

Yours, Mine, and the Truth: Using a Structured Minimum Wage Debate in the Economics Classroom

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Abstract

This article describes a strategy for using the minimum wage as a classroom debate topic. Classroom debate is an active-learning strategy that encourages students to develop skills that are often lacking in the college curriculum. Specifically, classroom debate promotes critical thinking and encourages students to see topics from various perspectives. Economics topics are well suited for classroom debate because most of the policy arguments have at least two well-reasoned positions. The minimum wage is an economics topic that students tend to care deeply about because it speaks to issues of poverty, income inequality, discrimination, and the economic value of education, and many students in the college demographic earn minimum, or near-minimum, wage. Instructors who use the minimum wage debate in their classrooms will find that students will apply an “economic way of thinking” to issues at the core of the curriculum.

JEL Classifications: A21, A22, J3

Keywords

active learning, minimum wage, economic education

Introduction

Economics classrooms are typically teacher-centered, textbook-driven, and dominated by lecture-based and chalk-and-talk methodology (Becker & Watts, 1996; Watts & Becker, 2008; Watts & Schaur, 2011). Many see this as a cost-effective approach to delivering content, given scarcity of time and resources (Becker & Watts, 2001) and fitting a variety of contexts and audiences (McKeachie, 1987). Research suggests economists are more likely to use lecture-based teaching methods than instructors in other fields, and students often rate economics instructors lower than instructors in other fields (Allgood, Bosshardt, Van Der Klaauw, & Watts, 2004; Becker & Watts, 2001). A 2012 survey found college economics faculty “spending 70 percent of class time lecturing, 20 percent leading class discussion, and 10 percent using other learning activities such as

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experiments, group activities, peer instruction, clickers, and so on” (Goffe & Kauper, 2014, p. 361). While lecture has been shown to be effective for the transfer of knowledge (Antepohl & Herzog, 1999; Nandi, Chan, Chan, Chan, & Chan, 2000), used alone, it does not usually lead to durable student learning (Brown, Roediger, & McDaniel, 2014). Many thought leaders in the economic education community actively promote the use of more active learning methods of teaching (Becker, Watts, & Becker, 2006).

Economic education research suggests interactive teaching methods are better suited to teach economic content, and students exposed to them are more likely to internalize the content and “think like an economist” (Siegfried et al., 1991, p. 199) long after they leave the classroom. Active learning increases student motivation, retention, and depth of understanding (Christoffersen, 2002). The benefits of active learning are well summarized by Nancy Walker Perry, Huss, McAuliff, and Galas (1996): “The active learning process transcends basic comprehension and memorization, focusing instead on the examination, analysis, evaluation, and application of course-related concepts” (p. 77).

Classroom debate offers instructors the opportunity to teach critical thinking skills in an active-learning environment (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). One of the strengths of using classroom debate is its value in challenging students to explicitly consider both sides of an argument, often on divisive topics (Bauer & Wachowiak, 1977; Brembeck, 1949; Budesheim & Lundquist, 1999; Combs & Bourne, 1994). By encouraging students to consider, and sometimes argue from, other points of view, debate can be an effective method for reducing bias (Berdine, 1987; Schroeder & Ebert, 1983). Kennedy (2007) identifies the critical thinking skills used in debate as “assessing the credibility of sources, identifying and challenging assumptions, recognizing inconsistencies, and prioritizing the relevance and salience of various points within the overall argument” (p. 184). For these reasons, Freeley and Steinberg (1999) argued that academic debate has been recognized as one of the most effective methods for developing critical thinking skills for more than 2,000 years.

Classroom debate affords instructors the opportunity to build a number of skills that we expect students to acquire to succeed in college and beyond. Sometimes referred to as “soft skills,” they include skills such as teamwork, communication, leadership, problem solving, initiative, and self-regulation (Hirsch, 2017). Oral communication is a skill that is valued by employers; however, aside from students majoring in communication, it is rarely taught or learned in the process of acquiring a college degree (Cronin & Glenn, 1991). Debate gives students a unique opportunity to develop oral communication skills in the context of learning discipline-specific content. For example, Combs and Bourne (1994) found that marketing students who participated in in-class debate reported a statistically significant improvement in oral communication skills. Vo and Morris (2006) found that debate helped students’ understanding and comprehension of economic problems and enabled them to see the relevance of economic content. Other skills we expect students to master on their path to a bachelor’s degree include key content knowledge, comprehension of complex ideas, application of knowledge, and evaluation of concepts presented from different points of view (Bloom, 1956; Krathwohl, 2002). Classroom debate can be an effective way to engage students and give them opportunities to practice these skills. Zare and Othman (2013) suggested that debate is an effective way to engage students in a manner that promotes critical thinking skills, mastering course content, and improving speaking abilities.

