

# Teaching Statement

Altug Yildiz

## Teaching Philosophy

In essence, my approach to teaching revolves around forming a collective narrative with my students. I rely heavily on an interactive teaching style, using my students' insights and inputs to help tell a meaningful story.

*"He creates an engaging classroom experience for all students that helps facilitate an excellent learning environment. His expertise in economics not only teaches the required topics well, but also provides real-world applications for further understanding."* (Intermediate Macroeconomic Analysis, Spring 2022)

In my experience, learning occurs most when the students find a way to connect with the material, and it falls to the teacher to establish this connection. I believe using real-world examples and involving students by giving them some agency over class structure helps strengthen this bond. Hence, I devote the start of each class to contextualize the material we are about to cover and create a roadmap. I make use of news articles or references to pop culture to emphasize the relevance of the day's material, and briefly highlight where we are with respect to the general direction that the course is taking. This approach helps students to orientate themselves and acts as an early warning mechanism for those who might be feeling lost.

The rest of the lecture involves continuous engagement from the students as we collectively fill in the incomplete versions of my lecture slides (posted online before each class), go over graphical and scenario-based analysis questions step-by-step, and break into small groups towards the end of the class to apply the day's material to alternate scenario questions (which might then come up on the exam).

*“His interactive and calm teaching style allowed students to easily ask questions and feel comfortable in his class. He is extremely approachable.”* (Intermediate Macroeconomic Analysis, Spring 2022)

I think a significant part of the college learning experience lies beyond the technical material covered in class. The skills that students build when working in groups, communicating their reservations, defending their opinions, and presenting their work in front of a crowd are coveted in all aspects of life. Teaching a generation that suffered COVID-related breaks to their in-person education (either in college, high school, or both) increases the importance of cultivating these skills. Therefore, I incorporate some form of group activity in each class, and give students ample time to socialize – I find that the camaraderie boosts morale when the material gets dense, and increases the motivation to come to class. As my classes also revolve around student participation, I foster this desired behavior by making sure students feel acknowledged and appreciated. Drawing from the finding<sup>1</sup> that hearing your own name activates the part of the brain associated with identity and personality formation, I firmly believe that learning students’ names by heart, using them in in-class examples where appropriate, or simply engaging them during, before, or after class helps them feel acknowledged and appreciated. I find that this encourages students to participate more often, as they feel their contributions are both recognized and valued.

*“I like the instructor’s ability to not just help us learn, but to learn from us as well. He had a very good connection with all his students along with compassion and understanding.”* (Expository Writing, Fall 2023).

In what was my first experience teaching my own class, I taught Intermediate Macroeconomic Analysis (Spring, 2022) to a group of over fifty students, largely consisting of juniors and seniors. I knew that I didn’t have years of experience in teaching the subject (or any subject for that matter), and the students knew this too. This allowed for an honest classroom environment

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<sup>1</sup> Carmody DP, Lewis M. Brain activation when hearing one’s own and others’ names. *Brain Res.* 2006 Oct 20;1116(1):153-8. doi: 10.1016/j.brainres.2006.07.121. Epub 2006 Sep 7. PMID: 16959226; PMCID: PMC1647299.

where I took continuous (anonymous) feedback throughout the year, and made tailored improvements wherever possible. The following Summer term, I taught Introduction to Macroeconomic Analysis to a group of mostly freshmen. Teaching this introductory class reminded me that economics is by and large a way of viewing the world. To indoctrinate newcomers to this worldview meant taking things slower than I was previously inclined. My biggest and most obvious revelation from these experiences was that the point of the lecture is not for me to get through my slides, but for what is on my slides to get through to the students.

*“Professor Yildiz vastly improved my capabilities as a writer. He taught us how to more effectively frame our ideas in an academic paper. I think I improved greatly in synthesizing arguments, especially when referencing primary texts in my essays.”* (Expository Writing, Fall 2023).

Since Fall 2023, I have also had the opportunity to teach Expository Writing and College Writing for the Writing Program at Rutgers. In these classes, I took on an advisory role and cherished the opportunity to instill in my students the confidence to apply their individual approaches to writing about a chosen topic. The experience was equally formative for me, as I became more aware of the various constraints economically-disadvantaged students might face – and how to create an environment where they could succeed.

Over my studies, I was a teaching assistant for four undergraduate courses in economics and one graduate level course in core Macroeconomics in addition to being the sole instructor for six undergraduate courses. Teaching these classes and being part of those classrooms helped me grow both as a person and as an instructor. I look forward to expanding my portfolio in the years to come, as I continue to learn a different lesson from each different cohort.

# Research Statement

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## Research Objectives

I am an economist interested in studying the unintended consequences of income inequality and poverty, and my chosen fields are Macroeconomics and Public Finance. Ultimately, my research agenda is to understand how public policy can be used to effectively and efficiently address wealth disparities to ensure long-term growth on a macroeconomic level, and to increase economic opportunities for the most disadvantaged at the microeconomic level. In most of my current research and going forward, I seek to answer some of the following questions, among others that will surely come up in the research process:

- Do excessive disparities in wealth and income have unintended consequences for economies? If they do, do these consequences arise at the microeconomic or the macroeconomic level, or both?
- What are some of these unintended consequences of excessive income disparities, and beyond what point does inequality become 'excessive'?
- Can public policy be used to thwart some of these unintended effects? Is public policy affected by these wealth disparities in turn, and how so? What are some of the most efficient ways to address these excess disparities and their unintended consequences?

