Teaching Statement

Jordi Martinez-Muñoz

1 Background

My first teaching experience was tutoring math in high school, where I discovered how rewarding teaching could be. After college, I spent three semesters as a lecturer at the University of Costa Rica, teaching Introduction to Economics to non-economists. That experience remains one of the happiest periods of my life and was an important input in my decision to pursue a PhD. At UCSD, I have served as an instructional assistant for more than 15 quarters, mostly in microeconomics and in behavioral and experimental economics, though also in econometrics and conservation economics. I have also been the instructor of record for two summer courses: Econ100B, a core upper-division course condensed into four weeks, and Econ171, an elective on decisions under uncertainty that allowed me to teach the foundations of my own research.

I see teaching as a bridge between discovery and understanding: it brings knowledge to life and sparks questions that feed back into my research. Research, in turn, keeps my teaching current and exposes students to cutting-edge work, both my own and that of leading scholars.

Looking ahead, I am happy to teach any introductory course, and I am particularly excited to teach intermediate and advanced microeconomics (theory and applied), econometrics, and mathematics for economists. I would also welcome the chance to teach or develop electives on behavioral and experimental economics, psychology and economics, decisions under uncertainty, and related topics.

2 What I consider the four big pillars of teaching

1. Effective knowledge transmission. I approach every new concept or relationship in three steps: an intuitive example students can relate to, the tools that formalize it, and an application to a relevant problem. I implement this through active learning, including in-class practice problems, peer discussions, collective problem-solving, and mini case studies where students take the perspective of policymakers or business managers. The idea is that students engage with each new concept rather than just listen.

For example, after we covered decision criteria under uncertainty in Econ171 (minimax, maximin, and minimax regret), we took the role of a manager launching a new product and designed a pricing policy under which all three criteria favor switching from the consumer's current product to ours. Students proposed and evaluated policies until we found one that worked. A version of this exercise, with different parameters and new follow-up questions, appeared on the midterm.

In Econ100B, 18 of the 19 students who completed the teaching evaluation agreed or strongly agreed that class sessions helped them understand the course content. Likewise, across my 2024–26 evaluations as a teaching assistant, an average of 94% of respondents ($N = 173$) agreed or strongly agreed with the learning and engagement items.

2. Focus on practical relevance. Most students are not aiming for a PhD and may not be primarily interested in academic research. This matters because we are most engaged when we can relate material to things we care about or imagine applying it, now or in the future. I encourage students to think about how the topics connect to their own interests, and I build on their ideas as far as possible to keep the content relevant to them.

Because this was a central goal when I designed Econ100B, I added two custom items to its teaching evaluation. Of the respondents, 95% agreed or strongly agreed that "the instructor effectively related the course material to real-world applications or situations outside of the classroom,"

and 90% that "the instructor maintained a balance between theoretical concepts and practical applications throughout the course."

One example comes from Econ171. After covering the theory of insurance, I illustrated the concepts with a real insurance contract: the student health insurance plan. Every time students see a doctor or nurse, that plan is at work, so understanding the copay, the coinsurance, and how these change by type of provider matters to them right away. In the final reflection, which asked students to describe three things they took away from the class, one student wrote: *"I now somewhat understand the point of some insurance fees I didn't before; deductibles and co pay (insurance). Still dont like it but makes sense"*. A student leaving my class with that thought is a gain for me.

3. Empathy. Being a student is often difficult. You are constantly tested, exposed to challenging material, and at the same time navigating the pressures of a complicated age outside the classroom. I try to recognize these struggles and respond with empathy, which does not mean lowering standards or compromising rigor. Rather, it means demanding excellence while also being mindful of students' challenges and remembering that a single kind word can make a profound difference.

In practice, this means policies that are flexible but clear, stated on the syllabus from the first day. Students can drop their two lowest quizzes, need only 80–90% of participation activities for full credit, and can submit late homework for partial credit. A higher final exam score replaces the midterm score, and students can even skip the midterm entirely without justification, moving its weight to the final. The idea is that one challenging week does not ruin a student's grade, and that students can plan around their lives outside class without having to ask for exceptions, while weighing the trade-offs of each choice.