Classroom debate excels at giving students the opportunity to apply and evaluate knowledge that they have already learned—to formulate clear, precise, and logical arguments (Omelicheva & Avdeyeva, 2008). This retrieval and application of previously learned content makes learning more durable (Brown et al., 2014). Furthermore, students enjoy debating; they also see the value of debate as a way to enhance their learning. Some report important attitude changes as well (Bauer & Wachowiak, 1977; Budesheim & Lundquist, 1999; Green & Klug, 1990). Darby (2007) summarized the case for classroom debate as an

experience by which students can develop competencies in researching current issues, preparing logical arguments, actively listening to various perspectives, differentiating between subjective and evidence-based information, asking cogent questions, integrating relevant information, and formulating their own opinions based on evidence. After the debate is over, students also report that the experience is fun. (p. 10)

Teaching Economic Issues Using Classroom Debate

Economics seems well suited to classroom debates. First, many of the issues that economists study are rooted in scarcity and are related to public policy. As a result, students who watch or listen to news programming may be accustomed to hearing politicians debate economic issues formally (as during a presidential debate) or informally (on cable news programs). Second, economists are famous for addressing an economic topic from both (or many) sides of an issue. As such, preparing for a debate with two well-reasoned sides is relatively easy because there are ample arguments and research (of varying quality) to support both sides of an economic argument. In addition, multiple economic think tanks representing a variety of political and ideological perspectives provide data and research that support a variety of perspectives on multiple issues. Finally, while economics is about models and theories, in the end, economics is about finding solutions to problems. Thus, classroom debates enable students to apply economic ideas to real-world problems.

One contentious scarcity-related socioeconomic problem is income inequality, which encompasses several related topics, including the minimum wage. The minimum wage provides instructors with a relevant, compelling topic for classroom debate. College students often work part-time jobs and many earn the minimum wage. Because they have “skin in the game,” students are often interested in the topic for self-interested reasons. The topic is also timely. The federal minimum wage has been US\$7.25 since 2009, forcing the issue to be heavily debated on the state and local levels: On January 1, 2017, the minimum wage rose in 20 states, giving an estimated 4.4 million low-wage workers a raise. Arizona’s increase to US\$10 per hour (an increase of US\$1.95) will mean higher incomes for 12% of the state’s workforce (Morath, 2016).

Recent polls suggest that Americans generally support a higher minimum wage. A 2015 CBS/*New York Times* poll found 71% in favor of increasing the minimum wage from US\$7.25 to US\$10.10 (“Americans’ Views on Income Inequality and Workers’ Rights,” 2015). However, economists are generally divided on the issue. A 2013 poll asked economists if raising the federal minimum wage to US\$9 would make it noticeably harder for low-skilled workers to find employment: 34% agreed, 32% disagreed, and 24% were uncertain (IGM Forum, 2013). The discussion of whether the minimum wage should be increased often boils down to the costs and benefits for low-wage workers: Some workers benefit through higher income, but others suffer the cost of fewer job opportunities. This trade-off was evident in the 2014 Congressional Budget Office (CBO) study, which found that raising the federal minimum wage to US\$10.10 per hour would move 900,000 people (of 45 million), on net, above the poverty threshold. The legislation would mean an extra US\$31 billion in income for low-wage workers. However, the study noted that only 19% of that extra income would go to families below the poverty threshold, whereas 29% would go to families earning 3 times the poverty threshold. On the employment side, the higher minimum wage would reduce total employment by about 500,000 workers (CBO, 2014). Given the divisive nature of the issue within economics, the minimum wage is a topic that lends itself well to classroom debate.

