When the mathematics confirms or overturns their expectation, students remember both the result and the reason for it. In intermediate microeconomics, for example, I would rather students be able to explain in words why a price change has an income effect and a substitution effect than reproduce the derivation without knowing what it means.

Connecting models to data. My research studies how households in Sub-Saharan Africa respond to commodity prices and to policy, using household surveys and satellite data. I bring that perspective to the classroom. In econometrics, an estimator becomes meaningful when students see it answer a question they care about, so I build examples around real questions, such as whether a rise in the world cocoa price changes how farmers in Ghana use land and labor, and ask students to work through the whole process: posing the question, preparing the data, estimating, and interpreting the result with the caution it deserves. Having designed survey instruments and supervised field data collection in Nigeria, I also want students to understand where data come from and why measurement choices shape the conclusions we draw.

A way in for every student. I studied in Benin before coming to the United States, and I speak French, English, and Yoruba. A classroom brings together students with different languages, schooling, and expectations, and I try to make the structure of each course explicit, so that students always know what they are expected to learn and how it connects to what came before. I offer several ways to engage with the material: worked examples, practice problems with feedback, and office hours where questions at any level are welcome. I make a point of inviting questions from students who are quiet in class.

Courses I am prepared to teach. I am prepared to teach undergraduate and graduate courses in development economics, agricultural and environmental economics, and applied econometrics, as well as intermediate microeconomics, macroeconomics, and mathematics for economists, in which I have led tutorials as a teaching assistant. I would also like to develop a course on spatial data and remote sensing for economists, drawing on my research with Google Earth Engine and QGIS and on my Ph.D. coursework in spatial analysis and satellite imagery, so that students learn to build and evaluate the new kinds of data used in applied economics.

Across all of these courses my aim is the same: students should leave able to reason carefully about economic questions and to weigh the evidence for themselves.