



Cameron Allen

Teaching Statement

 camallen.net
 camallen@berkeley.edu

I am drawn to the field of artificial intelligence by my fascination with learning and teaching. The precise moments of clear, hard-won insight that arise after sufficient exposure to a new concept are some of the most gratifying experiences of my life, whether I notice them in my own mind or in the minds of my students. As both a researcher and a teacher, I try to deliver those moments of understanding to my learners as effectively as possible.

Teaching experience. My teaching experience comes from several places. I served as a teaching assistant for two courses: Introduction to Artificial Intelligence (Duke's CPS 270) with George Konidakis, and Learning and Sequential Decision Making (Brown's CSCI 2951-F) with Michael Littman, each with approximately 100 students. For both courses, I held weekly office hours, responded to student questions online, and graded assignments and exams. I delivered guest lectures in the Duke AI class and in two more AI courses at Brown—a 35-student graduate seminar and a 150-student intro course—and was a co-instructor of an introductory machine learning workshop led by Sam Saarienen at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution.

Approach. My approach to teaching consists of four pillars:

- Creativity. I view teaching as a generative collaboration between instructor and students, and I try to remain as open as possible to what that might look like. An open mindset is crucial for any creative pursuit, and learning especially so. I embrace mistakes and misunderstandings, find ways to say “yes” rather than “no,” and use humor to engage people’s creativity and keep everyone in a state of openness.
- Curiosity. I actively encourage questions from students to understand their interests and gauge the effectiveness of my teaching methodologies. If a lecture isn’t generating enough questions, I become curious myself and engage the students with my own questions to pinpoint any unclear areas.
- Compassion. Effective teaching requires a deep appreciation for one’s audience—particularly what it is like to not yet know something. It is all too easy to succumb to the “curse of knowledge” and forget how to relate to the beginner’s mind. When designing lectures, responding to questions, and grading assignments, I always try to inhabit the minds of my students to understand which aspects of my teaching are working and which are falling short.
- Context. It’s hard to collect ideas without a basket to put them in, which is why context is so important. Teaching is storytelling, and I always try to relate the details back to the broader narrative arc. Sometimes it’s necessary to dive into the weeds on some technical topic, but it should always be properly motivated beforehand and reinforced afterwards, so that students understand why they are learning something.

In the spirit of demonstrating some of these values, I acknowledge that the hiring committee will be left to wonder whether I intentionally chose the above pillar names so as to all start with the same letter, or merely embraced the pattern after the fact.

Future Teaching. I am prepared to teach a variety of courses. At the lower division undergraduate level, I would be happy to teach most of the introductory courses in programming (CS 3, 9H, 10, 61A, 61B). In the upper division, I would be especially well-suited to teach artificial intelligence, machine learning, or a group study in AI safety (CS 188, 189, 198). At the graduate level, I would be excited to teach a course in learning and decision making (CS C281B), or a seminar on AI abstractions, the subject of my dissertation.

Mentoring. I am grateful to have had the opportunity during my PhD to provide long-term mentorship to six undergraduate students (three now PhD students at CMU, UC Berkeley, and MIT), two master's students (one now an AI researcher at JPMorgan) and four PhD students, plus many other students for shorter durations. Now, as a postdoc, I am excited to refine my approach with a new cohort of students, even as I continue to deepen my relationships with existing colleagues.