Classroom Activity Description

This activity is intended for an introductory or principles-level college economics course. The activity fits the curriculum well because segments of the activity could be spread over three

consecutive class periods. The content fits within the context of the microeconomics course of the traditional principles sequence—in a unit on supply and demand, or more specifically a unit on labor markets. Alternatively, the debate could be used as a capstone project that leverages economic content knowledge from an entire semester of introductory or principles-level economics. Day 1 is reserved for debate preparation—which includes a description of the assignment, examination of the rubric, and role assignment. Students will begin their debate prep in class and complete it as homework. Day 2 is the debate. The classroom should be arranged to accommodate the classroom debate and students will have predetermined roles, so the first few minutes of Day 2 will be spent on organization and reminding students of the rules. Then students will debate. The last 5 min of the period will be reserved to decide the debate winner and to distribute and assign the reflection activity. Day 3 requires approximately 15 min of class time to debrief the activity by collecting the reflection activity, debriefing and discussing the central issues, reminding students what economists say about the minimum wage, and addressing any misconceptions that may have been introduced.

Content in Context

For students to have a meaningful debate, they must first know the content. As such, instructors should deliver their normal instruction on supply and demand, labor markets, and price controls. However, when discussing the minimum wage, information should include only the basic concepts. Instructors should avoid including too much information that might support one side of the debate or the other. For example, instruction should focus on the supply and demand graph, showing the minimum wage as a price floor located above equilibrium, which results in a surplus quantity of labor supplied. In addition, the Federal Reserve Economic Data (FRED) data website has historical minimum wage data that are useful to discussion (see Appendix A), and GeoFRED can be used to visually display the state minimum wages as they vary across the United States (see Appendix B). Finally, it can be useful to provide information about the relationships between education, income, and the unemployment rate. The Bureau of Labor Statistics provides relevant and timely information on this (see Appendix C). And because the purchasing power of the minimum wage over time can become a key part of the debate, Appendix D provides data about the “real minimum wage.”

Day 1: 15-Min Setup

1. Debates typically have a group of people who argue two different perspectives and a debate moderator. Debate questions are most effective when worded as an advocacy statement and challenge the current conditions: The advocacy statement for this debate is “The minimum wage should be increased to US\$15 per hour.” Students will be appointed to one of three groups:
 - a. Those who support and will argue for raising the minimum wage to US\$15.
 - b. Those who oppose and will argue against increasing the minimum wage to US\$15.
 - c. A panel of debate moderators composed of three undecided students who will prepare and ask the debate questions.
2. At the conclusion of the debate, the moderators will vote to determine which side won the debate. Moderators should vote for the side who provided the strongest arguments; they should not vote based on their personal view of the issue. Having three panelists prevents a tie. Instructors might also assign two moderators, with the instructor serving as the third vote. This gives the instructor an opportunity to participate in the deliberations and cast a minority vote. Stress that the votes of individual moderators will be held in confidence.

3. Because incentives matter, students on the winning debate team should be awarded something of academic value, such as extra points.
4. The method used to determine the debate sides is random, with an option to trade. The instructor should prepare a deck of cards with one King, one Queen, one Jack, and the rest of the deck divided evenly between red and black numbered cards. The total number of cards should match the number of students in the class. The cards will determine the role that students will play. Notice that students do not get to choose which side they will argue in the debate. Arguing against one's convictions can be enlightening to students and an effective strategy for building critical thinking skills and allowing students to see issues from multiple perspectives.
 - a. Tell the students that because red is a color associated with love, care, and passion, and those that argue for raising minimum wage are often characterized as arguing from those positions—students who draw a red card are assigned to the pro-minimum wage position.
 - b. Students who draw a black card are assigned to the anti-minimum wage position.
 - c. Students who draw a King, Queen, or Jack are assigned to the moderator panel.
 - d. Optional: after all cards are distributed, tell the students, as an economist, you recognize the benefits of mutually beneficial trade. Then, give students the option to trade cards with a willing classmate. This allows students who feel very strongly about one perspective the opportunity to argue that point of view. Also, it gives students who have been assigned to be a moderator, but have strong views, to trade with those who might be more neutral.
5. The debate prep is to be done by students as homework. Students should research the topic and create notecards with relevant information that supports their point of view.
 - a. Students should work within their debate groups as they prepare for the debate to ensure adequate coverage of the issue. However, students should be reminded that their individual grade will be determined by their individual preparation (notecards) and participation (speaking during the debate).
 - b. Students are often tempted to write complete paragraphs on their notecards, and then read these paragraphs during the debate. Tell students that the notecards should include a short statement that supports their point of view, and notecards must include a citation. For example, a student on the pro-minimum wage side might have a notecard that states this fact posted by the Economic Policy Institute (Cooper & Gould, 2014) on May 7, 2014: “An increase in the minimum wage would increase incomes for 4.7 million working moms, and 2.6 million working dads.”
 - c. Provide one or two balanced resources such as *Page One Economics: Would Increasing the Minimum Wage Reduce Poverty* published by the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis or *The Effects of a Minimum Wage Increase on Employment and Family Income* published by the CBO (see “Suggested Teaching Resources” section).
 - d. Students will find research on the Internet is easy, and information is readily available using a search engine and keying in phrases such as “anti minimum wage” or “pro minimum wage.”
 - e. Provide information for finding more biased resources that support each specific side.
 - i. The pro-minimum wage side will find key arguments provided by left-leaning think tanks such as the Center for American Progress, Political Economy Research Institute, Economic Policy Institute, National Employment Law Project, and Brookings Institution.
 - ii. The anti-minimum wage side could include short articles from right-leaning or libertarian think tanks such as the Cato Institute, Hoover Institution, Acton Institute, Heritage Foundation, and American Enterprise Institute.

