

TEACHING STATEMENT

MATTHIAS SCHÜTT

Mathematics is often viewed as an abstract theory. However, I believe that it is up to the teacher to present it as a lively and accessible subject. Both as a student and as a teacher, I learned that this approach helped all students equally well. When preparing a lecture, I always keep this ideal in mind.

Already as a Diplom student at Hannover University, I was given the opportunity to teach classes for engineering students. I immediately learned to employ flexible techniques to ease their misgivings about mathematics and reassure them that the material is manageable.

While being a PhD-student at Hannover University, I gave classes in first year-mathematics (Analysis & Linear Algebra). These were addressed to a diversity of students, majoring and minoring in mathematics, future teachers and physicists. I found it very enlightening to understand and support their different interests and goals as an approachable and flexible teacher. Moreover, I taught more advanced students in the course of two seminars and one class in Algebraic Geometry. I enjoyed guiding them through some modern aspects of this subject.

In my final two years at Hannover, I was furthermore invited to give prep courses for freshmen of the economic sciences.

At Harvard University, I will give a graduate course in the spring term 2008.

It is my understanding that mathematics is not a question of learning proofs by heart, but of gaining an overview of the relevant theory which is combined with real insight into the ideas involved. Independently of the students' talents, this is mostly a matter of motivation and curiosity. As an enthusiastic teacher, it is my main goal to challenge all students at the same time. Usually I achieve this by making some stimulating remarks and exercises for the more advanced students while elaborating instructive examples designed for the problems which other students might run into. Often I create a symbiosis between these two methods by starting with an example that appeals to all students regardless of their prerequisites.

The analytic way of thinking which is fundamental (and maybe unique) to mathematics encourages the students to always ask questions. In my interactive classes, I aim to strengthen their self-confidence to address not only their teachers, but also their classmates, since this dialogue will be to everybody's benefit. While the students shall not hesitate to insist on explanations and details, I particularly want to stimulate them to inquire on the motivation and inner reasoning of mathematics.

I enjoy being an enthusiastic and approachable teacher and will continuously try to refine my teaching skills in a wide variety of classes.

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