Beyond policies, the way I interact with students counts just as much. I was a student too, and I know that teachers' words matter, whether in kindergarten or in a master's program. I received this comment in the final reflection assignment for Econ100B:

"I think the most important thing I've learned is confidence. When you mentioned in the last lecture that someone had said they hated econ during the first class, that was me. I've been lurking here because I always got very poor grades in previous economics classes. This left me feeling very confused and lacking confidence. [...] Your thorough explanations made it very easy for me to understand the content you taught. [...] Thank you for making me realize that I am not a poor student!"

I don't think this reflects an "easy" class—it was not, and grade averages aligned with historical grades for the course—but the voice of a student who felt heard and supported.

In the Econ100B teaching evaluation, all respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the item on a welcoming and supportive learning environment.

4. Joy. Teaching is performative. Like a musician or an actor, a teacher develops a presence in the classroom, and today, with so many distractions, keeping students engaged is more important than ever. My teaching model is a professor of proof-based calculus who taught as if it were the most exciting job in the world, with high energy, interactive classes, and humor. I concluded that if proof-based calculus can be made fun, anything can. In my own classes, I work in current memes and humorous remarks; when a hard concept like general equilibrium is approaching, for instance, I warn the room with a "brace yourselves." When possible, I draw graphs and diagrams on the board, which forces me to slow down and gives students a different visual stimulus than slides alone. I also make trying, rather than getting it right, the goal of participation.

Students' comments consistently mention the positive and entertaining tone of my lectures: *"He has a very funny and relatable lecturing style that makes me comfortable to answer the question or say that I don't know the answer"* (Econ142, 2025, as teaching assistant), and *"He was a very*

positive person with positive attitude which encouraged and engaged me to attend and listen in class" (Econ100B, 2024, as instructor). Both comments show what joy does in a classroom: it makes students willing to participate and to show up.

3 Assessments

My exams draw on Bloom's taxonomy, which orders cognitive skills from remembering and understanding to applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. Conceptual multiple-choice and fill-in-the-blank questions check that students remember and understand key ideas, short-answer questions ask them to explain and analyze qualitatively, and quantitative problems ask them to apply the formal tools. For example, a question may ask students to identify fixed and variable costs in the description of a problem they could face outside of class; I think this is as important as being able to set up an optimization problem and solve it.

However, I avoid relying exclusively on exams. They are a standard way to measure learning, but a 120-minute, in-class, closed-book exam rarely leaves room for the highest levels of the taxonomy, especially creating. Performance under those conditions can also be hurt by emotions or recent experiences, and when exams are high-stakes, they leave little room for mistakes. In Econ100B, exams were 60% of the grade: still the majority, but leaving room for quizzes, homework, and participation.

Other tasks reach those higher levels. I particularly like reflections because they ask students to create: to formulate their own question and decide which tools from class can help answer it. In Econ100B, I asked students to "find a topic you like and think how class material could help answer a question." One student identified the lack of competitive teams in the Mexican women's soccer league as a question that could be studied through producer theory and cost analysis. Another, an event organizer in an ethnic community association, said he would now look more carefully at per-participant costs to assess the cost-efficiency of their activities. I find this valuable because students apply concepts in situations that make sense to them and that I would never have thought of, since they are outside my own background. Similarly, the Econ171 presentations asked students to analyze published research: one student interested in gender read and presented part of a paper on risk aversion and gender stereotypes, clearly explaining how the paper connected the two topics.

Another type of non-exam assessment I use is low-stakes formative work, such as quizzes and homework, which prepares students for summative exams by letting them fix what they got wrong before a similar question appears on an exam. This feedback is also useful for me: when quiz results show that many students missed a concept, I revisit it at the start of the next class. I apply the same logic to the course as a whole: as part of UCSD's Engaged College Teaching program, I wrote a post-course reflection on the Econ100B syllabus and assessments (attached at the end).

