

# Teaching statement

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I have prepared and taught four courses: two undergraduate courses and two graduate courses. The undergraduate courses are Intermediate Macroeconomics (ECN-302) and Economic Growth (ECN-487). At the graduate level, I taught Ph.D. Macroeconomics I (ECN-613) and Ph.D. Macroeconomics II (ECN-614). I taught ECN-302 and ECN-613 nearly every year. I started teaching in ECN-487 in 2019. I taught ECN-614 only once in spring 2014. The department asked for my help when the instructor who regularly taught ECN-614 was not available in the semester; I designed and taught this Ph.D. course on short notice. My teaching of the course was viewed highly favorably by the students. The table below lists the courses I taught in each of the semesters, along with enrollments.

**Table:** List of courses I taught

#	Semester	Course ID	Course name	Enrollment
1	Fall 2013	ECN-613	Macroeconomics I	10
2	Spring 2014	ECN-614	Macroeconomics II	6
3	Spring 2014	ECN-302	Intermediate macroeconomics	49
4	Spring 2014	ECN-302	Intermediate macroeconomics	48
5	Fall 2014	ECN-613	Macroeconomics I	8
6	Fall 2015	ECN-613	Macroeconomics I	10
7	Spring 2016	ECN-302	Intermediate macroeconomics	46
8	Spring 2016	ECN-302	Intermediate macroeconomics	52
9	Fall 2016	ECN-613	Macroeconomics I	17
10	Spring 2017	ECN-302	Intermediate macroeconomics	37
11	Spring 2017	ECN-302	Intermediate macroeconomics	41
12	Spring 2017	ECN-302	Intermediate macroeconomics	94
13	Fall 2017	ECN-613	Macroeconomics I	17
14	Fall 2017	ECN-302	Intermediate macroeconomics	41
15	Fall 2018	ECN-302	Intermediate macroeconomics	86
16	Spring 2019	ECN-487	Economic growth	31
17	Spring 2019	ECN-302	Intermediate macroeconomics	65
18	Spring 2019	ECN-302	Intermediate macroeconomics	70
19	Fall 2019	ECN-613	Macroeconomics I	8
20	Spring 2020	ECN-487	Economic growth	48
21	Spring 2020	ECN-302	Intermediate macroeconomics	66
22	Spring 2020	ECN-302	Intermediate macroeconomics	47
23	Fall 2020	ECN-613	Macroeconomics I	13
24	Spring 2021	ECN-487	Economic growth	50
25	Spring 2021	ECN-302	Intermediate macroeconomics	59
26	Spring 2021	ECN-302	Intermediate macroeconomics	49

Below, I describe my teaching in the following order.

1. I begin by providing an overview of my teaching contribution, focusing on content, delivery, and inclusiveness of my class to students of diverse backgrounds.
2. I then turn to student satisfaction based on student evaluations.
3. I then describe how I addressed the teaching challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic.
4. I finally provide details of each of the courses I have taught.

### **1. Overview of my teaching contribution**

I believe my classes have made a significant contribution to the department's and University's teaching missions. Given my expertise in international development and macroeconomics, my undergraduate students both in ECN-302 and ECN-487 got a useful opportunity to learn particularly about the macroeconomics of international development. In the graduate macroeconomics classes, I equip my Ph.D. students with essential analytical and quantitative skills in dynamic general equilibrium models. These skills are important not just in macroeconomics but also in other areas of economics on which our department focuses. My own research overlap between macroeconomics and development economics also helps me to better appreciate the needs of our graduate students with regard to utilizing macroeconomics tools in a variety of fields.

In my courses, I strive to ensure that the materials I cover are of high academic standard. To this end, I often experimented with pushing the boundaries of rigor to make sure that students use their potential as much as possible.

