

# ERIC OHRN

## TEACHING PORTFOLIO

### 1. TEACHING EXPERIENCES

While a doctoral student at the University of Michigan, I have enjoyed a diversity of teaching opportunities. As a Graduate Student Instructor (GSI) for the principles of microeconomics course (ECON 101; 2 semesters), I prepared and delivered two discussion sections per week. The discussion sections were structured to complement lectures by providing students with example problems and reinforcing core concepts. My next teaching role, as a Head GSI for the principles of macroeconomics course (ECON 102; 4 semesters), involved administrative duties in addition to teaching a discussion section. I took the lead in writing tests and structuring discussion sections for the other GSIs. After experiences both as a GSI and Head GSI, the department elected me to the position of GSI Mentor for the 2010-2011 academic year. As mentor, I taught an orientation class for new economics GSIs and then worked with GSIs throughout the semester on their teaching skills. I often attended discussion sections then provided feedback to instructors. This process was exciting because I was able to learn and grow as a teacher by observing and providing constructive feedback to my peers. With all of these experiences under my belt, I felt more than prepared when I taught my own courses in ECON 101 and ECON 102 during the summers of 2011 and 2012.

In all of my teaching roles, I have received positive feedback and consistently high evaluations from students. In addition, my teaching has garnered several awards. In the Fall of 2009 and the Winter of 2010, I was honored as one of the Department of Economics' top GSIs. In 2010, I won the Michigan Economics Society Award for Most Outstanding GSI.

I have greatly enjoyed my time as a teacher thus far. I am prepared to provide high-quality instruction in a variety of academic settings and am excited for the opportunities that lie ahead.

### 2. TEACHING INTERESTS

My teaching interests span a broad spectrum of courses. I am excited to teach classes related to my research in public finance, corporate finance, corporate governance, investment policy, and taxation. Additionally, I have enjoyed teaching introductory courses in both micro and macroeconomic theory and am prepared to teach theory courses at the introductory or intermediate level. Finally, I have enjoyed participating in many inter-disciplinary courses in the past and would be excited to work with faculty in other departments to develop courses that apply economic concepts in novel contexts.

### 3. TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

I went to graduate school because I wanted to follow in the footsteps of my professors at Grinnell College; I wanted to become an inspiring teacher that created a collaborative and exciting learning environment, perfect for fostering the study of economics among a diverse student body. My desire to teach economics only grew as I worked as a Graduate Student Instructor and Primary Instructor during graduate school. Every time I began a lecture, I was met by a rush of excitement knowing that I had an hour and a half in which to motivate and give my students the tools to see and analyze the world as an economist. As a result of my teaching experiences, both in and outside of the classroom, I have developed a simple 4 point teaching philosophy that guides me in my role as not only a teacher, but also as a potentially life-changing presence in the lives of my students.

**Education begins with motivation.** *To be an effective teacher, I must excite my students to learn.*

I use several tools to motivate my students. The first is my enthusiasm for economics and teaching. When students see the smile on my face and the energy that I bring to the classroom, they can't help but also get excited. Second, starting from the first lecture, I aim to create a welcoming and collaborative learning environment. I always tell students on the first day that "This is not the kind of classroom where its cool to sit in the back and unplug. This is the kind of classroom where you are an active learner. In this classroom, its cool to ask any question about anything and its cool to be passionate about economics!" Finally, I like to begin and end every discussion by addressing the "why" question. In my experience, when students know the reasons we teach game theory or economists use Real Business Cycle models, they are more motivated to dive into the subjects because they can see their real-world applicability. I have found that by using this variety of motivational tools, I can reach nearly all of my students despite the diversity of their backgrounds and goals for the study of economics.

**Diversity in all aspects of teaching.** *To teach to a variety of learning styles and backgrounds, I must employ a diversity of teaching methods.*

I often hear professors of economics say that they address many learning styles by using *equations, graphs, and words*. In my experience, for most student populations, this is only a first step toward addressing the multiplicity of their educational experiences and learning needs. When I was the Primary Instructor for an introductory macroeconomics course in the summer of 2011, I decided to actively address a range of learning needs by teaching portions of the class in a non-traditional manner. I incorporated group problem solving and group assignments for collaborative learners. For auditory and visual learners,

I played Planet Money podcasts on sovereign debt and seigniorage and the movie Inside Job, which addressed the causes of the 2008 financial crisis. In addition to equations, graphs, and words, I added interactive diagrams and personal anecdotes to my lectures. The diversity of approaches seemed to connect with each and every student. At the end of the course, I felt that not only had all of the students mastered the course's core concepts, but they were excited to continue their study of economics.

**Sweat the details.** *To effectively teach economics, I must be precise, detailed, and clear.*

In my experience, some teachers are able to create a fun and interactive learning environment. Others have the skills to deliver precise, calculated lectures. Only the very best are able to do both. When I began teaching economics, I was focused on providing clear explanations of economic theory. As my teaching experience grew, I realized clean, mistake-free board work and careful elucidation could provide students with tools to analyze the world as an economist, but did not produce students motivated to use those tools and fell short of appealing to students with non-traditional learning preferences. As I have incorporated additional motivational efforts and a greater variety of teaching mediums into my lectures, I have tried to remember that these efforts are all for naught without a detailed and careful presentation of economic concepts upon which to build.

**Evaluate and Evolve.** *To grow as a teacher, I must always seek and respond to feedback from my students and peers.*

At the end of every semester, I spend time analyzing student feedback and talking with peer instructors to brainstorm ways in which we may improve the class and our teaching, more generally. I enjoy working as a team to improve student experiences. I always find this process to be enlightening and usually adjust my approach the next semester as a result. I also try to apply this principle in a much more short-term context. During lectures, I always actively look towards students for feedback. If students look confused or cannot answer simple 'understanding check' questions about the Cournot Model, I will quickly adapt my lecture plans to play an active game about quantity competition or construct a chart which contrasts the Cournot with the Bertrand model.