A comment on student evaluations. In Econ171, I received only 2 of 13 evaluations, too few to generate a report under university policy. This partly reflects my decision not to incentivize them: in classes as small as mine, a group incentive, such as revealing a topic on the final once the class reached a response-rate target, would have put noticeable pressure on individual students. I think my main mistake was not giving students time during lecture to complete the evaluations, as I did in Econ100B, where I left the room while they did so and 19 of 29 responded. I will keep giving students that time in class in future courses. Despite the lack of evaluations for Econ171, students' final reflections offer a record of how they assessed their own learning, though not an anonymous one.

Ultimately, my goal is not simply for students to leave my courses knowing more economics, but to leave with a greater appreciation for learning, greater confidence in their ability to reason, and a sense of how economic ideas can be useful beyond the classroom.

Post-Class Syllabus Reflection. Some parts of the syllabus are omitted. For the full version, refer to the Sample Materials in my webpage

Jordi Martínez-Muñoz | Economics, UC San Diego

Intermediate Microeconomics

ECON 100B, Summer Session I, 2024.

University of California San Diego.

Letter to the Student

Dear student,

Welcome to Econ 100B. This course continues the journey you began with Econ 100A, where you learned how consumers translate preferences into demand for goods, considering prices and income. In Econ 100B, we will focus on the supply side: how firms decide how much to produce and which inputs to use in the production process, considering costs and revenue. We will also explore the equilibrium of perfectly competitive markets, the gains participants receive from trading, and how some well-intentioned policies can sometimes do more harm than good. You should have approved econ 100A for this class and be familiar with differential calculus.

Post-Class Comment: ***The Tone of the Syllabus: A Letter and a Trailer***

The tone of this syllabus has two main components:

1. *It's a* ***personal letter****, and*
2. *It's a* ***trailer or synopsis of an experience****.*

A Personal Letter. *In my home country, the syllabus is actually called "Carta al Estudiante"—literally, "Letter to the Student." While the content is often similar to a traditional syllabus, I really liked the idea of approaching it as a letter to a friend or mentee. That's the tone I've tried to adopt here: one that feels personal, warm, and like I'm speaking directly to you. This isn't just a list of rules or deadlines—it's an invitation and a conversation starter.*

A Trailer of an Upcoming Experience. *Think of how most enjoyable experiences begin: movies have trailers, video games have previews, books have blurbs, and travel packages come with descriptions of the journey. I see the syllabus in the same way—as a preview of what's to come in this learning adventure.*

There's a prequel (Econ 100A), and possibly sequels (other follow-up courses). So in this document, I introduce the students to what this part of the adventure is "about," what its main chapters are, and who the "characters" are (the teaching team). Sure, there are specific rules that will apply to the class, but the tone is not like the terms and conditions that you accept in a contract; it is more like a guide on how to make the

Class meetings *[Omitted from this version]*

Teaching Team:

Instructor: My name is Jordi Martinez Muñoz (jom001@ucsd.edu). I'm a 5th-year PhD candidate in Economics. My research interests include behavioral and experimental economics, and I am currently working on a project investigating why people often give up on exploring unknown alternatives too soon. You can talk to me at the end of each lecture or during my office hours:

[Rest omitted from this version]

Communication protocol: The official channels for material-related questions are lectures, discussion sessions, and office hours. Additionally, there is a discussion panel available on Canvas under the Discussion tab. Please reserve email communication for urgent administrative matters only. This approach helps with fairness, quality, and efficiency in our interactions. We will reply as soon as we can, but please be patient.

Class materials

Lectures: Your main source of information. Here, you'll have the opportunity (and are encouraged) to ask questions, clarify doubts, and engage with the material through various activities.

Lecture notes: A written version of the lectures.

