

## Teaching Statement--Tianyi Li

My teaching is grounded in three key principles: thorough preparation before each lecture, integrating theory with practice, and promoting inclusiveness in the classroom. Having served as the sole instructor of several advanced undergraduate courses, I am ready to teach a wide range of courses—from traditional offerings such as labor and public economics, to writing-intensive courses that guide students through independent research, to innovative electives like sports economics.

**Thorough Preparation Beforehand (E.g., Sports Economics):** This is the first course I taught at Penn State. Before the semester, I carefully reviewed the materials and sorted the content into three topics: the demand side of the sports market, the supply side, and specific issues in professional sports. I then structured the course around these topics and communicated them clearly at the beginning of the semester, which helps my students plan for their study. For each lecture, I always come to class well-prepared, and I practice giving the lecture beforehand: timing myself, making sure that I communicate effectively, and working on conveying the difficult concepts clearly and accurately. The dedication to preparation had a positive impact on student learning, as reflected by selected comments from my course evaluation: “The lecture notes were in depth yet still engaging. The homework assignments were hard but not impossible, and I enjoyed the lectures.”

Two things I learned from teaching this course: First of all, good preparation before class is key to pedagogical success. It not only boosts my confidence but also allows me to anticipate which parts of the lecture students may find challenging—I can then focus on addressing them during class time. Second, one can truly grasp the economic concepts only if they are able to explain them clearly to students.

**Combining theory with practice (E.g., Development Economics and Trade):** These are two writing-intensive courses at the University of Minnesota (UMN) in which I gave lectures on academic writing and taught students how to use R and Stata for empirical analysis. I also supervised their research papers, offering detailed feedback at each stage of the writing process.

Writing-intensive courses can be demanding for students: they learn new topics in lectures, while producing an empirical research paper based on what they learned. A key philosophy of my teaching is to have students combine theories with practice. For instance, in Development Economics, some students write papers exploring the relationship between reading skills and labor market outcomes, and most of them focus primarily on getting the regression models right. When giving feedback, I encourage them to draw on economic theories covered in class---such as human capital theory---and discuss the implications of the theories on their research question. By doing so, students gain a better understanding of the relevance of their paper to existing literature, and the quality of their research papers has substantially improved.

I am pleased that this teaching philosophy has been well-received by students. In my Fall 2023 teaching evaluation, I earned an overall rating of 5.88 out of 6. Specifically, on the question asking how prepared I was for each class, I received a 6 out of 6.

**Promoting Inclusiveness in Teaching (E.g., Labor and Public Economics):** When teaching labor economics at Penn State, I often came across students who wanted to ask questions in class but were hesitant to speak out loud. In such cases, I would gently encourage them by saying, “Other students may have the same question as you do, so you are helping others when you speak out.” This is a very effective way of soliciting questions from students, and I can see these students gradually becoming more confident and natural in asking and answering questions. In class, I seek to create an atmosphere in which people are eager to participate by complimenting them and highlighting the strengths in their responses. This strategy has greatly improved student engagement during lectures, and both students and I feel positive and energized after each lecture.

When teaching public economics, a key challenge I encountered was the heterogeneity in students’ mathematical backgrounds, which necessitated a high degree of adaptability in my teaching strategy. After week 1 of my teaching, I realized that some students had relatively limited backgrounds in Calculus and Constrained Optimization (i.e., the Lagrangian method), so I quickly put up some notes and ran a math review lecture. Knowing that repetition aids learning, I worked through several examples in class and posted additional practice problems for students to learn at their own pace. Beyond lectures and regular office hours, I made myself available through extra office hours for one-on-one discussions with students needing further help.

**Outcomes of my Teaching & Moving Forward:** My teaching performance has earned me the *Distinguished Teaching Award* from UMN’s Economics Department, and I have been recognized by the University’s Center for Educational Innovation for my dedication to student learning. As I continue to grow in my academic career, I feel confident teaching courses at the undergraduate, graduate, and MBA levels. In terms of breadth, I am well prepared to teach the advanced undergraduate courses mentioned above, as well as new courses related to my background in Industrial Organization. In all cases, I look forward to working with students and learning from them---just as I hope they will learn from me.

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