Teaching Statement

René Leal-Vizcaíno

At a young age, I remember in my math classes it would often occur that I could explain to my classmates some derivation that they couldn't grasp in class. At some point, however, I realized that I could no longer explain some concepts as well as before to younger classes. It became clear to me that the only way to effectively teach a new concept is to step in the feet of the newcomer and go through the process from the beginning.

Teaching is both a challenging and a rewarding job. Few things are more fulfilling than when students can take the concepts learnt in class, and use them to formulate a new question, or to come up with their own way of solving a problem.

The task of the instructor is to guide the student to the frontier of his development zone and give a hand to expand it. Clearly, this requires being able to constantly adapt lectures to the needs of the class, each class being different. In my experience as a teacher, working with freshmen, seniors, and graduate students has provided a diversity of audiences with different needs and interests. I learned that what works in one case does not necessarily work in the other.

First, even if the syllabus and the name of the course is the same, students may have different prior knowledge and moreover the distribution of prior knowledge might be more dispersed. Second, students from different majors or levels have different objectives and hopes for what they take away from the class. All of this affects the pace of the class and the level of guidance they require. How to adapt a class requires: (i) having different and flexible ways to explain the same topic, (ii) different levels of guidance depending on the objectives of the class between instructional and constructive approaches where students are minimally guided and expected to construct important information for themselves (iii) constant feedback and measurement of the students' level of understanding.

The task of the instructor, instead of connecting the dots for the students, is finding the correct length of the steps to let students connect the dots for themselves:

1. A class should ensure that students use the developing skills and concepts that need to be mastered. The class should also be engaging and interesting to keep everyone involved.
2. The teacher needs to anticipate errors the students are likely to commit when working on the task. Anticipation of errors enables the teacher to properly guide the students away from ineffective directions.
3. Learning steps should be organized in simple skills or concepts.
4. Providing encouragement and managing frustration and interest is also important for an effective class.

The simplest way of doing this is by giving students problems in the form of itemized questions,

where the solution to the problem introduces the students to a whole new concept. Thus, the students build up to the new result by using the tools already developed in class.

In summary, good teaching is challenging, requires constant preparation, but a class that is engaged can be an amazing experience. Students that not only learn but learn to learn will be the ones transmitting knowledge tomorrow.

Teaching Experience

At Northwestern University, I have been a teaching assistant for several Microeconomics courses, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels. At the undergraduate level, I was a teaching assistant for Introduction to Microeconomic, a course that is taken not only by economics and engineering majors, but also theater and psychology majors. I was also a teaching assistant for Industrial Organization, which was an elective for juniors and seniors in the economics major.

The graduate courses consisted of the last two parts of the first year Microeconomics sequence, which cover partial and general equilibrium theory, game theory, mechanism design and implementation theory. For both classes, I actively took part in the process of designing the problems and discussion sessions.

In 2016, I was also an instructor in the BRIDGE Summer Program for first-generation and low-income college students which was a magnificent experience with a class coming from very diverse places and families all around the country.

My teaching evaluations at Northwestern University show that I take my teaching duties seriously, I am well-prepared for classes, and available to clearly answer students' questions.

Teaching Interests

I am qualified to teach any of the Microeconomics sequence of a graduate program, as well as in the Microeconomics and Econometrics sequence in an undergraduate program. I can also teach more advanced courses and selective topics on the fields of Mechanism Design, Auction Theory, Decision Theory, Comparative Statics, revealed preference analysis, Industrial Organization, and demand estimation, either for theorists, or for students who wish to use the models covered in their applied work.

Department: ECON Economics
Course: 410-2-20 Microeconomics
Quarter: Winter 2016

CTEC Online TA Report For Rene Leal Vizcaino

Teaching Assistant Questions

Wording of Statement	Number of responses	**6** (high)	5	4	3	2	1 (low)	Average
23. The TA was able to answer the students' questions adequately.	10	8	2	0	0	0	0	5.8
24. The TA was well prepared for each session.	10	9	0	1	0	0	0	5.8
25. The TA communicated ideas in a clear manner.	10	9	1	0	0	0	0	5.9
26. The TA showed strong interest in teaching the course.	10	8	2	0	0	0	0	5.8

Comments: The TA was great. His goal was to present the most elegant answer to every problem, minimizing algebra and extra work. No weakness.

Department: ECON Economics
Course: 410-2-20 Microeconomics
Quarter: Winter 2015

CTEC Online TA Report For Rene Leal Vizcaino

Teaching Assistant Questions

Wording of Statement	Number of responses	**6** (high)	5	4	3	2	1 (low)	Average
23. The TA was able to answer the students' questions adequately.	9	6	3	0	0	0	0	5.67
24. The TA was well prepared for each session.	9	4	2	3	0	0	0	5.11
25. The TA communicated ideas in a clear manner.	9	4	4	1	0	0	0	5.33
26. The TA showed strong interest in teaching the course.	9	4	4	1	0	0	0	5.33

Comments: Great ability to explain problems and also was good at getting discussions going.