STATEMENT OF TEACHING AND MENTORING

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Teaching allows me to honor the educators who helped me along the way. One in particular, Dr. Stephanie Strand, shaped my teaching philosophy by showing me the power of clear communication and thoughtfulness. During a lecture on DNA replication, our class couldn't understand how the body limits genetic mutations during the replication process. After a flurry of questions, Dr. Strand paused, reflected, and admitted that she had been relying on jargon. She re-explained everything using traffic signs as analogies, and the class finally understood. She then thanked us for helping her realize she didn't understand the process well enough to explain it without jargon, adding that a good teacher should be able to explain anything simply. Seeing a clear expert in her field approach our class with such humility inspired me to bring the same level of care to my own students. I believe learning is iterative, and my goal is to help students become comfortable with that process so they leave my class confident in their ability to learn anything. I aim to do this through storytelling, direct communication, and an emphasis on practice.

Storytelling sits at the heart of my teaching philosophy. Effective storytelling is like writing a television series. I map out the ending and the path to get there, give each episode (i.e., each topic) its own arc, and show how each step moves the story forward. Each episode almost always answers some combination of four questions: what, why, how, and how it connects to what came before. When I taught econometrics this summer, the ending was an empirical project using a difference-in-differences approach. Throughout the first half of the course, I wove in questions about proper counterfactuals and how outcomes evolve over time, so that by the time I formally introduced difference-in-differences, students had already built the intuition behind the parallel trends assumption. The year before, the empirical project used instrumental variables, so I built toward the first stage step by step. A quiz asked students to prove that demeaning both terms in a sum of squares gives the same result as demeaning just one. On the midterm, students used that result to prove that OLS residuals are uncorrelated with predicted values, a property that prepared them to understand the first stage of instrumental variables.

Another part of effective storytelling, for me, is motivating each concept with engaging real-world examples, which requires that I understand both the material and my audience. On the material side, I consider the purpose of a concept and the technical aspects, such as equations or variables, that drive the results. I also think through multiple ways to represent the material so that I am ready with different examples. For example, when teaching instrumental variables, I sometimes draw Venn diagrams to illustrate "good" and "bad" correlations between variables when my students struggle with the two-stage approach. On the audience side, I consider my students' lived experiences. I often ask about their career goals or what they did over the weekend, and I draw on their answers throughout lectures. For instance, I have motivated linear regression by asking students whether they have ever wondered how TikTok's algorithm knows which videos to recommend, and I have illustrated the sunk-cost fallacy with the example of forcing yourself to attend a Cardi B concert because you already bought the ticket, despite struggling with depression. I believe this process builds trust. Students see that I am interested in them, which helps them stay engaged.

I also strive to be as conversational and direct with my students as possible to encourage engagement. I check in with the class regularly, asking for feedback on pacing and whether I am being clear. As I talk, I scan the room, noting facial expressions, the amount of eye contact, and how quickly students nod their heads. If something feels off, I stop lecturing and ask for feedback. I emphasize that my lectures are for them, and that I am happy to revisit material if anything is unclear. When students share their thoughts, I thank them for their honesty and make sure never to shame them. Because speaking up may not appeal to all students, especially those who are more introverted, I also ask the class to close their eyes and show a closed fist if I should slow down or a thumbs up if the pace is OK. I used this approach most often in Health Economics, a particularly demanding course because it requires students to learn coding, statistics, and facts about the healthcare market. I taught this course twice, and students gave me an average rating of 5 out of 5 for teaching effectiveness both times.

Finally, I strongly believe in the importance of repetition and patience in the learning process. One of my volleyball coaches growing up often emphasized the goal of leaving every practice 1 percent better than when we started. That lesson has stayed with me: mastery only comes from practice. When I worked at my school's

math tutoring center, instead of solving problems for students who struggled, I created an easier version of the problem. I asked students to first brainstorm different ways to approach it and to pick the path that felt most promising. If that route led to a dead end, I encouraged them to try another until they arrived at the solution. Then I created a more difficult problem and repeated the process. By the end, students had solved a problem similar to the one they originally struggled with. Along the way, I asked them to identify the differences between the problems, challenging them to see the pattern and understand the nuances so they were not simply memorizing. I have carried this approach into my own courses through how I structure exams: 40 percent of the questions are identical to problems from lecture, practice exams, or a bank of practice questions I created, and another 40 percent are variations of those problems. This structure rewards students for practicing while challenging them to go beyond memorization. Above all, I want to instill confidence in my students. I want to show them how to study effectively and encourage them to push through, to keep practicing, and after enough rest, to practice some more.

During the 2025–2026 academic year, I mentored four undergraduate students. They had taken my econometrics class in 2025 and came to every office hour seeking advice on both the course material and how to navigate their final undergraduate year. I offered to continue mentoring them after the class ended, and throughout the year, we met twice a month over Zoom. During these meetings, I shared resources ranging from guiding questions to help them identify which industries or pathways best aligned with their values and goals, to studying and research advice, to what to consider when moving out of one apartment and looking for another. Three of these students took graduate-level courses during their final year, and two completed an honors thesis, with one receiving the prize for the top project that year. I chose to mentor these students because I recognized their potential, but also how amazing they already were. I also saw myself in each of them in different ways. All were students of color, one is openly queer, and two are immigrants. Two openly grappled with their confidence, while the other two constantly balanced their drive for achievement with the internal question of their place in the world.

My approach to teaching and mentorship has been well received by my students and fellow educators. As a teaching assistant and instructor of record, I have earned an average teaching effectiveness score of 4.6 out of 5, compared with a department average of 4.2. The econometrics faculty at UC Davis also entrusted me to teach their upper-division econometrics course over the summer. This course is normally taught only by econometricians in our department and had never been offered over the summer because of the amount of material it covers.

I remain committed to growing as an educator. I am currently working on an intervention program that aims to strengthen math skills among undergraduates, which is being implemented at UC Davis and UC Irvine. This project has connected me with educators across multiple disciplines and campuses who share a commitment to student learning, and I would welcome the opportunity to extend this work to any institution I am a part of. My experience thus far prepares me to teach a number of courses, including Health Economics, Introduction to Statistical Analysis, Econometrics, Principles of Microeconomics, Intermediate Microeconomics, Financial Economics, Money and Banking, Macroeconomic Development, and Mathematics for Economics.

I have invested so much of myself in teaching because it is deeply personal to me. As a Vietnamese refugee whose parents never finished high school, I had to rely mainly on myself to navigate the American education system. I owe much of my success to teachers along the way who understood effective pedagogy and cared about my personal development. However, I also remember the times when I struggled and felt helpless and frustrated by my circumstances and my inability to learn. This is why I approach my students with such care. Having experienced both the highs of excelling and the lows of struggling, I can empathize with students from many different backgrounds, including the first-generation and transfer students who make up a meaningful part of Berkeley's undergraduate community. Taking care of my students is my way of taking care of myself, and my way of showing gratitude to those who helped me. I want them to succeed and to leave my classes knowing they are capable.