Books: Books are supplements to the lectures and lecture notes. The official book is *Intermediate microeconomics with calculus: a modern approach. Varian, 2014* (Not provided through Canvas). Other recommended books are *Microeconomics* by Perloff and Nicholson's *Microeconomic Theory.* ***Note: The Perloff may become the official book, more updates coming)***

Intermediate Microeconomics Video Handbook (IMVH): A set of videos created by the Economics Department at UCSD. I highly recommend you check them out!

TA Sessions and Office Hours: Weekly discussion sessions to review the class material and practice problem-solving. The TA and I will also offer office hours to support your learning process (see above).

Discussion board on Canvas: This is a great place to ask questions, share insights, and collaborate with your peers. We will monitor it often.

SI Sessions: Opportunity to engage with content, ask questions, and review lecture material with peers. Sessions are led by an advanced undergraduate student.

Organization of the class

This part of the journey is divided into five chapters. My goal as an instructor is for you to achieve certain skills and capabilities by the end of each chapter. Below is the map of this cla

Post-Class Comment: Because this class covered a broad range of topics and is part of the core curriculum for Economics and Business Economics majors, I found it challenging to define just five or six general learning outcomes. Instead, I chose to create a short list of specific learning outcomes for each of the five chapters in the course.

This clarified what I wanted students to take from each chapter, guided my own teaching, and gave students a transparent view of what they were expected to learn.

[Very Compressed Version]

Chapter 1: Technology. We study how economists understand the production process and its main characteristics.

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

- Define and identify key concepts of production technology in real-life situations.
- Compute the marginal product, marginal rate of technical substitution, returns to scale, degree of homogeneity, and technological progress for various production functions.

Chapter 2: Cost Minimization. We examine how firms decide the optimal amount of labor and capital to minimize the cost of achieving a given production plan.

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

- Distinguish between the short-run and the long-run in production decisions.
- Solve cost minimization problems for firms in the short and long run, using several optimization techniques.
- Identify the optimization techniques that apply to special families of production functions (linear and fixed proportions).
- Reflect on how technological progress and changes in the cost of capital can affect the demand for labor and impact workers.

Chapter 3: Profit Maximization in Perfect Competition. What does it mean for a market to be perfectly competitive? How do firms maximize their profits in a perfectly competitive market? Given output and input prices, what are the output and input demands that maximize profits?

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

- Identify and describe the main assumptions and implications of perfect competition both in words and quantitatively.
- Solve profit maximization problems for firms in perfect competitive markets.
- Describe the equivalence between the cost minimization and the profit maximization problems.
    - Reflect on the implications of perfect competition on the power of individual sellers and compare it with other market structures where firms have more power.

Chapter 4: Partial Equilibrium and Welfare Analysis. Given demand and supply, what is the market equilibrium? How many firms produce when the market is at its long-run equilibrium, and how does the transition in the number of firms occur from the short to the long run? What gains do agents have by participating in a perfectly competitive market? Some policies are intended to fix unfair market equilibriums, but can they?

By the end of this chapter, you will:

- Define and calculate the equilibrium price and quantity for given supply and demand functions.
- Calculate the firm's output and the market supply given the market demand and output and input prices.
- Calculate the number of firms in a perfectly competitive market equilibrium in the long run and describe the transition from the short to the lung run.
- Define qualitatively and estimate quantitatively the notions of welfare in a market setting: consumer surplus, producer surplus, and total surplus.
- Describe qualitatively and estimate quantitatively the effects of different market policies (taxes, subsidies, and price controls) on the market outcomes and welfare.

Chapter 5: General Equilibrium. So far, we have described settings in which consumers and producers are different people. Typically, each of us both supply and demand different goods. How do we study these kinds of settings?

By the end of this chapter, you will:

- Describe how different market actors interact in a general equilibrium setting.
- Calculate equilibrium outcomes in a general equilibrium setting.

- Define Pareto efficiency and identify and calculate Pareto efficient equilibriums and the theorems of welfare in economics.
- Distinguish between socially efficient and socially equitable market outcomes.

How will I assess your progress in this class?