I do my research and teaching with a great deal of passion. I deeply care about many issues in macroeconomic development. And I bring that passion to the classroom. Pushing the rigor poses its challenge in terms of presenting the material in a way that is comprehensible and engaging for students, and I did work very hard to address this challenge. I spend a considerable amount of time preparing my own lecture notes that consider the needs of our students. In the case of ECN-302, my lecture notes and slides are detailed enough to avoid the need for expensive textbooks, giving some financial relief for many students with tight budgets. I prepared recorded lectures that are very concise (often less than 15 minutes) so that students can review without losing focus. I have prepared several problem sets that provide students the opportunity to digest the content. I created ample opportunities for my students to link the theoretical models with real-world examples. This engagement takes various forms. In classroom discussions, I bring up ongoing public debates on economic issues (such as the controversy around trade surplus/deficit between the US and China) and

inform those discussions with insights from formal models. I incorporate cutting-edge research articles in my undergraduate curriculum (e.g., empirical papers on the role of colonial history for contemporary prosperity). I use actual data to illustrate the application of economic concepts in the real world (e.g., calculation of Total Factor Productivity, GDP measures).

I actively looked for feedback to continuously improve my teaching and tried to as much as I can to learn from the feedback I receive. Two of my mentoring committee members visited my class on different occasions and gave me useful comments. I took those comments seriously and incorporated them into my teaching. For example, I was advised to speak louder in class, and I have always used the classroom loudspeaker since then. I was also advised “to explain things in detail and sometimes even from first principles.” I have since then put greater emphasis on providing more detailed explanations for basic principles.

I personally consulted with instructional experts at the Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment (IEA) team. I also attended instructional training organized by the IEA on inclusive teaching. These conversations and the workshop provided me with useful information to improve my courses and to better ensure that marginalized students also benefit from my classes.

I also solicit student feedback quite regularly. I incorporate this feedback into my classes.

I try my best to make sure that every student feels that they are treated with dignity. From the very beginning, I communicate my strong view on treating every student respectfully. Economics is a profession in which many communities are highly underrepresented. The lack of representation affects the kind of research done in the profession and the way results are communicated, including to students in economics classes. Let me illustrate this with a few examples in undergraduate macroeconomics. Persistent unemployment is one of the core issues in macroeconomics. Macroeconomics textbooks mention various reasons for long-term unemployment. But often, the textbooks do not bother to even mention the persistently high unemployment rate among minorities (particularly African Americans) and the racism that underlies this fact. I do not ignore such facts in my class. The same applies to discussions of income and wealth inequalities both within and across countries. While economics textbooks mention factors like education and finance, often, they completely ignore political injustices that underlie those inequalities. In my classes, I try to highlight those factors by drawing on academic research on the role of institutional factors for economic growth and income inequality.

My classes are attended by many international students from different countries. These students often have a keen interest in international development. But macroeconomics textbooks mostly focus on US data and do not draw on data from a wide range of countries. Even worse, they are sometimes openly offensive. I abandoned a planned adoption of a textbook on economic growth after realizing that the book included some sentences that characterized people from a certain race as easy-going, lazy, and not hardworking (as an explanation for low income). I have many hard-working students from that race attending my course. I abandoned the book even though I had spent a considerable amount of time preparing to use it.

I draw on international data with careful consideration for both academic rigor and respect to my students. In one of my ECN-302 classes, during my earlier years at Syracuse, a student told me that they are financially distressed and cannot afford the textbooks and MyEconLab. Such financial distresses may not affect many of our students. But for the few who are facing distress, it is a tough one. I responded by ramping up the preparation of my lecture notes (which were at the early stage) and problem sets so that the textbook and MyEconLab would no longer be required for the course. I believe that this helps minimize the gap that students with limited financial resources face in their endeavor to realize their learning potential.

To sum up, I teach striving for high standards. I provide significant support to my students so that they can understand and engage. I try my best to ensure that no student feels like an outsider in my class.

## **2. Student evaluations**

I put a great deal of effort and passion into preparing and delivering such rigorous content in a way that is comprehensible to my students. I have received many positive comments from students such as:

*“Instructor knew what he was talking about and was enthusiastic about it.”*

*“He answered every question asked with detailed answers”*

*“Professor Shifa is brilliant, enthusiastic about teaching this course, and really cares if students understand the material. He wants students to understand the reasoning behind the topics we cover and delve deeper than the surface.”*

*“Professor Shifa is extremely knowledgeable of the course material.”*

*“I really liked the way he lectured because it was more hands-on. Doing practice problems in class and going over them was the biggest help ever!”*

