

Teaching statement

Siho Park, Ph.D. candidate, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Department of Economics

I believe the ultimate goal of learning in university is to develop the ability to ask and answer questions that do not yet have clear solutions. Unlike problem sets with predetermined answers, the real world presents open-ended challenges. Learning to ask questions, formulate answers, communicate reasoning, and listen to others is the essence of research. Regardless of career paths, students benefit from cultivating these skills of critical inquiry, reasoning, and communication. I see teaching as sharing this intellectual journey with students.

My teaching philosophy was shaped by a moment during my master's program, when I served as a teaching assistant for Intermediate Macroeconomics in Hong Kong. While discussing the Solow-Swan growth model, a student criticized the model for not reflecting complex reality. I quickly answered that the purpose of this model is to abstract away from complicated reality to highlight one particular driver of growth and then moved on. However, I later realized that the student's critical perspective was precisely the kind of questioning that advances our understanding, and I may have too quickly dismissed an insightful perspective. That experience taught me the importance of encouraging critical perspective of established frameworks in class.

In practice, I aim to create classrooms where students actively engage with open questions. I would incorporate group projects in which students investigate key topics, academic papers, or real-world cases, and then communicate their findings through written reports and presentations. For example, in an undergraduate health economics course, groups might examine topics such as the demand for health, moral hazard and adverse selection in health insurance, or rising health care costs. Then, they would write a group report and present them in class. Each group would use real-world examples to motivate the topic, explain the relevant economic concepts, and discuss policy implications. At the graduate level, I envision assigning academic papers, with one student presenting and defending the paper, while the rest of the class posing critical questions. Across levels, I want students not only to learn the material, but also to practice the skills of questioning, presenting, and responding to critique.

I believe evaluation should reward active engagement, including asking thoughtful questions, presenting ideas, and constructively debating with peers. I would place more weight on participation and projects than traditional exams. I also see value in carefully guided use of AI tools. With open-ended questions, effective use of AI would enhance, not replace, student learning.

Equally important to me is fostering an inclusive classroom. Students come from diverse cultural backgrounds and preparation levels. Through group projects, I aim to create opportunities for collaboration across differences. I will also emphasize respectful communication. Questioning and critique should be framed as contributions to collective learning, not as fault-finding. By teaching constructive ways to ask questions and give feedback, I want every student to feel their perspective is valued.

Beyond the classroom, I look forward to mentoring students in research and career development. Whether guiding undergraduates through independent projects or supporting graduate students in developing their own research agendas, I see mentorship as a natural extension of my teaching.

At the undergraduate level, I am prepared to teach core courses as well as field courses in health, public, and development economics. If given the opportunity, I would especially look forward to teaching applied methods courses for causal inference, such as randomized controlled trials, instrumental variables, difference-in-differences, and regression discontinuity design, since such courses provided me with the framework I now use to analyze the world. I am also comfortable with teaching computational tools like Stata, R, and Python, which are essential for modern economic research. At the graduate level, I would be excited to teach health economics.

While I am prepared to teach a wide range of courses, my broader goal extends beyond content coverage. Ultimately, I hope to inspire students to see economics not only as a set of models, but as a way of asking meaningful questions and thinking critically about the world. I am committed to supporting them throughout this journey.