The evaluation will consist of five items: One midterm exam, one final exam, quizzes, homework, and participation.

Participation	*20%*
Quizzes	*10%*
Homework	*10%*
Midterm Exam	*30%*
Final Exam	*30%*
Total	*100*

Post-Class Comment: I gave this a lot of thought. My courses in college tended to be very exam-driven, especially the core courses, but I didn't want to design a class where a single bad exam day could severely impact a student's overall grade. While exams still account for a majority of the grade (60%), I included other components—such as participation, quizzes, and homework—that offer alternative ways for students to engage with the course.

Inspired by lessons from the Introduction to College Teaching (ICT) and Advanced College Teaching (ACT) courses, I also built in flexibility across the grading components. For example, students only needed to complete 80% of the participation activities to earn full credit, the two lowest quiz scores were dropped, and if a student performed better on the midterm than on the quizzes, the midterm score replaced the quiz average. This way, the quizzes functioned as low-stakes opportunities for students to take risks and learn without the pressure of high consequences.

One student regularly asked me to review the correct answers after each quiz. When similar questions appeared on the exams, that student got them right. This suggests that some students took advantage of these tools!

Participation, 20%. After each class, I will ask you to answer a reflection question about how you feel about the material in terms of difficulty and interest. Participation also includes class polls and think-pair-share activities. All the activities are graded based on completion only. If you miss these activities, they cannot be made up, but you only need to complete 80% of them to receive full credit.

Quizzes, 10%. At the end of each class, you'll take a short quiz (one or two multiple-choice questions). While I may skip some quizzes, be prepared for one every class. If you miss a quiz, it cannot be made up, but your two lowest quiz grades will be dropped. Additionally, if your midterm exam grade is higher than your average quiz grade, your quiz grade will be replaced by your midterm exam grade (but not the other way around)

Post-Class Comment: Participation worked very well and became a key part of my interaction with the students. One student mentioned in the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) that they appreciated the in-class activities—mostly solving problems in pairs and then all together in class—which were tied to the participation rubric. These activities helped create an engaging learning environment.

The written reflections also worked effectively. Most students responded quickly and thoughtfully, giving me valuable insight into what they liked or disliked about the lectures, which topics they found easier or more difficult, and how they might apply the material to real-world situations. One student, for example, wrote about applying the concepts of firm costs to the Mexican Women's Soccer League, suggesting it could help identify ways to make the league more competitive. I found this incredibly interesting and creative—it was a great example of a student taking the material in a direction I hadn't anticipated.

The final reflection prompt asked students to share "three things you take from this class." It was intentionally open-ended, and to my surprise, many students used it to reflect on personal growth. They mentioned discovering their ability to learn in a fast-paced quarter, developing strategies to manage the material, and forming meaningful study group connections. One student even shared that the class helped them gain confidence they had been lacking in previous economics courses. I treat the final reflection as my own closure to that teaching adventure. All the feedback I received was invaluable, and I'm truly glad I incorporated this tool into the course.

Homework, 10%. Most homework will consist of problem sets graded based on completion. The grader will check that you made an effort on the problems. Other types of homework may be included with specific rubrics. Please submit homework on time out of consideration for the graders. Late homework will be graded on a 70% maximum. Homework is due one week after it is assigned, and detailed instructions will be provided on the assignment day

Post-Class Comment: I don't think the homework was very well received by the students. Even though it was graded on completion and focused on solving parts of the problem sets—which offered great practice for the exams—they didn't seem to appreciate having to submit work by a deadline. I saw it as "free points": since they needed to attempt the problem sets to study anyway, I was essentially giving them credit for scanning and uploading their work to Canvas. But somehow, it still felt like a burden to them. Another negative effect I noticed was during the post-midterm review. Many students said they had focused heavily on the homework problems, but most admitted they didn't pay much attention to the other problems in the problem sets that weren't assigned as homework—even though those were also important for the exam. While I don't fully understand why (maybe the super-fast pace of summer didn't help), I'll consider making problem sets practice only for future courses.