*“I really enjoyed this course and think it is being taught very well, thank you!”*

*“Everything was good. If anyone complains, it is their own fault. he is available for office hours, the material is clear and the rest is up to the students to practice and improve on”*

*“Clear slides and helpful homework assignments”*

*“He was enthusiastic and did a decent job of keeping me engaged.”*

*“This instructor is extremely caring and helpful towards his students. When I had questions about the course material, I was able to go to his office hours and he devoted his time to explaining everything to me.”*

*“He made the lectures interesting and easy to pay attention to”*

*“I have attended your other classes before, and I really think you are a good, responsible professor who cares about students, so I choose your course again this semester. I appreciate your consideration for the students. I really like the arrangement of this class, especially those instructional videos. They are concise and easy to understand. Also, I think the number of questions on the quiz is reasonable and I particularly like the fact that we have enough time to do and think about the quiz. Overall, I think it is good. Thank you very much!”*

*“By taking the time to talk to the professor, even briefly, before and after class, I found he was extraordinarily helpful in clarifying anything I was confused about from a previous lecture. What's more, he never leaves a student who asks a questions (even one with an obvious answer) outside class or during lecture feeling embarrassed or ashamed. He supports his students and their drive to learn.”*

### **3. My teaching contribution during COVID-19 pandemic**

During the COVID pandemic, I took care of my students with at most dedication. I heard many distressful stories from my students. I genuinely sympathized with the distress that my students faced. I tried my best to intellectually challenge and engage

my students while trying to minimize their stress. I worked hard to make sure that they lose out on learning the material without jeopardizing their emotional health due to too much stress.

I was asked by the department to teach synchronous classes to students from many time zones. Some of them had a very hard time attending live classes because of the time gap (like students in China). Some of my students had trouble with having reliable internet access. Student engagement was another challenge. Keeping my students motivated in the absence of in-person interactions was difficult.

I have designed and worked hard to implement a successful strategy to accommodate the diverse needs of my students and keep them engaged. I invested a considerable amount of time preparing highly concise videos with a clear explanation of the material. I prepared weekly quizzes so that students can stay engaged with the material throughout the semester. Since students have now pre-recorded videos, I dedicated the live sessions (i.e., regular zoom classes) to questions and answers. These sessions provided ample opportunities to address specific questions that students have. The sessions were also engaging since students ask the questions. For students who cannot make it to the regular class times, I made myself available by appointment (instead of fixed office hours).

Students appreciate my effort. This is also illustrated in the feedback I received from student evaluations. Students wrote:

*“I was engaged when watching the videos, because they were very easy to follow.”*

*“I was most engaged, excited and involved in the course during each weekly quiz. I was able to show what I had learned each week and I was able to see how to apply each week’s concepts”*

*“Very clear course materials. i can easliy understand, learn, and prove in the quizzes what I have learnt each week”*

*“I think the content of each video in the class is very detailed and clear, which makes me have a good grasp of the core content of each week. After finishing the quiz every week, it allows me to know my shortcomings and improve.”*

*“I really like the weekly test, because it pushes me to catch up with the lecture contents and study the macroeconomics step by step.”*

*“I was most engaged in the lectures trying to learn and understand the material.”*

*“Genuinely loved this teaching technique. It took all the pressure out of the course itself. No deadlines to remember except for quizzes every week. I knew what I had to do for the class at all times and if I had any questions I did not have to go out of my way to schedule office hours and simply went to class to ask them since that was what they were for. No big projects, no long papers, no large exams, simply just review the topic and take a quiz. I retained just as much, if not more knowledge, in this course as I have with all of my other courses and I attribute that to the stress free environment Prof. Shifa has created.”*

*“This professor does a great job explaining the course concepts in pre-recorded lectures, so class time was mainly used to answer any questions which was extremely helpful!”*

#### **4. Description of teaching by each course**

Below, I turn to detailed descriptions of each the courses I taught.

##### **ECN-613: Macroeconomics I**

ECN-613 is the core macroeconomics course in our Ph.D. program. Until 2018, ECN-613 was one of the two courses in the macroeconomics sequence (ECN-613 and ECN-614). Since Fall 2019, ECN-613 is the only macroeconomics course in the Ph.D. program following a revision of the Ph.D. curriculum.

