Avigyan Sengupta
Else School of Management
Millsaps College
Email: sengua@millsaps.edu
Phone:- (601) 974-1268

TEACHING STATEMENT

Teaching Experience

I am proud of my record as an effective instructor. At UW-Milwaukee, I have had the opportunity to teach introductory courses in Microeconomics and Macroeconomics to over five hundred students as an independent instructor. Through different modes of instruction, I have gathered significant experience that will aid me in academic roles requiring teaching. I am competent in using a wide range of pedagogical tools, ranging from traditional in-class lectures to incorporating online and hybrid instructional modes. For my teaching efforts, I have been awarded the William L. Holahan Prize for Outstanding Teaching in 2023. This award is given to graduate students in Economics Department with excellent contributions in teaching and encourages passionate and thoughtful education. Currently, as a faculty at Millsaps College, I am teaching Principles of Economics and Econometrics & Applied Statistics.

When I began my PhD program in 2018, I served as a Teaching Assistant (TA) for Principles of Macroeconomics, working under the supervision of tenured faculty members. During that time, my duties included leading three 50-minutes discussion sections every week for approximately 25 students in each section. The objective of these sections was to supplement the instructor's lectures with opportunities for students to reinforce their learning through focused discussions and practice materials. As a TA, we had immense flexibility to design the discussions, giving me my first opportunity experiment with pedagogical methods.

Since my second year in the program, I have served as the sole instructor for Principles of Microeconomics, teaching approximately 50 students per semester in weekly 150-minute sessions. My responsibilities have included planning the full curriculum, preparing lectures, writing and grading problem sets and exams as well as assigning the final course grades. The objective of this course was to introduce them to the fundamental microeconomic concepts. In a Summer semester, I have co-instructed Principle of Macroeconomics and independently taught a course titled "Economics of Personal Finance" where I introduced healthy financial habits to incoming first-year undergraduates. Overall, by now I have taught hundreds of students in different capacities.

Although I did not get an opportunity to teach graduate students in any capacity within the department, I was fortunate to conduct a one-day bootcamp on R for the graduate students at Lubar School of Business, UWM in Fall 2023. In this course, I introduced students with different levels of prior programming experience to the basics of R, starting from basic operations to

running regressions. It was challenging, but nevertheless extremely satisfying as it allowed me to broaden my skill set as an instructor and gave me experience interacting with a different group of students. Going forward, I am enthusiastic about seeking out similar opportunities to engage with graduate students through hands-on workshops focused on building impactful skills.

At Millsaps College, I have had the opportunity to further refine my teaching approach while instructing Principles of Economics and Econometrics & Applied Statistics. The intimate class setting here, with each class capped at 25 students, called for modifications to my teaching approach that I have developed at UW-Milwaukee, where I typically taught classes of 50 to 75 students. This transition has given me the opportunity to adapt my methods to a more personalized environment. The smaller classes enable me to foster deeper engagement with the students and understand their needs, enhanced my versality as an instructor and also deepened my appreciation for the impact of personalized instruction on student learning outcomes. I am confident that through my combined experience at UW-Milwaukee and Millsaps College, I am ready to teach in a variety of settings across class size and mode of instruction.

Throughout my career as an instructor and a former TA, I have experimented with a diverse range of pedagogical tools. In addition to the more traditional in-person teaching methods that involve a whiteboard, I am also conversant with technology-driven online teaching tools. The pandemic necessitated a rapid shift to remote learning and provided me with a valuable opportunity to explore new teaching techniques. I have incorporated various blended learning methods into my instruction like pre-recorded videos, interactive learning modules, and collaborative discussion boards among others. The transition has challenged me to think more creatively about utilizing complementary technological platforms to enhance student engagement and comprehension. As an when I felt necessary, I have incorporated remote and digital components to expand the learning opportunities.

My continuous efforts to improve my teaching skills are reflected in the progressively higher student evaluations I have received over time. This positive trajectory demonstrates my deep commitment to teaching excellence – I take these responsibilities extremely seriously and am willing to make concerted efforts to become an even better educator.

