

Teaching Statement

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Teaching is a vital dimension of the appeal of academia to me. I do not state this conclusion lightly as I have been exposed during my professional life to a variety of careers and tasks spanning the private, public and academic arenas. I have come to realize that out of all the roles I executed, it was teaching and advising moments that I most thrive upon, whether in a traditional classroom setting or in a mentorship setting in the private and public sectors. I have come to appreciate that I am indeed “a natural teacher”, as a student of mine stated in a anonymous evaluation. This explains the detour that I took after five years of professional practice back to academia.

Perhaps teaching is a natural fit for me because it was high-quality education that opened so many doors throughout my life that would have otherwise been firmly closed. I have come to recognize that education is the only way out for the Middle East from its current state of stagnation and cruelty. Perhaps, it is because my father instilled in me the realization that education is truly the only mobile and secure asset after he lost everything, including his right to education, as a refugee. Either way, I feel most at home when I am standing in a classroom offering the education that changed my life and granting it to others just as my father was denied it.

I view teaching, not as a career or task, rather as a passion. It is this passion that pushes me to deliver knowledge in the clearest and most durable of ways. It is what drives me to remain available to students outside the classroom until that piece of knowledge has been firmly entrenched in them as one more stone in the endless pathway of learning. It is this passion that led me to move my family to live among students in Quincy House, one of Harvard’s undergraduate residences, where I serve as a resident tutor. This intergenerational living structure ensures that the transfer of knowledge does not end when the classroom bell rings; rather it continues throughout the day as I interact with my students over meals, recreation or in formal mentorship roles. This ability to continuously deliver is only possible with true passion.

My teaching portfolio at Harvard represents an eclectic combination of courses. In addition to teaching the economic development of the Middle East, I have also taught courses on Arabic literature and language. The class on the historic origins of Middle Eastern development explores factors that led to the region’s ascension to global economic leadership during the Middle Ages and those that hinder it from achieving its economic and institutional potential in the modern era. Topics include the effects of colonialism, natural resource endowments and religion on economic growth. It is a unique opportunity to teach on my own research interests including topics that are central to my dissertation.

While teaching the course on the economic development of the Middle East is a natural extension of my academic training and interests, teaching language and literature courses may appear puzzling. Nonetheless, I strongly believe that it is essential to read and analyze Arabic literature in order to truly understand the region’s cultural norms, behavior and incentives. Given that very little economics research has been conducted on the Arab world, I have found that Arabic literature presents an abundant resource for understanding the world as seen by Arabs. Furthermore, I utilize literature to fill the existing void that engulfs data on the Middle East, especially in the areas of behavioral economics and quality of institutions. In addition, I strongly believe in equipping future researchers in the fields of economics and

social sciences at large with the essential language and literary skills to create more original scholarship in their fields on the Middle East. This explains my interest and ability to teach Arabic literature during my graduate study at Harvard.

Methodologically, my teaching style is characterized by seven practices. First, I work hard to get to know the students and their interests along with getting them to know and work with each other through formal presentations and small group discussions at the beginning of the term in order to establish a comfortable and friendly atmosphere in the classroom. Second is commencing each class with a brain teaser, fact or caricature of the day related to the subject matter, or a news flash from current events. This raises the energy and interest of students and reminds them of the importance and relevance of the class. Third, I start and end my classes with stating the driving motivation behind studying the topic at hand in order to present a coherent picture of where that topic fits within the overarching subject. Fourth, I combine theory with practice by introducing case studies on the subject matter whenever appropriate. I encourage the students to discuss these cases in small groups which allows them to present their thoughts in addition to serving as a natural break to recharge the attention span in the middle of the class. Fifth, I ask students for informal feedback frequently in addition to have them fill formal evaluations in the middle and at the end of the course. Sixth, I incorporate the use of modern technology and presentation media whenever possible. Seventh, I work on creating a lighthearted atmosphere in the classroom which allows students to enjoy the learning process.

Going forward, I see myself teaching a variety of classes depending on the needs of the department. I can teach introductory microeconomic courses to undergraduate and graduate students. I am extremely interested in teaching a course on the relationship between religion and economics in general with a focus on Islamic finance and economics. This would be a natural fit given my research interests and existing studies. I would immensely enjoy teaching courses on behavioral economics and finance in addition to courses on the current patterns and historic origins of Middle Eastern development. Also, if there is a need, I would enjoy teaching on the modern and historic political landscape of the Middle East.

I observed during my first economics class at Harvard as a freshman that there were two groups of students in that classroom; the first merely asked the professor to clarify his argument while the second respectfully challenged the professor's premise and assumptions. This symbolized the difference between educational systems that spoon feed material to students, and those that teach them to how think and analyze independently. I intend to use the classroom to achieve the second to provide students with a valuable toolset of skills that they can benefit from no matter where they end up in life. That would be a truly mobile and safe asset to carry through their life journey.