Teaching Statement

Qilin Zhang

I teach economics as a way of making decisions. Almost every model students meet, from a firm setting a price to a household deciding how much to save, asks what someone is trying to achieve and then weighs a marginal benefit against a marginal cost. My goal for undergraduates is that they become thoughtful consumers of economics, who reach for this lens when they face a decision at work or in their own lives, or weigh an economic argument in the news. My goal for graduate students is that they become producers of research, who master the mathematical and statistical techniques of the field without losing sight of the economic story those techniques are meant to tell.

Teaching experience

At the University of Florida, I have taught ECP 3703 Managerial Economics, an intermediate-level undergraduate course of about thirty students, as Instructor of Record since Spring 2026, with responsibility for planning the course, presenting the material, and designing assessments. I have also been a teaching assistant in undergraduate, MBA, master's, and Ph.D. courses, including Intermediate Macroeconomics, Economic Data Analysis, International Macroeconomics, Macroeconomic Analysis, and Computational Economics. In first-year Ph.D. Macroeconomic Theory (ECO 7206), I prepared and led a weekly discussion section. Student feedback from my first semester as Instructor of Record is encouraging. With a response rate of 83.9 percent, students rated my enthusiasm at 4.54 out of 5, and they rated the clarity of my standards for response and availability at 4.65, above the college mean of 4.46. One student wrote that the worksheets were "extremely helpful to practice the concept immediately after we learnt it." I also opted into the university's voluntary midterm evaluation. In it, students asked me to slow down and work through problems step by step, so I added class time to work through each problem step by step and show how the textbook material applies.

Undergraduates: building economic intuition through practice

Introductory courses are technically far from research, but the intuition they build is valuable to every student: those who leave economics use it to make decisions, and those who continue make fewer mistakes because they can tell when an answer does not make economic sense. Intuition cannot be memorized; it has to be practiced. I begin a new topic with a concrete decision or a short numerical example and ask students to commit to an answer before we formalize it. When we reach monopoly pricing, students first guess how the price will change, and only then do we derive that marginal revenue equals marginal cost, so that the derivation tests an intuition they have already committed to.

Once students have a tool, they use it again in settings that look different on the surface, such as a coffee shop pricing a latte, an airline charging students and business travelers different fares, and a streaming service weighing a cheaper plan with advertising. My worksheets and practice exams are built on this principle and point out the steps where past students most often went wrong. Group homework and practice-exam reviews, in which students explain solutions at the board, turn practice into a shared activity, and my feedback separates errors in economic reasoning from errors in calculation.

Graduate students: from consumers to producers of research

Graduate courses already center on technique, and graduate students come with a foundation in mathematics and statistics. Economics uses mathematics without being reducible to it, so while I teach the techniques carefully, I keep returning to why we do things this way. Why solve this problem by backward induction? Why do we care whether an estimate is causal? What are the marginal benefit and marginal cost in this first-order condition? The

consumption Euler equation, for example, says that a household is indifferent between consuming one more unit today and saving it for tomorrow; read this way, each optimality condition brings students back to the intuition they built as undergraduates. In my ECO 7206 section, I wrote out each step of a derivation, explained why it followed, and paused where a common mistake was likely, drawing on the mistakes I had made myself.

My own path is part of why I teach this way. Early in graduate school I concentrated on derivations and problem sets and became a capable consumer of research. After my qualifying exams, I learned to read papers for the question the authors were answering, why they approached it as they did, and what story their evidence tells. I want to help graduate students make that transition earlier than I did, and I would advise research assistants and thesis writers in the same spirit: undergraduates learn by practicing with real household data, and graduate students build technical mastery that keeps returning to the economic question.

An equitable and accessible classroom

Students come to economics with different preparation, schedules, and reasons for taking the course, and I aim for an equitable and accessible classroom, built so that every student can keep up without lowering the bar. I post slides and a worksheet for every chapter, so that a student who misses a class can catch up; I drop the lowest homework and quiz scores, so that one difficult week does not define a grade; and I use group homework with peer evaluation, so that students learn from classmates who approach a problem differently. Because students told me the online homework platform was costly, I will weigh the cost of materials when choosing them. I treat questions as part of the work, never as evidence that a student does not belong.

Courses I can teach

I am ready to teach any undergraduate course the department needs. At the graduate level, I would most like to teach macroeconomics (including computational methods), public economics, and family economics. My dream course to develop is *Household Decisions over the Life Cycle*, which grows out of my research: I build macroeconomic models from the micro foundations of household decisions. Its three parts cover altruism and warm-glow giving, consumption and saving, and risk and insurance markets. It can be taught as an introductory undergraduate elective or, with the household survey data I use in my research and more advanced papers, to advanced undergraduates and graduate students.

Whether students leave as thoughtful consumers of economics or go on to produce research, I want them to be able to explain the intuition, carry out the analysis, and interpret the result. That is the standard I bring to my teaching.