In this course, I strive to provide students with a solid theoretical and quantitative foundation in real macroeconomic analysis. In designing the course, I have taken careful consideration of the needs of our students as they pursue their dissertation and research careers in the core areas of our department (such as labor, public, trade and urban). The analytical skills that Ph.D. students learn in this course are useful in many fields outside macroeconomics. For example, many trade and urban models involve dynamic general equilibrium analysis where factors of production move across sectors and/or locations. The Overlapping Generations models are foundational tools for intergenerational analysis, such as studies of pension sustainability (public economics) and parental education investment (labor and education economics). The

macroeconomics tools I teach Ph.D. students strengthens their skills relevant to large parts of the economics literature.

I put great emphasis on strengthening the skills of our Ph.D. students in analyzing dynamic general equilibrium models. To this end, I follow the book by Ljungqvist and Sargent (*Recursive Macroeconomic Theory*). This is of the most technically rigorous books in the area. I also give them several problem sets throughout the semester to strengthen their skills in solving dynamic models. I train them with MatLab exercises in which they undertake quantitative simulations of dynamic models, including solution methods in dynamic programming.

I encourage students to appreciate the importance of the techniques they learn in class. One way I do this is by encouraging them to read journal articles that apply macroeconomics tools to topics related to the core fields in our department. For example, in Fall 2019, I gave students a list of papers on trade, urban and public. Students then select the paper they like (depending on their intended field of research) and present in class. One of the papers students read and presented was *Hsieh and Moretti. 2019. "Housing Constraints and Spatial Misallocation." AEJ: Macro*. This paper shows how one can use macroeconomics tools to study questions in urban economics.

Overall, I teach this course in a way that provides our students with a strong foundation that helps them appreciate the importance of the skill sets they learn for their chosen area of research.

### **ECN-302: Intermediate macroeconomics**

ECN-302 is an intermediate-level macroeconomics course. The course covers a broad set of important macroeconomics concepts such as national income accounting, economic growth, the goods/capital markets, and labor markets.

I first designed this course by closely following the book *Macroeconomics*, by *Andrew B. Abel, Ben S. Bernanke, and Dearn Coughore*. I also utilized MyEconLab that comes with the book. Over the years, I have made revisions that have increased the depth of coverage substantially.

For example, in standard textbooks, the topic of national income accounting is often discussed in terms of aggregate variables only. Students are taught the aggregate equations (such as  $GDP = C + I + G + NX$ ). Often, students just memorize these equations and answer questions in tests, but they do not really understand where the equations

come from (or why the equations are true). Students are taught the various approaches to calculate GDP (i.e., product, income, and expenditure approaches). These approaches are typically given as a list of formula to be memorized, with little expectation for intellectual engagement by students. I have restructured the lesson plan for this topic in a way that provides a thorough understanding of national income accounting. I developed a simple model economy that consists of four firms and a government. These firms engage in various activities across the value chain (agriculture, manufacturing, and service). The firms and workers also pay various types of taxes (direct and indirect) and receive transfers. The firms in this model economy sell their goods to domestic consumers, the government, foreign buyers, and to each other. There is also import of raw material. Foreigners own stocks of domestic companies and domestic residents also own foreign stocks. In a nutshell, this model economy includes many variables that constitute national income, including investment in capital goods, investment in inventory, import/export, indirect taxes, direct taxes, transfers, net factor payments, government purchase, consumer spending, profits, wages, private saving, government saving, GDP, GNP, disposable income, and current account balance.

Given the raw information about the activities/transactions of each participant in the economy, my students construct national income variables from scratch. This way, they have a clear picture of the complex accounting identities among national-income variables. They see why the three approaches computing GDP deliver similar results. They understand why we include indirect taxes but exclude direct taxes in the list of variables added by the income approach. They comprehend why national savings and investment determine the current account balance.