Teaching Philosophy

My teaching philosophy revolves around three central tenets. First, I aim to create an open and honest line of communication with my students so that they feel comfortable sharing their concerns about anything related to the course. Second, I strive to create an environment that welcomes students from all walks of life, regardless of socioeconomic background, race, religious beliefs and disability status. Third, I constantly work on my teaching methods to do a progressively better job at instructing.

In my roles as a TA and an independent instructor, I have always aimed to create an encouraging environment that facilitates student learning. To promote engagement, I hold weekly office hours and accommodate appointment outside of the regular time to maximize

availability to my students. I have found that sometimes they hesitate to share their difficulties in front of their peers, so providing them with an opportunity to have a private conversation during office hours helps built trust and support. My goal is to foster an inclusive atmosphere where students actively utilize my office hours to strengthen their comprehension and also take ownership of their learning journey. My student-centric approach revolves around responsive support, approachability, and dedication to their academic growth.

I strongly believe that all students, regardless of their gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation and disability status (among others) deserve an equitable opportunity to quality education. It is my responsibility as an instructor to create an environment that is inclusive and accommodates diverse needs. Whether it is through additional materials, flexible attendance policies, and/or alternative testing methods, I am committed to doing my best to remove barriers so that all students can thrive academically.

To further these goals, I have regularly attended workshops organized by the Accessibility Resource Center (ARC), a center dedicated for this purpose, to better understand the needs and help create a more equitable learning space. I have also participated in cross-disciplinary discussions on inclusive teaching methods. My commitment is to create a classroom culture where each student feels recognized, valued and empowered in their unique learning journey.

As an instructor, I believe it is important to continuously reinvent and enhance one's teaching methods. To further develop my pedagogical skills, I have attended workshops offered by UWM's Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) to expand my repertoire of instructional techniques. I regularly apply these learnings in my class – my course content is a mix of traditional lectures, blended with real-world examples, collaborative activities and a variety of practice materials. This multifaceted approach facilitates student comprehension and engagement from multiple dimensions.

In addition to my classroom efforts, at Millsaps College, I am actively working with my colleagues across multiple disciplines to secure a grant through the Gulf Scholars Program (GSP). This is an initiative of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine's Gulf Research Program. The GSP aims to prepare college students as the next generation of change agents across several fields to address the complex environmental and social challenges in the Gulf of Mexico region. Through this program, my colleagues and I plan to develop an interdisciplinary and transformative educational experience that engages students from diverse backgrounds, including those from historically marginalized communities. We aim to stress on place-based education, critical pedagogy, and integrative learning. This work closely aligns with my commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion, as it actively seeks to engage and empower students from all walks of life.

Moving forward, I aim to continue and improve upon this student-centric approach through effective instruction. My larger goal will remain to foster an inclusive environment, be accessible to the students, and continue adapting my methods to cater to students with different requirements. I am committed to regularly evaluating my teaching strategies and identify areas of

improvement. I am enthusiastic about working with colleagues and students at your institution to further these goals and evolve as an instructor. My aim is to not only disseminate Economics, but also equip students with analytical skills, nurture their potential and lay the groundwork for their lifelong learning.

Teaching Interests

My teaching interests span a broad range of economic courses. I am prepared to teach foundational courses like Principles of Microeconomics, Principles of Macroeconomics, and Principles of Economics, where students understand and develop the economic way of thinking. Having taught these courses extensively at UW-Milwaukee and Millsaps College, I am confident about continuing to effectively offer these courses to students from a diverse academic background.

I am equally passionate about intermediate-level courses where students deepen their theoretical and analytical skills. My experience teaching Econometrics and Applied Statistics has equipped me to guide students through quantitative analysis and empirical methods. I am also excited about the possibility of teaching field courses like Labor Economics, and Health Economics that align with my research specialization. Additionally, I am also well positioned to teach courses on data analytics - I am scheduled to teach Computational Statistics using R next Spring and would be happy to continue teaching similar courses in the future.

Reflection on Teaching Evaluations

As a visiting faculty at Millsaps College, I had a 3-3 teaching load with 4 course preps in the academic year of 2024-25, serving approximately 100 students from diverse academic and socioeconomic backgrounds. The comprehensive student evaluations from this period provide valuable insights into my teaching effectiveness and areas for continued growth.

