

Teaching Statement

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My teaching approach builds on my prior career in a high-growth technology firm. I have hired and trained dozens of employees and overseen the selection and onboarding of many more. People I hired as junior employees are, today, executives and key contributors at a variety of companies. I stay in touch with many of them and they routinely credit some measure of their success to a safe early-career learning environment.

One feature of my management style was that I refused to leave anyone behind. I felt a deep obligation to help each hire grow in competence and confidence. I loved the challenge of matching my experience and expertise with the unique challenges, skills, and objectives of my new hires and I've brought that same approach to teaching and mentoring students at UCLA. Ultimately, my goal is to help students become the kind of person that I would hire, work with, or even work for in the future.

Traditionally, UCLA Strategy has not allowed graduate students to teach, but I was asked to teach undergraduate entrepreneurship this past year and was given broad discretion to set the syllabus and curriculum. The result was a rigorous, practice-oriented class which received overwhelmingly positive reviews from students and visiting Venture Capital investors.

1 Pedagogy

My preferred approach to instruction has two pillars. First, my lectures are direct, information-rich, and high-energy with the objective of giving the class a set of foundational concepts and a common vocabulary. Once the groundwork has been laid, I lead the class through a broad, free-ranging discussion centered on one or more cases. Where possible, I prefer cases that have unexpected and dramatic conclusions. In a Core Strategy class, I might use a case on Coors Brewing which, at face value, helps students understand sources of competitive advantage and types of cost and value strategies. However, I like to twist it into a story about the importance of differentiating between lucky and good. Likewise, I like to use the Ironbox/Steelcase case to illustrate a no-win situation in which the only correct decision is ruthless and painful. The case asks students to think of the correct payoff needed to induce voluntary

separation in a workforce which prides itself on its affiliation with Ironbox, but only layoffs (and clear leadership/communication) can achieve the desired objective.

In addition to carrying the course payload, I have two objectives for class discussion. First, I want to challenge students and be challenged in turn. I want to generate friction. Students should argue with me and with each other, both because it's conducive to learning and because the ability to present a case and argue a point is, itself, a critical career skill. Second, I want the discussion to lay bare any ethical or normative conflicts in the case or subject matter. My goal is not to evangelize a particular point of view, but rather to push students to elaborate their own in a way that is internally consistent. As an example, the aforementioned case of "lucky or good" has interesting implications for compensation: should CEOs be paid dramatically more than workers if some meaningful part of their performance is luck? What would we have to believe about compensation for dramatic pay differentials to make sense?

If I could, I'd mentor every student individually, but this is time consuming, inefficient, and sometimes incompatible with the reality of university instruction. Still, a well-run case discussion lets me aim a question at a specific student and pull the entire room into the exchange so a sixty-person lecture gets something close to the engagement I'd give one-on-one.

2 Classroom Technology & LLMs

I have a preference for analog classrooms. Some of the best courses I've taken were nothing but a brilliant scholar and a whiteboard. That means, no computers or tablets (accommodations excepted, of course). No class recordings. Only a handful of slides. Done well, this approach allows students to engage with course concepts in a distraction-free environment.

A more analog classroom also has an advantage in that it shapes healthier LLM usage. If students take handwritten notes, then even the process of generating LLM prompts can reinforce the material. Rather than dumping a corpus of content into a model, students need to first define class concepts in their own words. For example, when teaching entrepreneurship, I used the idea of a contrarian belief and defined it as "something a smart, reasonable person would disagree with that you nevertheless believe about your own business idea." Students reported that LLMs struggled to produce contrarian beliefs without clean examples, which meant that they had to "teach" the model before they could use it.

That said, my goal is not to frustrate LLM usage. Outside the classroom, I encourage students to run their ideas through LLMs. I provide suggested prompts for some customer research assignments and point students to academic papers/concepts they can use to set expectations in their chat sessions. In order to shape usage, I give students three simple guard rails. First, LLMs are imprecise and imperfect, so

you can use them to start a project but not to finish it. Second, LLMs should never speak for you because your voice is what makes you worth listening to. Third, LLMs are unlikely to excel at strategy or entrepreneurship because those disciplines reward practitioners who diverge from the consensus.

3 Courses

My background and research equip me to teach a variety of courses in Strategy, Entrepreneurship, Human Resources, and Management. I can speak to academic consensus, tell stories from my own career (with a special emphasis on catastrophic mistakes that I've made), and arrange guest speakers from my own network. Where necessary, I am comfortable developing my own syllabus, co-teaching, or picking up an existing class.

I would also be interested in developing more niche, practitioner-oriented courses in sales management, software product management, and corporate strategy development. While likely not part of any core curriculum, these could be electives or executive coaching/workshops.

Finally, I look forward to supporting student research projects and advising Doctoral students. I've organized internal brown-bags, brainstorm meetings, and referee letter review sessions for junior PhD students at UCLA and would like to continue supporting the PhD program in my future roles. I often have a surfeit of toy models bouncing around my head which I'm happy to share with students looking for a concept to play with. I would also happily lead graduate-level seminars/colloquia in Strategy, OB, or HR.