I have done the same revisions on the topics of labor and capital markets, going much deeper than many textbooks. Classical models of labor and capital markets are often presented as simple static frameworks where the two markets are studied separately. In such models, students have no way of analyzing how a change in one market could affect outcomes in the other market. For instance, consider the effect of an increase in the supply of labor in the current period. This change could usher many macroeconomic effects in the economy. However, in the textbook labor market models, students can hardly see the many effects of this change other than on current wages. To address this gap in standard textbooks, I constructed for my students a simple dynamic model in which both markets are incorporated. This enables students to undertake a much richer analysis. Taking the example of the effect of an increase in current labor supply, I show them how this change could increase current GDP, which could in turn increase domestic saving, and depending on whether the economy

is open to international capital markets, this increase in domestic saving could affect capital flows, interest rates, future wages, and trade balance (among others). I teach my undergraduate students to undertake such a rigorous analysis in a two-period dynamic general-equilibrium model. They solve the model analytically, they compute the solutions numerically, and they interpret the insights using graphs. I apply this kind of rigor in each of the topics I cover in the course.

I deliver this level of depth by providing various instructional supports to my students. The models I present are developed from basic steps that students can grasp. For example, in teaching national income accounting, students focus on a single firm. They first calculate the value-added of the firm. They then calculate how that value-added is distributed between government (in the form of indirect tax), workers (wages and benefits), and capital owners (profits and interest payments). They slowly move on to building the aggregate variables. I give them several problem sets. Students learn through repeated practice and the feedback they receive from their mistakes during practice.

### **ECN-487: Economic Growth**

When I was asked to teach this course by the department (after the previous instructor left our school), I accepted the request enthusiastically. I am passionate about the topics of economic growth. I designed the course with a great sense of interest. Soon, my enthusiasm was met with a serious challenge. The book I liked for its rigor (by Chad Jones) uses models in continuous time, which required more advanced math skills than models in discrete time. So, the formulas involve not only elementary calculus but also differential equations and logarithms. I considered switching to undergraduate textbooks that use discrete-time models. However, for a course that focuses exclusively on Economic Growth (rather than a general macroeconomics course), I felt that students miss a lot of analytical insight that comes from continuous-variable models.

I have designed a successful strategy to overcome this math hurdle that my students face. I wrote my own lecture notes in which I use several strategies to address this issue.

First, when I present the model, I do not start by describing the equations and/or assumptions. This intimidates students. Instead, I first present the facts that lead to the equations we develop. I also introduce each equation (and notation) with a story/data from the actual world represented by the equation, rather than as some abstract mathematical expression.

In addition, when explaining analytical results, I hold back the main analytical parts (which rely on advanced math) but focus more on the interpretation (and less on details of the algebraic derivations). To this end, I use graphical and intuitive presentations of model results. I also relate the model to data from actual economies (in this case, India, China, and the US) so that students can relate the equations to the real world.

Even with this simplification, many students lack some essential math background. I close this gap by providing them with an introduction to the basic math they need for the course. This introduction is organized in such a way that students with no background in calculus can understand exponential/logarithmic growth in continuous time.

I provide students with several problem sets for practice. I go through the problem sets in class providing detailed step-by-step solutions. I wrote my own lecture notes to take the background of our students into account.

I designed the course in a way that is intellectually engaging to students. In the lecture notes, I show how students can apply the theories by using data from real-world economies (e.g., comparative quantitative analysis of China, India, and USA). Besides the class discussions during lectures and through problem sets, students engage in critical discussions about economic growth across countries. Students read cutting-edge research on economic growth (published in top economics journals). Most of these papers are highly technical. But I help them identify the portions of the papers that are accessible to a non-technical reader. I coach my students on how to extract the main messages from each paper without getting lost in the technical complexities. I ask them to write term papers (and give presentations) in which they undertake a comparative analysis of the growth experience of selected countries. In their paper, they must demonstrate an in-depth understanding of the historical/institutional details of the countries they discuss, illustrate the application of the growth theories they learn in class, and undertake some simple quantitative empirical analysis.

To summarize, I have designed and taught this course in a way that is both rigorous and comprehensible to students with little math background. I provide a lot of support to students in terms of various problem sets, lecture notes, and videos. I made the course intellectually engaging to students: I brought recent research into the course discussions and provided students to express their critical views through term papers, class presentations, and seminar-style class discussions.