

Building the Economics Starting Point Community: An Evaluator's Perspective

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Starting Point: Pedagogical Resources for Teaching and Learning Economics

- The portal is being constructed for long-run success
 - Based on a proven and stable model
 - Well-funded through NSF
 - Developed and organized by knowledgeable experts
 - Thoughtfully designed and implemented plan
 - Carefully crafted collaborations
 - Attention to the details
 - Built to grow, develop, and expand over time
 - Demand for instructional reform in economics (?)

A Highly Selected Survey Sample

- 135 Respondents to a web-based survey conducted in mid-Fall 2009
- Economic educators belonging to electronic communities devoted to teaching
 - tchecon listserv
 - NAEchat listserv
 - Economics for Teachers blog
 - Teaching Innovations Program (TIP) program participants mailing list

Respondents' Characteristics

- 61% Male
- 50% With 15 or more years teaching experience
 - 36% With 20 or more years
- 70% Teaching at a public institution
- Admission Standards
 - 2% Exclusive
 - 14% Highly Selective
 - 25% Selective
 - 26% Moderately Selective
 - 31% Open Admissions

Respondents' Characteristics

- 26% Frequently discuss teaching methods with departmental colleagues
- Teaching workshop attendance; past 10 years
 - 37% More than 5
 - 32% 3 to 5
 - 24% 1 or 2
- 44% Reported participation in AEA-sponsored TIP workshops
 - 30% Not aware of the program

Teaching Style Index

Lecture-Based Chalk & Talk	4%	31%	45%	12%	5%	Active Learning Pedagogies
"Instructor Centered" Lessons	4%	33%	34%	20%	6%	"Student Centered" Lessons

Does Teaching Style Vary Across Courses?

Yes! Factors that seem important:

- Principles vs. Upper-division field courses
 - Some report use of more active learning techniques at Principles level while others report the reverse!
- Number of students in the class
- Physical environment and technological infrastructure of classroom
- Course content
- Target student audience

Satisfaction with Personal Teaching Style

- To what extent are you satisfied with your current overall approach to teaching under-graduate economics?
 - 13% Very Satisfied
 - 60% Satisfied
 - 5% Indifferent
 - 19% Not Satisfied
 - 1% Very Dissatisfied

Selected Comments on Dissatisfaction

- “I sometimes question if what I am doing is the best way.”
- “Student indifference. Chalk and talk loses many more students than it enthralls.”
- “Would like my classes to be more interactive.”
- “The interest level of my students seems low. Ability of students to do analytical work is low.”
- “My approach is OK, it is the outcomes that are unsatisfying.”

Experimentation with Different Pedagogies

- To what extent have you experimented with different pedagogies in your undergraduate economics courses during the past 5 years?
 - 46% Extensively
 - 49% From time to time
 - 4% Once or twice
 - 1% Never

	Familiar	Experimented	Adopted	Most Beneficial
Context Rich Problems	50%	33%	25%	9%
Just-In-Time Teaching	26%	10%	4%	1%
Quantitative Writing	20%	14%	11%	2%
Teaching with Cases	74%	40%	22%	12%
Cooperative Learning	73%	61%	47%	23%
Classroom Experiments	93%	77%	58%	34%
Computer Simulations	60%	35%	14%	8%
Personal Response Systems	59%	21%	12%	11%
Guided Inquiry	27%	11%	6%	1%
Student Research	68%	50%	36%	14%
Service Learning	51%	11%	5%	2%
Spreadsheets Across Curriculum	11%	6%	2%	2%
Documented Problem Solving	14%	8%	5%	1%
Media-based Teaching	45%	34%	26%	14%
Interactive Lecturers	50%	34%	31%	14%
Interdisciplinary Approaches	45%	23%	17%	6%

Sources of Information on Alternative Teaching Methods

	Normal Source	Most Beneficial
Colleagues in Discipline	67%	21%
Colleagues in Other Disciplines	49%	6%
Internet and Web-based Searches	39%	5%
Internet-based Discussion Groups	25%	1%
Disciplinary Workshops	62%	27%
Disciplinary Professional Conferences	51%	8%
Teaching and Education Conferences	33%	15%
Disciplinary Professional Journals	31%	2%
Interdisciplinary Teaching and Education Journals	21%	2%
Impossible to Say; Sources are Interconnected		7%

Barriers to Teaching Reform

- Have you encountered or perceive that significant barriers exist for economists to integrate alternative pedagogies in their classrooms?
 - 39% Yes
 - 61% No

Frequently Cited Barriers

- Opportunity cost of time to learn and adopt
- Time costs relative to amount of material that must be covered during a course
- Opposition of colleagues and administrators
- Inertia and lack of incentives for change
- Textbook and materials not readily adaptable
- Physical classroom environments/infrastructure not conducive to alternative class formats
- Technical/mathematical nature of economics

Conclusions

- Yes, there is a demand for reforming teaching in economics!
 - 1 out of 5 survey respondents not satisfied with their current approach to teaching
 - Teaching innovation is part of the professional discussion
 - A vast majority of survey respondents have experimented with different classroom pedagogies
 - Respondents experiment with and use a wide variety of different classroom pedagogies
 - Chalk and Talk may not be the norm for many economists
 - 68% of survey respondents will “definitely visit” the Starting Point site and 27% desire to contribute.

Conclusions

- Yes, there are challenges!
 - Knowledge and use of specific pedagogical approaches vary widely
 - Currently, internet and web-based resources are not the primary source of information about alternative pedagogies for economists
 - Need to significantly reduce the opportunity cost of investing in new instructional approaches
 - Institutional barriers do exist for the adoption of new teaching techniques

Questions and Comments