- iii. Of course, purposely pointing students to biased information creates a scenario that is ripe for the debate—if students prepare diligently, each side will be armed with reasoned arguments and data that support their position.
 - f. Some of the research students find might seem dated, but tell them that the arguments and principles usually stay the same regardless of what the minimum wage was at a particular time.
6. The moderator panel should be given both packets of information. Their task is to prepare several questions that will be used during the debate. These should be targeted toward one side of the issue and range from very broad (What are the benefits of raising the minimum wage?) to the very specific (Economic theory suggests that raising the minimum wage will result in fewer jobs for low-skilled workers. Is not a low-paying job better than no job at all?). Tell the moderator panel to prepare many questions for each side—they will find that students will answer some of the questions in the process of answering others.

Day 2: Debate Day

7. If your classroom has movable desks, tables, and chairs, arrange the room so that the moderator panel is in the front of the room and the classroom itself is divided into two sections (see image below). Ask the pro-minimum wage group to sit to the left side of the moderator panel. Explain that pro-minimum wage proponents are often on the left politically. Ask the anti-minimum wage group to sit on the right side of the moderator panel. Explain that those who oppose the minimum wage tend to be on the right side of the political spectrum.
8. Start the debate by reminding students that the goal is to debate the central debate topic: The minimum wage should be increased to US\$15 per hour. Explain that the moderator panel will decide the outcome based on the strength of the arguments, not based on their personal preferences.
9. Student engagement is key to a successful debate experience. Each side should have the opportunity to construct an argument, deconstruct (or “clash”), and rebuild the argument. To accomplish this, structure the debate with this format:
 - a. The undecided panel will ask their first question to the pro-minimum wage group.
 - b. The pro-minimum wage group will be given approximately 3 min to construct an argument using theory, data, and other evidence. Several students from this group may speak during this period (within the time constraint).
 - c. The anti-minimum wage group will have 3 min to deconstruct the argument using an alternative theory, data, and other evidence. Several students from this group may speak during this period (within the time constraint).
 - d. The question will be given back to the pro-minimum wage group for 1 min to deliver final comments.
 - e. The undecided panel will ask the next question to the anti-minimum wage group, repeating the process described above. The debate should continue by asking questions of both sides in an alternating fashion, with time limits for each segment.
 - f. Allow the last 10 min to conclude the debate. Have each side choose one member to summarize their team’s point of view to provide a sort of closing argument. Use a coin toss to decide which side should go first. After both sides provide closing arguments, the three students on the questioning panel should be given a few minutes to discuss and then cast anonymous votes to decide the winner. Announce the winner in class.
10. Students should turn in their notecards before they leave class, which can be used for scoring.