I recognize that the best teachers are not born but are continually evolving and growing towards greatness. While these principles have served me well thus far, I am excited to see how they will change as I experience new teaching challenges and strive to provide the highest level of instruction and motivation to students.

#### 4. SELECTED ANONYMOUS WRITTEN STUDENT COMMENTS

##### **Head Graduate Student Instructor, Principles of Macroeconomics Winter 2013**

*Eric Ohrn was one of the best GSIs I have ever had! I feel like I actually learned more in section than in lecture. Very enthusiastic and good at explaining things.*

*One of the best GSIs I've ever had. I made it a priority to go to section to help clarify the material discussed in lecture. I would be willing to recommend Eric Ohrn for a professor position or any awards in the future.*

*This was a very hard class. Fortunately, I had Eric as my GSI. He was a great teacher and did a great job of explaining things that were very confusing in lecture. Eric might have been the best GSI I've had for any class at the university.*

##### **Head Graduate Student Instructor, Principles of Microeconomics Fall 2012**

*Eric was probably the best GSI I have ever had. He was really passionate about the material and conveyed a strong sense of understanding. He motivated us to like what we learned.*

##### **Primary Instructor, Principles of Microeconomics Summer 2012**

*Great instructor with a friendly and outgoing attitude that encouraged each student to rise to the difficulty of the class.*

*The instructor was very clear in teaching the material and with the guidelines of the class. I would love to have him again as a teacher.*

*The instructor created a particularly effective learning environment in which students were willing to ask questions, and answer questions even if they were unsure of the answer.*

##### **Head Graduate Student Instructor, Principles of Macroeconomics Winter 2011**

*Incredible at explaining all topics. Best GSI I will probably ever have.*

*Eric is a phenomenal teacher who manages to make the material interesting mostly due to force of personality. Eric is the man.*

*I thought the instruction was top-notch for a GSI. Definitely best GSI I've ever had.*

*Eric is the best GSI in the econ department hands down. He always would help me during office hours and made Econ 102 easier for me. He is the man.*

*This is the best discussion I have ever had - engaging, informative, and entertaining. Eric is a great GSI and really makes learning the concepts fun.*

### **Head Graduate Student Instructor, Principles of Macroeconomics Winter 2011**

*Eric is the best GSI I've had at U of M. Without question. Not only is his teaching clear, and effective, he's hilarious and it seems like every student likes him and learns a great deal from him. The best part about Eric, besides all of that, is he is always willing to help. If he's planning on being a lecturer, he would already be one of the best.*

*Eric Ohrn was one of the best GSIs I have had at Michigan. Very engaging and knew the material well. Enjoyed helping students and wanted us to succeed.*

*Eric was an absolutely amazing GSI, one of the best I have had at U of M by far.*

*Eric was one of the best, if not the best GSI that I have had at the university to this point.*

### **Graduate Student Instructor, Principles of Microeconomics Fall 2009**

*Eric was an excellent GSI. He was willing to get input from his students. He related to us, and made me feel comfortable going to ask questions. He was laid back, but not so much that we didn't learn or didn't come to class. He reacted well to students asking questions, and always laid out an agenda for the class. He was enthusiastic and personable. He generally had a good idea of what we would not understand and was very easily able to tell when we were not understanding a concept, and he would change the way he approached the problem.*

*Eric Ohrn is a great GSI, he made everything interesting and fun and his notes were very clear and helpful. He loves to help students with their doubts and share their thoughts. He motivates student to learn Economics and is one of the reasons I had a great experience in Econ 101. I believe he can be a great professor himself.*

*Eric does a great job of explaining things that are difficult to understand in class. Also, students don't feel intimidated to ask questions. He's very approachable and I benefited greatly from having Eric as my GSI.*

*I felt like, singlehandedly, my GSI (Eric Ohrn) taught me EVERYTHING I learned in Economics 101. Without him, this class would have been unbearably confusing and difficult. Eric made Econ much more understandable, gave great examples, and MADE COMING TO DISCUSSION FUN.*

## 5. QUANTITATIVE TEACHING EVALUATIONS

At the end of every academic term, the University of Michigan requests that students anonymously fill out evaluations of their courses and instructors. The numerical part of the evaluations consists of students selecting one of the following predetermined statements for a list of questions about the course and the instructor.

- 5 = Strongly Agree
- 4 = Agree
- 3 = Neutral
- 2 = Disagree
- 1 = Strongly Disagree

The table below provides a summary of these responses averaged across classes and for each of my teaching roles - as Graduate Student Instructor, as Head Graduate Student Instructor, and as a Primary Instructor. The table also presents university-wide median scores as benchmarks. Original disaggregated evaluations are available upon request.

AVERAGE STUDENT EVALUATIONS				
the instructor ...	Head GSI	GSI	Instructor	UofM Med.
was an excellent teacher	4.89	4.78	4.69	4.50
explained materials clearly	4.84	4.71	4.75	4.33
handled questions well	4.82	4.64	4.63	4.38
enjoyed teaching	4.93	4.73	4.86	4.80
was not confused by questions	4.66	4.51	4.52	4.25
maintained an atmosphere of good feeling	4.90	4.80	4.81	4.67
treated students with respect	4.91	4.82	4.81	4.73
was willing to meet outside of class	4.84	4.74	4.88	4.67
seemed prepared	4.80	4.65	4.70	4.60
set high standards for students	4.71	4.49	4.54	4.40

Note: Head GSI observations are averaged over 4 classes. GSI observations are averaged over 4 classes. Instructor observations are averaged over 2 classes.