Teaching Statement
Daniela Vidart

Teaching Philosophy
Teaching economics involves conveying a structure within which to analyze the world. Effective economics teaching involves two primary tasks: instruction on real world problems, and instruction on the theoretical and empirical methods used to shed light on those problems. The ability to combine these two within one unified framework is one of the key strengths of the economics discipline, since it arms students with a big picture understanding of the world, along with technical knowledge to rigorously process through complex questions and ideas. This feature also entails a few difficulties, however. Often, economics students “lose the forest for the trees”, and get too caught up in the assumptions and algebra of models and data, at the expense of the general lessons they convey. Teaching macroeconomics is especially susceptible to this, since it relies on theoretical models that often use complicated technical frameworks. Recognizing these challenges has guided my instruction as a teaching assistant at both the undergraduate and graduate level, leading to a few specific strategies.

I try to keep instruction as interesting and engaging as possible. Although many students will excel at exams, only students that are truly interested in the topics will carry this learning beyond the current term. I use several strategies to motivate students, and push them to think beyond the algebra and mathematical details in models. First, I share what got me excited when first learning the topics, and continues to get me excited in my research (e.g, “Growth models were designed to study the factors that have led some countries to be much richer than others.”). Second, I try to connect the topics with current events and students’ own interests. In my undergraduate teaching, I have used examples ranging from the depreciation rate of cell phones, to the opportunity cost of attending college instead of working. I have also worked with Ph.D. students to connect the topics I am teaching to their wider research interests. When I was a TA for the first-year Ph.D. core sequence in macroeconomics, there were a couple of second-year students who were retaking the class due to academic requirements, and had research interests outside of macroeconomics. I directed them towards research that connected their own interests with the topics we were studying (e.g, “Recent behavioral macro models extend the growth framework we are currently studying to account for bounded rationality.”). These connections helped motivate the students to learn the topics beyond the specific academic requirements, and were key to their success in the class. One of the students has even continued to work in topics at the intersection of his area of interest and the topics learned. Some student comments that speak to the effectiveness of these practices include:

- “Daniela is a great TA. Her thoughts were quick and she understands where I got stuck and point me out the right way. I enjoy going to her office hours and learning Macro has never been so fun. She also teaches in a clear way.”

- “Daniela is a wonderful TA. She was always approachable and well prepared. She knows
the material very well, and she handled questions and section perfectly. Her discussion sections were essentially another class lecture, and she explained the material clearly.”

- “Daniela’s discussion sections were exceptionally well prepared. At times they were as useful as the lectures. She is definitely the hardest working TA that I’ve had.”

- “Daniela was very organized and clear on how she presented the material. Her discussion section and exam review were extremely helpful.”

I make an effort to be approachable and relatable. Academic discussions of the material being taught are key ways through which learning occurs. However, teachers can often appear intimidating, preventing students from asking questions inside and outside the classroom. I use several strategies to make myself approachable and encourage discussion. First, during lecture, I frequently prompt students to ask questions, and also ask myself questions out loud to convey the idea that confusion or skepticism about the material is natural and expected (e.g, “Something I often wonder about in the Solow Model is why a steady state that is not at the maximum consumption level (golden rule) could exist.”). Second, I acknowledge transparently when I don’t know the answer to a question, signaling that the material is hard, and learning is a continual process. Third, I like to make myself widely available by email. I believe that in addition to office hours, offering a more informal and immediate option to communicate is key for many students who are shy, and would not ask questions otherwise. Many times, the students I had initial email discussions with started attending office hours and participating more in class. Some student comments that speak to the effectiveness of these practices include:

- “Daniela was the real MVP. She has a very good understanding of macro concepts, and her explanations are extremely clear. I probably learned just as much, if not more, during her discussion sections than in lecture. I loved the fact that she went over how to solve relevant problems, and she did not skip any steps. She is extremely organized and writes out most of what she is saying, which I find helpful for exam review. She is also very responsive by email, and very approachable during office hours. A wonderful TA.”

- “There are times I wished she would’ve gone through the problems a tad bit quicker, but by no means did it hinder my learning. I’m pretty sure this is so that we could understand the problems that she did go over more clearly. Daniela was an outstanding TA and I was surprised by how much she actually cared for our learning and to see if we understood everything. DEFINITELY RECOMMEND!”

- “Emailed Daniela for help and she was very informative and helpful. Went above and beyond by including a graph for me to better understand the answer to my questions.”
Learning economics entails gaining a structure within which to engage with global issues. As a teacher of economics, I believe there are a few specific ways to enhance this process. I look forward to continuing to learn how to be a more effective, relatable and interesting teacher, and to learn economics and life skills from my students as I do.

Teaching Interests
I have extensive experience as a teaching assistant in a variety of courses, and feel qualified to teach any course at the undergraduate level. However, I have particularly significant experience teaching macroeconomics at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, and the courses I would be most interested in teaching include:

- Macroeconomics (any, but particularly growth theory) (graduate or undergraduate)
- Development Macroeconomics (graduate or undergraduate)
- Use of Historical Data in Macroeconomics (graduate or undergraduate)
- Principles of Microeconomics (undergraduate)