

Teaching Profile

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1 Teaching Philosophy

Jimmy always had a way of simplifying down all the concepts so they could be easily understood.

Introduction to Statistics, 2013

The basic philosophy driving my teaching is the same philosophy that drives my research in Statistical Computing. Break complex tasks down into simpler tasks, and break those into even simpler tasks, until the individual tasks become trivial and easy to solve. Complex concepts can also be broken down into simple ideas that students find easy to understand, and I find the same joy in doing this for students as I do when writing software for my research.

My experience in teaching has largely been in introductory statistics courses. At the University of Auckland the first year Statistics course (Introduction to Statistics) sees 2,500 students every year from a diverse range of departments, from Accounting, to Psychology, and of course from Statistics itself. Teaching these courses has given me experience in communicating statistical concepts to a variety of students, arming me with a wide array of examples that I can utilise to teach students of different backgrounds.

JIMMY IS LIFE... he teaches, doesn't give the answers away, he makes me think!!

Introduction to Statistics, 2013

In teaching my research area, Statistical Computing, I look forward to teaching how to use computing skills to solve simple, but practically useful tasks (such as automating a task), and then demonstrating how to abstract the same principles to solve even more tasks. Not only is this area useful for the content itself, in that the students will now be able to write code to solve problems, but the underlying principle of simplifying complex tasks into easier ones is applicable widely, with my own teaching being one such application.

2 Evidence of teaching effectiveness

Student Evaluation Results are from evaluations for tutorials. The format of the tutorials are small-class lectures with worked examples. Evaluations are only filled by students who have attended several tutorials taught by the tutor being evaluated.

The scores given are for the statement “*Overall, the tutor was an effective teacher*” with a possible score between 0 – 5 corresponding to Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree and Strongly Agree. Thus responses ≥ 4 means agreement with the statement.

Year	Course Title	Responses	Mean	% of responses ≥ 4
2012	Introduction to Statistics	19	4.42	90%
2012	Introduction to Statistics	11	4.27	100%
2012	Data Analysis	5	4.60	100%
2013	Introduction to Statistics	27	4.67	100%

3 Critical reflection

When I first started teaching tutorials, the most common complaint I received was to “*slow down*” so the students could “*copy down the answers*”. When I did slow down the following semester, my evaluations results fell.

Upon considering these results I found the problem to be thus: in the first semester, I was placing emphasis on the fundamental concepts, while only briefly covering less important content. The problem most likely arose because I never explained this is what I was doing. In the second semester, I spent equal time on all content, but this led to less concrete understanding by the students, and hence less student satisfaction.

Assuming my analysis was correct the solution was simple, better communication. For every tutorial I made sure the students understood what the key points were and why they were important. Where I covered briefly, I again communicated the reason, but offered additional help to those who wished to know it in depth after the tutorial. The feedback became very positive, with the students being happy with the pace and the content. Not a single complaint about being too fast was found.

I now communicate my teaching intent clearly to my students, which has led to increased satisfaction both for myself and for the students.

[The tutor] made sure that we knew what we were doing, that we understood, before moving on.

Introduction to Statistics, 2013

The tutor went over the content very clearly, and made it easy to understand. He used good examples.

Introduction to Statistics, 2013