

# ***Starting Point: Pedagogical Resources for Teaching and Learning Economics***



***<http://serc.carleton.edu/econ/>***

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**Co-PIs:** Mark Maier, Glendale Community College, [mmaier@glendale.edu](mailto:mmaier@glendale.edu)  
Cathy Manduca, SERC, Carleton College, [cmanduca@carleton.edu](mailto:cmanduca@carleton.edu)  
KimMarie McGoldrick, University of Richmond, [kmcgoldr@richmond.edu](mailto:kmcgoldr@richmond.edu)  
Scott Simkins, North Carolina A&T State University, [simkinss@ncat.edu](mailto:simkinss@ncat.edu)

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## ***How did Starting Point get Started?***

The *Starting Point* project grew out of the recognition that a readily accessible, comprehensive, and easy-to-use set of web-based teaching resources for economics instructors was both valuable and needed. In addition, we wanted to introduce economists to a variety of pedagogical innovations initially developed in other disciplines, but readily adapted for use in economics [the outgrowth of recent cross-disciplinary research carried out by Mark Maier and Scott Simkins with the support of National Science Foundation Grants DUE 00-88303 and 04-11037].

## ***What is Starting Point?***

*Starting Point* is an economics pedagogic portal that seeks to:

- ***introduce economists to innovative teaching strategies developed both within and beyond the discipline of economics.*** We are especially interested in promoting cross-disciplinary adoption and adaptation of research-based teaching/learning practices.
- ***provide instructors with the tools to begin integrating and assessing these teaching strategies in their own classrooms.*** Each teaching strategy contained in the portal includes background knowledge about the strategy and how best to use it, reasons for using the strategy, and examples illustrating the teaching strategy in practice.
- ***promote the sharing of teaching innovations among instructors.*** The *Starting Point* site encourages instructors to submit classroom-based examples illustrating the use of the teaching strategies included on the site for review and sharing.

The *Starting Point* web site includes **16 modules** covering the following teaching strategies:

- |                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| • Teaching with Cases                | • Interactive Lecture Demonstrations           |
| • Classroom Experiments              | • Interdisciplinary Approaches to Teaching     |
| • Classroom Response Systems         | • Just-in-Time Teaching                        |
| • Teaching with Computer Simulations | • Quantitative Writing                         |
| • Context-Rich Problems              | • Service Learning                             |
| • Cooperative Learning               | • Teaching with Spreadsheets                   |
| • Documented Problem Solving         | • Undergraduate Student Research               |
| • Interactive Lectures               | • Using Media to Enhance Teaching and Learning |

## ***Why should Economics Instructors use Starting Point?***

While collectively useful for the enhancement of our understanding of pedagogical practices, currently available teaching resources in economics are often disconnected from each other and typically stand in isolation from other disciplines and from research on student learning. As a result, economists are often unaware of educational developments within their field or across disciplines. *Starting Point* provides a comprehensive array of research-based instructional strategies aimed at promoting student learning in economics. Using *Starting Point*, economics instructors can quickly compare a wide variety of effective teaching strategies to match their teaching style, course level, content, and student learning objectives.

We also hope that *Starting Point* will promote a more intentional development of communal, cumulative knowledge-building in economics education, similar to the educational research process in some science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) disciplines, especially physics education research. The extent to which teaching strategies are publicly discussed and examples are shared in economics is typically limited to formal presentations at regional and national disciplinary conferences, refereed journal articles, and collected volume publications. As part of the *Starting Point* project, we hope to promote the idea of a Teaching Commons, “a conceptual space in which communities of educators committed to inquiry and innovation come together to exchange ideas about teaching and learning and use them to meet the challenges of educating students.” (Huber and Hutchings, 2007, *The Advancement of Learning: Building the Teaching Commons*, Jossey-Bass)

### **How can Economics Instructors use *Starting Point*?**

***Learning more about specific pedagogic techniques.*** Each module contains the following:

- Description of the pedagogic practice and its distinguishing features (*What is...?*)
- Information on when and why the method is particularly effective, with references to educational (general and economics-specific) and learning sciences research (*Why use...?*)
- Understanding how to implement the pedagogic practice and use it effectively, including tips for the instructor (*How to use...*)
- References, including references to web-only material
- Examples, which can be easily adapted for use in your courses

***Browsing the teaching examples library.*** Each example contains the following:

- Description of the example and a complete set of teaching materials needed for implementation, such as handouts, data and instructions for students
- Teaching notes and tips for the instructor
- Context for how this activity has been used, including the type of course and at what point in the course
- Measurable goals for student learning and assessment information that describes how the instructor can measure students’ achievement of specified learning goals
- Author attribution and contact information
- References and links to other resources supporting the example

### **How does *Starting Point* Differ from other Economics Teaching Resources?**

- Single comprehensive location; consistent and transparent structure (*Why, What, How, ...*)
- Extensive topic coverage; inclusion of teaching/learning innovations adapted from other disciplines
- Modules developed in interdisciplinary teams; building on work initially developed outside of economics
- Developing cross-disciplinary linkages; expanding vision of economics education research to include educational research in other disciplines and the learning sciences
- Dynamic library of examples, with opportunity for expansion via instructor submissions

#### **How can you Contribute to the *Starting Point* Project?**

We are particularly interested in having instructors share their expertise through the ***submission of examples*** illustrating the use of teaching strategies included in the *Starting Point* site. Contributors will be asked to include the components described above using an online form. Example submissions will be reviewed before being accepted for inclusion on the *Starting Point* site.

See [http://serc.carleton.edu/econ/submit\\_activities.html](http://serc.carleton.edu/econ/submit_activities.html) for more information about submitting an example for inclusion in *Starting Point*.