

## TEACHING STATEMENT

ÁLVARO PARRA

**My experience.** I am a committed and passionate instructor with outstanding teaching evaluations. My teaching experience is vast, starting as a Teaching Assistant (TA) in more than 30 classes as an undergrad student in Chile. I have experience teaching at undergraduate and graduate levels (Ph.D., Master, and MBA) at Business Schools and Economics Departments. My teaching portfolio ranges from Microeconomic Theory, Industrial Organization, Strategy, and Managerial Economics at graduate and undergraduate levels. My best teaching evaluation at the undergraduate level at UBC is a perfect 5 out of 5. My best teaching evaluation at the MBA level is 4.8 out of 5 (see attached).<sup>1</sup> I have experience teaching diverse audiences in Canada, USA, China, and Chile (in Spanish).

One of my most significant achievements as an instructor was reformulating Sauder's Strategy sequence at the undergraduate and graduate levels. This reformulation was difficult; the course had been consistently underperforming and had very little (yet very arid) economic content. One of the main challenges I faced was taking a discussion-based course and making it more rigorous, following an economics-based approach without losing its essence. After a lot of work, the outcome was a runaway success. My course is very effective and highly replicable. As a result of this reformulation, Sauder decided to change the course status from an elective to a mandatory Capstone course for graduating students.

During my Ph.D. studies at Northwestern University, I was, for three years, the TA for the Ph.D. first-year sequence in Microeconomic theory. I also TAed for undergraduate IO. The Economics Department recognized my performance as a TA twice with the Distinguished Teaching Assistant award. Northwestern Graduate School also invited me to be part of Northwestern's Teaching Assistant Fellows—a university-wide program inviting outstanding teaching assistants to develop seminars on effective teaching and train new TAs. There, I took mini-courses in learning theory and designed (and imparted) a workshop catered to other TAs on effectively teaching abstract and complex ideas (such as economic theory, statistics, and math).

**My Teaching Philosophy.** I think that critical thinking— i.e., the ability to analyze any problem systematically to reach a deeper understanding— is the most valuable skill students learn at the university. Formulas are quickly forgotten. Frameworks and models can be looked up in a book or online. Critical thinking, however, is a high-level skill that perdures over time. It helps students become better researchers, make better professional decisions, and be better equipped to face life's difficulties. In every course I teach, my main goal as an instructor (besides teaching the course's content) is to promote students' critical thinking skills. Through critical thinking, I get students to better see a topic's motivation,

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<sup>1</sup>I am using as a benchmark the same question that UBC Sauder uses to assess their instructors: "I would recommend this course to other students."

experience the teaching lessons, and explore their thoughts. Ultimately achieving that students obtain a deeper understanding of the subject imparted.

The methods I have used to improve critical thinking vary according to the purpose and nature of the class. My Strategy course develops critical thinking through applying economic theories and frameworks to cases and news articles. The objective is to help students make sense of complex real-world problems by approaching them systematically and thoroughly. I developed critical thinking in graduate economics courses using the ‘what if’ methods. The best way to understand a theory is by changing, one step at a time, each of the assumptions in the model and studying the impact of the assumptions on the model’s outcomes. What if agents are not price-takers? What if preferences are not locally satiated? What if there is asymmetric information? In my undergraduate economics courses, I mix the methods above. Plus, I always like to discuss the historical context and motivation behind the development of each model and methodology.

**My Equity, Diversity and Inclusion efforts in the classroom.** Through my teaching, I have learned the enormous impact we, professors, have on the students’ university experience and, ultimately, their lives. Consequently, I have given a lot of thought to how, through my teaching and actions, I can help my students feel more comfortable and included in my classroom and help them appreciate the importance of having a diverse environment. I have learned that small gestures make a big impact. For instance, in my strategy course, I have around 30 news articles and cases we discuss throughout the term. I consciously try to include articles from outside North America, including readings from countries where most international students come from (in UBC’s case, China, India, and South Korea). Also, when I discuss a strategy case, such as Uber, I make sure to contrast the differences in challenges brought by competitors like Lyft in North America vs. Ola in India or Didi in China. Suddenly, everyone in the class lights up when the quiet international student unexpectedly leads the discussion and provides a thorough analysis. In addition, as a first-generation immigrant who learned English in my twenties, I understand how difficult it could be for ESL students to participate and express themselves in front of the class. I have taken actions, such as pre-assigning questions I will ask in class, to help ESL students gain the confidence to contribute to class discussion in a participation-based course.

Another example of my equity efforts is an award I created for my class. The students chose the winners via an anonymous poll at the end of the term, asking them to name the three students who contributed the most to their learning. In the first three years of the award, I noticed that male students got a disproportionately large share of the votes despite having very strong female students. Worried about this disparity, I looked for research on the matter and learned that when looking at leadership positions, both males and females tended to overlook women. So, I decided to act. Now, before voting for the award, I discuss this bias with the students. As a consequence, the proportion of votes between male and

female students has even out. Perhaps more important is the students' positive reaction to the discussion. I have received emails or comments from both male and female students thanking me for the discussion. Men for making them aware of biases they did not believe they had, and women for helping visualize (and taking action against) an inequity they had experienced throughout their lives. This reaction motivates me to find new ways to improve my courses from an EDI perspective.