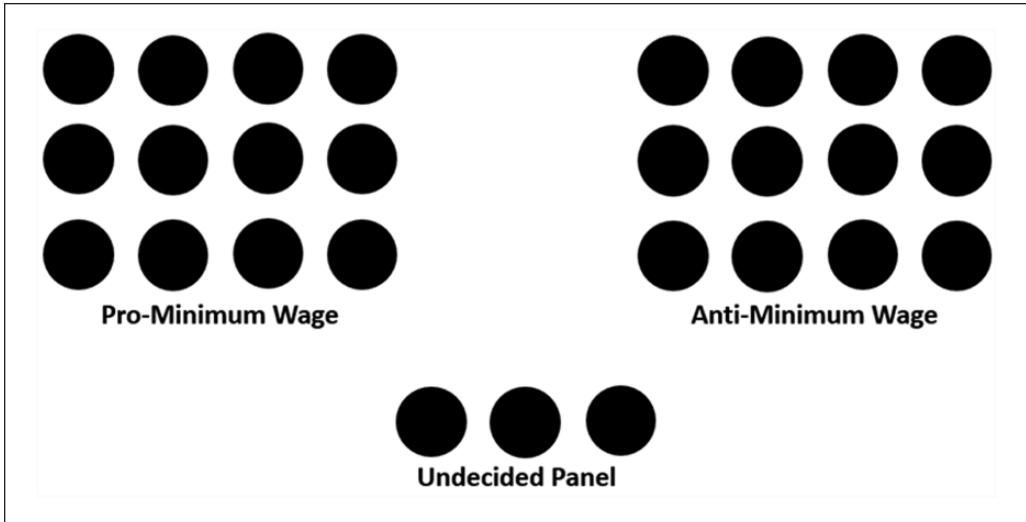


Figure I. Classroom Layout.

11. Students sometimes end up arguing a point of view with which they personally do not agree. Also, the opinions of some students may change as a result of the debate experience. So, assign students a short writing assignment so they can explain their thoughts on the minimum wage and reflect on the debate experience using Appendix E, “Reflection Assignment.”

Day 3: Debrief

12. At the beginning of Day 3, collect the reflection assignment. Then, debrief the debate using the following questions:
 - a. What was the strongest argument proposed by those who supported the minimum wage?
 - b. What was the strongest argument proposed by those who opposed the minimum wage?
 - c. Did the debate experience change or reinforce your views on the minimum wage? Explain.
13. Explain the two sides held by economists—some of this will coincide with the content debated in class. You may need to dispel some of the arguments made during the debate: They might have been strong arguments for use in a debate, but they might not reflect economic reality.

Assessment

Students can be graded in three areas: participation, preparation, and a written reflection essay. Appendix F provides a rubric for scoring using these categories. To determine participation points, consider the number of times a student actively contributes to the debate, weigh the qualitative value of their contribution, and assign points based on your estimation. To determine preparation points, have students hand in their notecards and assign points based on their level of preparation. The completed reflection assignment (Appendix E) serves as the third component of the assignment. Members of the panel should be graded on the questions prepared, their participation in the debate, and their reflection assignment.

Long-Run Impact

The author used the minimum wage debate in his classroom at a medium-sized high school in Minnesota from 2003 to 2010. Participants who engaged in the exercise were high school seniors enrolled in either (a) the economics course that was required for graduation or (b) Principles of Economics, an elective dual-enrollment course for which students received college credit from the University of Minnesota. To assess the long-term impact of the experience, the researcher used social media to survey former students and collect qualitative information about the classroom debate experience. Respondents to the initial query “tagged” other former students to broaden the scope of the survey. The use of qualitative data is fitting in this context because many of the learning objectives are focused on applied content and the development of “soft skills” such as critical thinking, viewing an issue from multiple perspectives, and verbal expression.

For many respondents, it had been many years since they participated in the classroom debate, but many reported long-lasting effects. Respondents consistently noted the value in seeing both sides of an issue—something that had been missing in the rest of their educational experience. A 2007 graduate stated,

It was really the first experience I had delving into both sides of an issue and learning how to view things not in black and white. It’s definitely a project that stuck with me in a way a lecture on the subject never could have (no offense to the lecturer). I still use that experience to explain the minimum wage to voters as part of my political work.

A 2004 graduate also saw the value of seeing an issue from both sides:

I was taught important facts from the opposite view. I was so one-sided going into that debate and I came out really seeing both sides and why the topic is viewed controversially. The whole experience opened my eyes and mind to other viewpoints, and that lesson carried with me to my adult years and in professional development; teaching me to always consider and research both sides of any argument or controversial topic rather than impulsively jumping on one side close minded.

The type of respectful, academic discourse that occurred within the classroom is lacking in the broader culture and often missing in the popular discussion of economic topics. A 2004 graduate commented, “The classroom may be the only place left where we can learn the skills of structured, principled, civil debate. Cable news and the Thanksgiving table are the alternatives and neither hold promise to promote healthy discourse.” A 2009 graduate suggested that the classroom created a unique context for this type of discourse: “It was a great exercise to see the pros and cons of each point of view, and it was helpful to do it in a ‘safe’ environment.”

