

Peter Courtney: Teaching Statement

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I have taught economics, statistics and philosophy at three universities, to students from their first year of undergraduate study to the master's level. Teaching is one of the main reasons I want an academic career.

Most recently, at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, I taught two seminar groups in Institutional Economics in the bachelor's programme in Philosophy, Politics and Economics, and I have supervised four bachelor's theses in economics. In 2022 I was the teaching assistant for Nic Spaull's course in the Economics of Education at Stellenbosch University, which honours and master's students take together. I designed the weekly empirical assignments, in which students worked with South Africa's administrative education records and with large-scale learning assessments; I also ran the sessions, marked the coursework and held office hours. Earlier, at the University of Cape Town, I tutored two first-year philosophy courses, Introduction to Philosophy and Ethics, leading weekly tutorials of about 25 students and marking their essays and tests.

What I enjoy most is watching a student who does not think of themselves as mathematical start to explore a dataset. Once they can plot the data, change something and see what happens, statistics stops being a hurdle and becomes a way to answer questions they already care about, and they bring that interest back to the material. The Stellenbosch course taught me that the quickest route to that point is a picture rather than a table of coefficients, so I would build any data-based course around plots and simulations that students produce themselves. I have taught with Stata and work mainly in R, and I am happy to teach in either. My aim is that students can see what a method does before they are asked to derive it.

I have also taught outside the lecture room. I trained survey teams on two occasions for a J-PAL Africa evaluation that surveyed more than 5,000 children, and I now supervise a research assistant. For Money & Macro, an economics channel on YouTube, I wrote scripts for videos that have drawn hundreds of thousands of views; writing for that audience taught me to keep the argument in plain words and to cut every step the viewer does not need.

I can teach the core courses in microeconomics, statistics and econometrics at undergraduate and master's level, as well as data science and field courses in development and education economics. My training in philosophy, politics and economics also equips me to teach institutional economics, political economy and political philosophy, and I am glad to teach wherever the department needs me. I would particularly like to develop two courses: an introductory statistics course built on visualisation and simulation, so that students get a feel for what each statistical operation does to the data; and a course in institutional economics.

I feel fortunate to enjoy both halves of academic work. My research on South African schools supplies examples that make ideas such as selection, fixed effects and measurement error concrete for students, and explaining those ideas to students makes my research clearer.