Midterm exam, 30%. The midterm exam will take place during the first 80 minutes of the lecture on July 18. If you miss the midterm, the 30% will be added to your final exam, making it worth 60% of your grade. I do not recommend missing the midterm unless absolutely necessary.

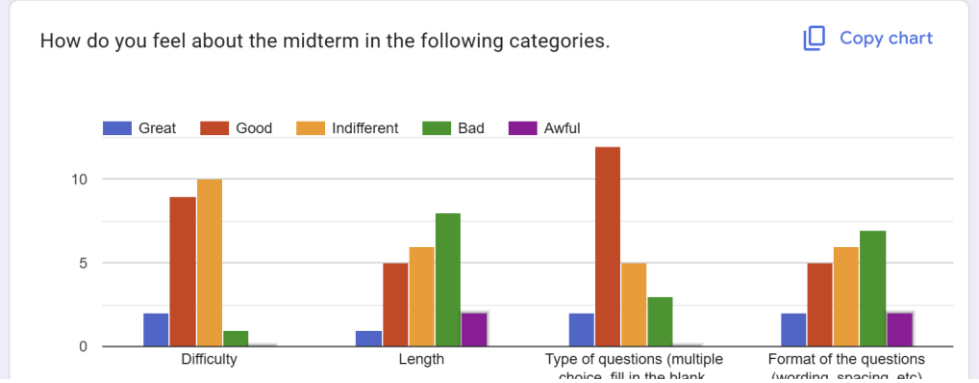
There will be no make-up exam and no exceptions. The midterm covers content from the first four lectures, including the material made in substitution for the July 4th missed class.

Post-Class Comment: I liked the idea of giving students the agency to choose whether to take the midterm or shift the exam weight entirely to the final. Instead of asking for medical documentation or trying to judge whether their excuse was valid—which feels uncomfortable to me, since I can't truly know what they're experiencing—I simply let them make that choice for themselves, no questions asked. This is something I learned during the ACT, and although I initially thought it was too extreme, I came to appreciate its merits. That said, I do advise students in the syllabus against taking this route, as it carries significant risk. So, while I give them agency, I also offer what I believe is the most responsible guidance. Two students chose this option, and both ended up passing the class.

Another note about the midterm: I conducted a post-midterm survey to understand how students felt about their performance and grades, as well as how they evaluated the midterm overall. One important takeaway was the need to improve the formatting of the quantitative questions. In particular, when a question had multiple parts, I realized through their feedback that it was helpful to repeat the entire general prompt in each subpart to avoid confusion and inconvenience.

After discussing this feedback with the students in class, I made the necessary formatting adjustments for the final exam.

Here is an example of the post-midterm survey questions:



Final exam, 30%. The final exam will cover all the material discussed in class.

Regrading policy: You can request a regrade within seven days of receiving your grade. Please revise the grading rubric carefully before submitting a regrade request.

Some useful information about the exams:

Both the midterm and final exams will include multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, and analytical problem-solving questions. The in-class activities, homework, and quizzes are designed to help you prepare for the exams. The exams are closed-book; no notes are allowed. You can bring a simple calculator and scratch paper. To succeed in the exams, it is important to have a good grasp of the material.

Memorizing some tricks will help, but it is better if you focus on learning the mechanisms rather than just memorizing.

Important dates:

Drop without a "W" Deadline: July 12.
Midterm Exam: July 18, in class (first half of the class).
Drop with a "W" Deadline: July 19.
Final Exam: August 2, 3:00pm-5:50pm, place TBA.

Post-Class Comment: I learned this from a lecturer I worked with as a TA in the past. While it may seem like just an administrative detail, students sometimes lose track of deadlines, and decisions about dropping or staying enrolled can be significant for them. Simply pointing out that this information is available in the syllabus helps guide them and reinforces a student-centered approach to teaching. I followed this with reminders in Canvas as important deadlines were approaching.