## **Current Research**

### *“Marginal Value of Public Funds: A Breakdown Using the EITC”*

In my job market paper, I use CPS ASEC data to show that the Earned Income Tax Credit encourages lower income mothers to work. This increases the taxes they pay and reduces supplemental welfare income they receive, thereby reducing the net cost of the policy to the government. To calculate the policy's net cost to the government, I exploit three decades of plausibly exogenous policy changes to the EITC, generating variation in eligibility across time based on family structure. I find that by increasing tax revenue and decreasing spending on supplemental welfare assistance, the EITC helps 'pay for itself.' I then break down my sample into quintiles of poverty, inequality, and unemployment, and find that the afore-mentioned behavioral responses are amplified in states that have less of these adverse outcome measures. In other words, the policy costs more to the government in states with high rates of poverty, inequality, or unemployment. The paper adds to the ever-growing literature making use of Marginal Value of Public Funds.

### *“Income Inequality and Total Factor Productivity: An Inverse-Parabolic Relationship”*

In this paper, I set to out to investigate the possibility of a non-linear relationship between income inequality and total factor productivity. Using five different subsets of countries under 20 different model specifications, I show that the coefficient on the inequality measure is positive and significant, and the coefficient on its square is negative and significant in nearly all of specification. In other words, I find an inverse-parabolic relationship (or an inverse-U shape) between total factor productivity and income inequality (with the latter measured by the Gini coefficient as well as the top 10%'s share of total income for robustness). In accordance with previous literature, I use two-steps and System GMM estimation to address the complexities of analyzing dynamic panel data of a persistent nature. I make use of unbalanced panel data including up to a maximum of 62 countries over a period of 50 years. The results suggest that there might indeed be a turning point beyond which inequality becomes 'excessive,' with the turning point being at a higher level of inequality in developing (non-OECD) nations.

### **Opportunity for Future Research**

As my research interests lie both in microeconomic and macroeconomic fields, I have ample opportunity to collaborate with others on multiple avenues, some of which I highlight below:

#### *Public Finance and Policy Evaluation*

I believe there is great value and opportunity in continuing to add to the body of literature using the Marginal Value of Public Funds as a measure of policy effectiveness. Be it by assessing the impact of existing social policy or by identifying potential underlying economic sources as policy dampeners, this body of research could span across the realm of empirical microeconomics and be of interest to both policy-makers and stakeholders alike.

#### *World Bank – Business Ready*

In addition to my studies, research, and teaching, I have been a consultant for the World Bank Development Economics Global Indicators Group (DECIG) over the last two years. I have worked across many capacities in the collection, cleaning, presentation, and publication of primary data on private sector development, with emphasis on institutions, regulations, and policies that foster economic productivity, promote job creation, and increase gender equality. I want to apply my familiarity with the data to my own research interests in the form of carrying out quasi-experimental studies to identify the effects of exogenous policy changes in developing countries to the indicators published in the context above.

#### *Macroeconomics*

I would like to continue my previous research and explore the channels through which an increased income disparity could affect long term growth via its effects on total factor productivity. In doing so, collaborating with existing faculty would be extremely desirable in my personal growth as a researcher.

# Diversity Statement

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## **Understanding Diversity**

The improvement of economic opportunities for persons of all backgrounds is the reason I chose to pursue a Ph.D. in economics. It is for this very reason that I focus my research on analyzing the unintended consequences of inequality and poverty, and how public policy can be implemented to ameliorate outcomes. In the classes I teach, I make the concerted effort to paint the picture of how what we study ties into what we experience in our daily lives. I find that building this link between the classroom and the real world makes students think about the deep-rooted causes of societal fragments.

*“Altug, by selecting passages about personhood and individuality in communities and society, has really forced me to think about why I act the way I do, how much of my own thoughts and actions are really my own, and what are the things that I adopted from my community.”* (Expository Writing, Fall 2023)

As a non-native speaker of English, I recognize the importance of an open and welcoming classroom to provide an effective learning environment. Teaching Expository Writing at Rutgers has taught me how to be more responsive to my students’ needs when those students had been accustomed to different pedagogical methods or needed different approaches from me to more effectively deliver the material. I cherish the experience I had in learning about their diverse backgrounds and I have deeply benefited from their inputs both personally and in my capacity as an instructor.

*“Overall, this instructor was very open to criticism. He took into consideration what worked for his students and what didn’t, and always tried making lessons fun for us. He was always available to answer questions and recommend the best possible solutions.”* (Expository Writing, Fall 2023)

Through my studies and teaching at Rutgers, I have also become aware that the term “diversity” encompasses much greater meaning, and carries deeper implications than I had imagined. In all of the courses I taught as the sole instructor, there were at least some students with disabilities, or those who were economically disadvantaged. Keeping open lines of communication has proven paramount in alleviating some of their very valid concerns. This involves switching the traditional classroom roles and me as the instructor taking a listening role. Allowing them to express their needs, and making the necessary adjustments helps level the playing field and hopefully set them up for success. Be it by allowing extensions, arranging extra office hours, or accepting hand-written submissions when access to the required technology is an issue, I aim to return my students’ efforts in kind. Providing a safe environment where they could raise their thoughts and concerns without worry helps communicate that I am there to help them. It is because of these experiences that I know that no two students are the same, and that listening is very much an active process I can only improve in over the years.

*“He is very open to hearing from his students and our thoughts and opinions and questions.”*

*“He is organized, reachable, relatable.”* (Intermediate Macroeconomic Analysis, Spring 2022)

Beyond my research and as an instructor in the classroom, I also try to play an active role on campus to help make it a better place for everyone. To this end, I volunteered to lead the Graduate Economic Students Association as well as being the department representative in the Graduate Union. I hope to continue being active in many more ways in the future, with the hopes of securing a more equitable environment for all.