Students also stated that the experience also added to their economic learning. One student (class of 2004) suggested that the debate motivated her to learn the economic content:

My competitive nature fueled me to research my topic diligently and enthusiastically. It also taught me the importance of well thought out responses and topics to be sure I covered, as I only had a short amount of time to relay the importance of my position. I remember that experience more than I remember other projects in high school. I also remember I won.

A 2006 graduate reported,

It definitely was helpful in getting me to consider both sides and gave me a more comprehensive understanding of the issue. When I was in college and discussing the minimum wage in other classes, this experience helped me to engage in a deeper way.

A 2007 graduate who went on to graduate from Harvard with a degree in economics said, “For me at least, it is probably one of the most memorable classroom exercises from high school.”

The qualitative reflections provided in this article suggest that structured classroom debate can be an effective instructional strategy. However, more research is needed. As such, the author recommends additional research using empirical research methods to test the effectiveness of classroom debate on student learning.

Discussion

Classroom debate can be an effective way to engage students with economic content and give them an opportunity to practice critical thinking and higher level thinking skills. These skills are increasingly important in a world where information is readily available, but citizens are called on to think critically to identify bias. Furthermore, classroom debate gives insight into how politics and economics often get intertwined in ways that can be hard to disentangle. Finally, the debate gives students an appreciation for the complexity of economic arguments. Students realize that economic issues often involve at least two well-reasoned perspectives and that there is not a simple correct or incorrect answer. This can help students develop skills that are much needed in today's world—the ability to think critically, identify bias, evaluate an argument, and craft a response.

Classroom debate can also help students build reasoning and speaking skills that translate well to college and the workplace. A structured classroom debate gives instructors the opportunity to address these skills directly and demonstrate key components if needed. In this situation, students will often stand and state a fact from a notecard, but not give it the context necessary to formulate an argument. For example, a student might stand and say, “The minimum wage creates a surplus of workers” because they saw that fact in a textbook. These students, especially those without prior debate experience, often need to be coached to provide context for the audience and then use the fact as an opportunity to argue a position. Suggest they try something like,

raising the minimum wage above the equilibrium wage will result in a greater quantity labor hours supplied by workers due to the higher wage, but a smaller quantity of labor hours demanded by firms. This will result in a surplus of labor hours. This means that some workers will not be able to find jobs. In my opinion a low-paying job is better than no job at all. As a result, the minimum wage hurts people who want to work and should not be increased.

Tell the students that their goal is to “connect the dots” for the listener—give the listener the context they need to understand the topic, then connect the fact to either support for or opposition to the minimum wage. Remind students that their job is to persuade the listener to accept their position.

It is also important to lay down some debate ground rules. For example, remind students to keep the focus on the issue and not on specific people—this is not personal. For example, ask students to use a fictitious person—for example, “Suppose Mr. X dropped out of high school”—rather than real person—for example, “my mother dropped out of high school.” This will result in a more general response from the other side: for example, “Mr. X needs jobs skills to be employable,” rather than, “your mother needs jobs skills to be employable.”

Specifically, a classroom debate on the minimum wage allows students to apply some of the content they have learned in their economics courses. For example, simple supply and demand graphs might seem esoteric, but when students are confronted with a debate, students often find themselves in a situation where they must explain how raising the minimum wage above the equilibrium wage results in a situation in which the quantity supplied is greater than the quantity demanded. Or they might explain how there are actually several labor markets in the economy and, when people increase their human capital through education, training, and experience, they actually move out of the low-skilled labor pool and compete for jobs with higher wages. Students might also use some macroeconomic principles such as explaining the differences in the

unemployment rate based on level of education, how inflation diminishes the purchasing power of wages over time, or how using means-tested programs such as food stamps or the earned income tax credit might be more effective for reducing poverty than raising the minimum wage. Given the complexity of this issue, instructors will often find themselves referring to content that arose during the minimum wage debate as they teach the remainder of their economics course.