Tentative schedule of topics *[Omitted from this version]*
Other *[Omitted from this version]*

—---------- I hope you enjoy this class! Jordi

Post-Class Comment: Again, I close the document as I would close an email or a letter to a friend!

What I purposefully did not include in the syllabus.
I intended not to curve the grades in this class. A strict no-curve policy would also require committing to a fixed letter-grade scale, and since this was my first time teaching the course, I wasn't sure how students would perform, so I left it out of the syllabus. During the first lecture, when we discussed the syllabus, I announced that grades would not be curved and shared a tentative letter-grade scale, which I noted could be adjusted later, but only in students' favor.

What I like about not curving grades is that it forces me to write well-balanced exams. I aim to include different types of questions that target various levels in Bloom's taxonomy, instead of hyper-focusing on quantitative problems that don't necessarily reflect the student's conceptual understanding or intuition—and that disproportionately hurt students who struggle with quantitative problem-solving. In the post-midterm survey I included, most students reported feeling good or great about the types of questions on the midterm, and not because the qualitative questions were easy points: performance was not much better on the qualitative than on the quantitative questions.

Negative effects of curving*. I understand large classes usually require curves[1] and that they are a way to correct exams that end up being more challenging than expected. Yet, especially in smaller classes, I believe that grading without a curve gives students a more realistic and transparent way to assess their performance. If a student scores 40% on an exam but receives an A-, does that signal strong performance or a need for improvement? In this sense, I fear that curving can undermine the formative purpose of assessments—particularly midterms—which are meant to help students identify where and how to improve.*

Some authors share my view. Drawing on Bloom (1968), Schinske and Tanner (2014) note that under curved

grading, "grades might not communicate any information whatsoever regarding a student's mastery of course knowledge or skills." Students seem to agree: in a survey of 177 engineering students, those receiving an A for exam scores in the 30s were unlikely to feel proud or that they had learned what the instructor expected, and while only 12% said distinguishing exceptional students should be a primary purpose of exams, 93% said measuring mastery of course concepts should be (Wolfe & Powell, 2015).

There is also reason to think that curving—especially when based on relative performance—can incentivize unhealthy competition: when one student's high grade requires others to receive lower ones, the resulting zero-sum logic may discourage collaboration and community. Schinske and Tanner (2014) review work showing that curve-grading "forces students to compete with each other, whether they want to or not" (Seymour & Hewitt, 1997, p. 118), and that science students perform worse and feel less engaged in competitive environments than in cooperative ones (Humphreys et al., 1982; Tobias, 1990). Others find competitive grading incompatible with mastery goals and cooperative learning (Haley, 2015) and argue that it undermines equity (Bowen & Cooper, 2022). Meanwhile, the motivational benefit often claimed for this competition is unclear: in a field experiment, Czibor et al. (2020) found no significant effect of relative grading on students' preparation or exam scores.

My own experience points the same way. At the end of the term, one student thanked me for not using a curve, saying many students had taken it as an opportunity to collaborate rather than compete. Twelve students formed a study group, became close friends, and even planned to take other classes together. This camaraderie also showed in the final reflections and the SETs, particularly in the "Environment" category, where the course received one of the highest scores across the entire Econ 100 sequence since SETs were implemented.

***Final Thought.** Taken together, this evidence suggests that curving may be detrimental to student collaboration and the learning environment more broadly. Notably, much of this research comes from STEM fields, where peer cooperation is often essential to success. Personally, I could not have succeeded as an economics major without the support of my classmates and study partners.*

I understand that curving is sometimes necessary—for standardization or as a safeguard when an exam turns out to be unexpectedly difficult. However, in my experience, not curving is simpler, pushes instructors to design their evaluations more intentionally, and helps avoid potentially toxic competition among students.

[1] *In an experiment in UCSD's Econ 100A, Brownback (2018) finds that students work slightly harder when curved against larger rather than smaller groups, which he attributes to the lower uncertainty of rank in larger groups.*

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