

Teaching Statement

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As a first-generation college student who navigated the challenges of higher education without a roadmap, I understand intimately the transformative power of accessible and engaging teaching. My journey from the University of Ibadan to Georgia State University's PhD program has shaped my belief that effective economics education must bridge the gap between theoretical rigor and lived experiences. Teaching is not merely about transmitting knowledge; it is about empowering students to see themselves as economic thinkers capable of analyzing and addressing the pressing issues affecting their communities. This philosophy drives my commitment to creating inclusive learning environments where every student, regardless of background, can thrive.

Teaching Philosophy: Meeting Students Where They Are

My approach to teaching economics is grounded in three core principles: *accessibility through relevance*, *active engagement through collaboration*, and *empowerment through mentorship*. Having taught primarily first-generation students and those from underserved backgrounds at Georgia State University, one of the most diverse research universities in the United States, I have learned that students excel when they can connect economic concepts to their own experiences and aspirations.

In my Economics of Poverty and Public Policy course (Fall 2024), where 75% of my students were first-generation college students, I began each class with current examples from Atlanta's neighborhoods that students recognized. When teaching about spatial mismatch theory, we analyzed MARTA's transit gaps affecting job access in South DeKalb County. When discussing health economics, we examined the closure of Atlanta Medical Center and its impact on emergency care access for low-income residents. This approach transformed abstract concepts into tangible realities, leading one student to note: "Professor Yusuff put tremendous effort into finding material that enhanced our learning...He always looked to our preferences and made sure that we were heard."

My teaching evaluations reflect the success of this approach, with students rating my overall effectiveness at 4.6/5.0, particularly highlighting my ability to make complex material accessible (4.8/5.0 for achieving course objectives) and my commitment to student success (4.7/5.0 for accessibility).

Creating Inclusive Learning Environments

Understanding the unique challenges faced by students from diverse backgrounds has been central to my teaching effectiveness. Many of my students juggle multiple responsibilities. They face work, family obligations, and financial pressures while pursuing their education. I structure my courses to accommodate these realities without compromising academic rigor.

I implement a multi-modal approach to content delivery, providing detailed lecture notes in advance, recording key concepts for review, and offering flexible office hours, including virtual options. This flexibility proved invaluable when several students faced transportation challenges or work conflicts. One student who initially struggled with the mathematical foundations of poverty measurement flourished after we developed a peer tutoring system where stronger students earned extra credit by helping classmates during structured study sessions.

My commitment to inclusive teaching extends beyond logistics. I deliberately incorporate diverse perspectives in course materials, highlighting research by scholars from underrepresented groups and examining economic issues through multiple cultural lenses. When teaching about development economics, I draw from my own research experience at the Center for Econometric and Allied Research in Nigeria, bringing in examples that resonate with our international students while broadening domestic students' global perspectives.

Innovative Pedagogical Approaches

My teaching philosophy emphasizes active learning and practical application. In collaboration with Professor Glenwood Ross, I helped pioneer a virtual exchange program between Georgia State University and Nile University in Egypt for the Economics of Cities course, which was featured in GSU News (June 2025). This initiative allowed students to collaborate across continents, analyzing urban economic challenges in both Atlanta and Cairo, fostering global perspectives while building cross-cultural communication skills.

I integrate cutting-edge research methods into undergraduate education. In my Poverty and Public Policy course, students learned to use real data from the American Community Survey to analyze local poverty trends. We utilized R programming for basic statistical analysis, demystifying quantitative methods that many students initially found intimidating. By the semester's end, students who had never written code were producing professional-quality visualizations of income inequality trends in Georgia counties.

Assessment in my courses balances individual accountability with collaborative learning. While maintaining rigorous standards, I provide multiple pathways for students to demonstrate mastery. Reading quizzes ensure engagement with material, group projects foster teamwork and peer learning, and policy briefs allow students to apply economic analysis to real-world problems. This diversified approach acknowledges different learning styles and strengths while maintaining high academic standards.

Mentorship and Student Development

My role as an educator extends far beyond the classroom. Having benefited from mentors who saw potential in me as a first-generation student, I prioritize making myself available to students seeking guidance on academic and career paths. I maintain an open-door policy and actively reach out to students who may be struggling but are hesitant to seek help, a common trait among first-generation students who may feel they don't belong in academic spaces.

Through my involvement with the Andrew Young School's Department of Economics Graduate Student Association, I mentor students interested in applying economic analysis to policy challenges. I have provided guidance to first-year PhD students preparing for comprehensive exams, sharing strategies and resources that helped them succeed. Additionally, I've written reference letters for two undergraduate students from my Economics of Poverty course who were admitted to master's and PhD programs in economics. I've also guided several undergraduate students in developing research proposals, with two students presenting at the 2025 Georgia State Undergraduate Research Conference. These mentoring relationships often continue beyond the semester, as I help students navigate graduate school applications, internship opportunities, and career decisions.

Teaching Experience and Professional Development

My teaching portfolio spans multiple levels and formats, from large undergraduate lectures to intimate graduate seminars:

- **Primary Instructor:** Economics of Poverty and Public Policy (Fall 2024). Developed curriculum emphasizing empirical applications and policy relevance
- **Teaching Assistant:** Global Economics, Economics of Cities (including innovative virtual exchange with Nile University, Egypt via Google Classroom), Principles of Macroeconomics, Environmental Economics, Applied Microeconomic Analysis (Graduate Level). Supported diverse student populations across theoretical and applied courses.
- **Teaching Certification:** GSU Center for Excellence in Teaching, Learning, and Online Education (Spring 2024)

Student feedback consistently highlights my preparedness, clarity, and genuine investment in their success. As one student noted: "He was always very organized...you could tell that he really wanted to make sure we understood the material."

Future Teaching Contributions

As a faculty member, I am prepared to teach courses across the economics curriculum while developing specialized offerings that leverage my research expertise:

Core Courses: I am eager to teach undergraduate and graduate courses in microeconomics, health economics, urban economics, and public economics. My research background enables me to bring current scholarship into these foundational courses.

Innovative Courses: I propose developing:

- *Economics of Health Disparities:* An interdisciplinary course examining the economic causes and consequences of health inequities, incorporating spatial analysis and policy evaluation methods
- *Applied Economic Analysis for Policy:* A hands-on course teaching students to use modern econometric tools and machine learning techniques to analyze real policy questions
- *Urban Economics and Spatial Justice:* Examining how economic forces shape cities and create or alleviate spatial inequalities

Commitment to Institutional Mission

My teaching philosophy aligns with creating inclusive excellence in economics education. I am committed to recruiting and mentoring students from underrepresented backgrounds into economics, knowing firsthand how representation matters. Through participation in programs like the IRP Professional Development Training Series at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, I continue developing strategies to support diverse student populations.

Teaching economics is both my passion and my responsibility. Every student who enters my classroom brings unique perspectives and potential. My role is to provide them with the analytical tools, confidence, and support to become economic thinkers who can tackle the challenges facing their communities and our world. The consistently strong evaluations from my students, particularly those from underserved backgrounds who often struggle in traditional academic settings, demonstrate that inclusive, engaging pedagogy is not just an ideal but an achievable practice that enhances learning for all students.

As I continue my academic career, I remain committed to excellence in teaching that is rigorous yet accessible, challenging yet supportive, and always centered on student success. The opportunity to shape the next generation of economists, particularly those who, like me, are breaking barriers as first-generation students, is both a privilege and a responsibility I embrace wholeheartedly.