My teaching responsibilities at Millsaps were exceptionally broad, encompassing traditional economics courses from introductory to advanced levels, as well as specialized data analytics courses for the certificate program of the Else School. I taught Principles of Economics, Econometrics & Applied Statistics, Intermediate Microeconomic Theory, and Computational Statistics using R (serving both undergraduate and graduate students). Notably, all except Principles of Economics are new preparations, requiring me to develop comprehensive course materials while simultaneously delivering instruction – a challenge that any experienced educator will recognize as not trivial.

I would like to put my course evaluations under this context – a first-year visiting faculty teaching multiple new preparations across different delivery formats and class structures, serving students ranging from first-year undergraduates to working professionals pursuing graduate certifications. Despite these challenges, my evaluations reveal a clear, upward trajectory with several areas of notable strength.

Across all courses in both semesters, students have consistently rated my accessibility highly, with scores ranging from 6.71 to 7.00 (on a 7-point scale), frequently exceeding both college and division means. These numbers reflect a conscious pedagogical commitment – I prioritize being there for my students through regular office hours, appointments outside of scheduled times, and prompt response to their questions.

Student comments reinforce these quantitative measures. One student observed that I "always want[ed] to help [my] at students" and was "willing to whatever it takes for students to understand the material". Another noted I was "willing to go extra mile to help students understand". These comments have appeared across subject matters and instruction format, showing that this is not something I do in specific areas but in general.

The evaluations highlight not only my strengths, but also areas where I have room for improvement. In my Principles class, some students found my early lectures difficult to follow, noting that I sometimes "taught as if we had taken Econ classes before" despite it being an introductory course. My scores in the presentation department ranged from 4.14 to 5.50 indicating that my methods need modifications. However, relative moderate standard deviations of 1.62 to 1.82 suggest that my performance, despite being below the division mean, was not an outlier in a negative sense.

Some students mentioned feeling stressed by the rigor of the assignments, with one noting that "homework felt like a mini exam every time". Another expressed frustration with what they perceived as "curveballs" on tests, though I maintained consistent, objective standards through multiple-choice assessments with practice materials.

Rather than viewing these critiques as failures, I see them as valuable feedback that has boosted my growth as an instructor. I have carefully reviewed every aspect of the evaluations, and recalibrated my teaching style and content.

The most compelling narrative in my evaluations is the documented improvement both within and across semesters. Students have explicitly acknowledged this – "towards the end of the year the teaching felt better and actually helped us learn". This was not accidental – it resulted from deliberate adjustments based on my observations on students' performance. I have done this in several ways. First, I have altered how I split the class time between lecture and practice. Second, I have modified lecture materials to better suit their needs without compromising on the academic rigor, thereby ensuring that students still learn technical materials but without getting overwhelmed by the technical aspects. Third, I have better aligned practice materials with actual assessments so that students learn what exactly is expected of them.

Throughout all my courses, I have maintained high academic standards, a commitment that has been reflected consistently through strong scores for this metric. Students have recognized this and largely appreciated the rigor I try to bring into my courses, with evaluations showing that I "established and held students to high academic standards". While some of them found it challenging initially, many ultimately valued the thorough preparation it provided. As one student reflected, "I struggled a lot with the materials and concepts. However, I was pushed outside of my comfort zone and at the end of the day that makes me proud".

Perhaps the most gratifying elements of my evaluations are the detailed comments from students who documented their growth in my courses. One in Intermediate Microeconomics wrote an extensive reflection, noting “Dr. Sengupta’s class was a great experience. I really enjoyed the dynamics of his class… He provided in-depth study guides and gave us multiple chances to ask specific questions in class to make sure we knew the material”. Another student in my Computational Statistics class appreciated how “hands-on R coding assignments and real dataset applications greatly deepened my understanding of statistical concepts”, while acknowledging that “working through R’s error messages and debugging challenges helped me develop a methodical problem-solving approach”. Comments like this suggest that despite the challenges, many students gained not just knowledge but also valuable critical thinking skills that will serve them beyond the classroom.