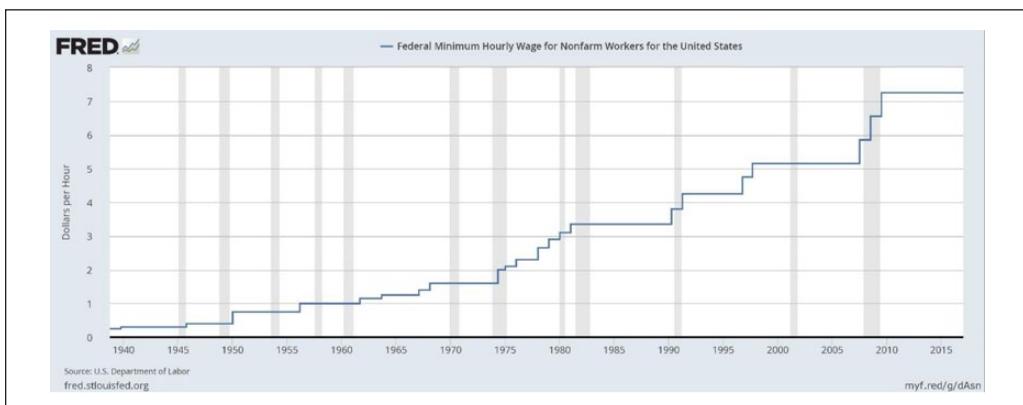
Limitations and Considerations

The classroom debate is only as effective as the preparation of students. If students have not read the arguments or have not created notecards, they cannot critically assess an argument or articulate a response; in this case, the debate can result in feeble arguing rather than academic, reasoned debate. As such, it is necessary to lay the groundwork and create incentives so that students spend the necessary time preparing. In addition, it is crucial for the instructor to play a role in the proceedings—for example, at times a class can become stuck on one topic or be dominated by one person. It is important that the moderator panel be given the opportunity to take the lead in the activity, but the instructor should stand ready to intervene to keep things moving along.

Conclusion

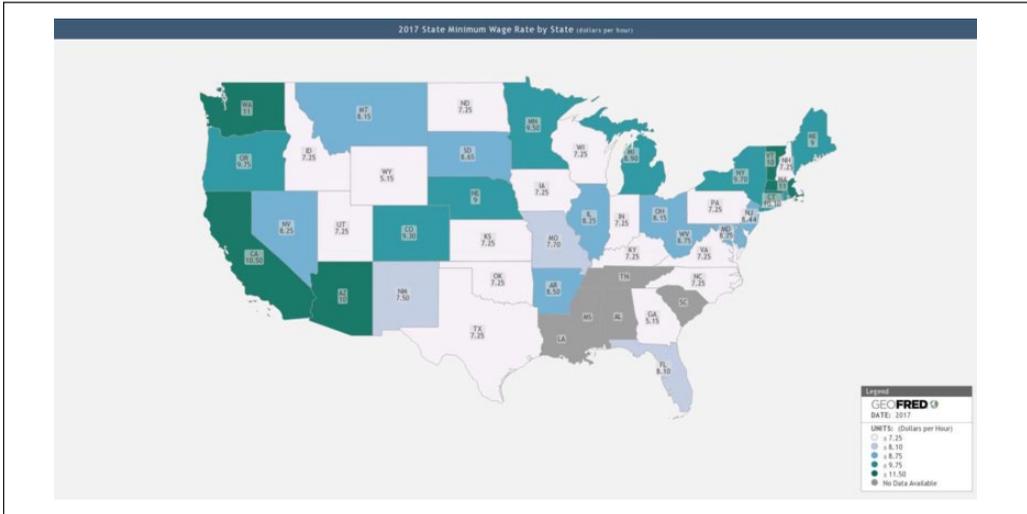
Education reformers are increasingly asking educators to teach critical thinking and media literacy. In addition, active-learning methods have been shown to increase student motivation and retention. As such, classroom debate encourages students to develop skills that are often lacking in the college curriculum. Classroom debate is well suited to economics because most of the policy arguments have at least two well-reasoned positions. More specifically, the minimum wage is a topic that students tend to care deeply about because it speaks to issues of poverty, income inequality, discrimination, and the economic value of education, and many students in the college demographic earn minimum, or near-minimum, wage. As such, many will initially cheer the thought of a higher minimum wage. However, as students dig deeper into the content, they will realize the complexity of the policy. Instructors who use the minimum wage debate in their classrooms will find students applying the “economic way of thinking” to issues they are passionate about as well as topics that are at the core of the curriculum (labor markets, supply and demand, inflation, unemployment).

Appendix A



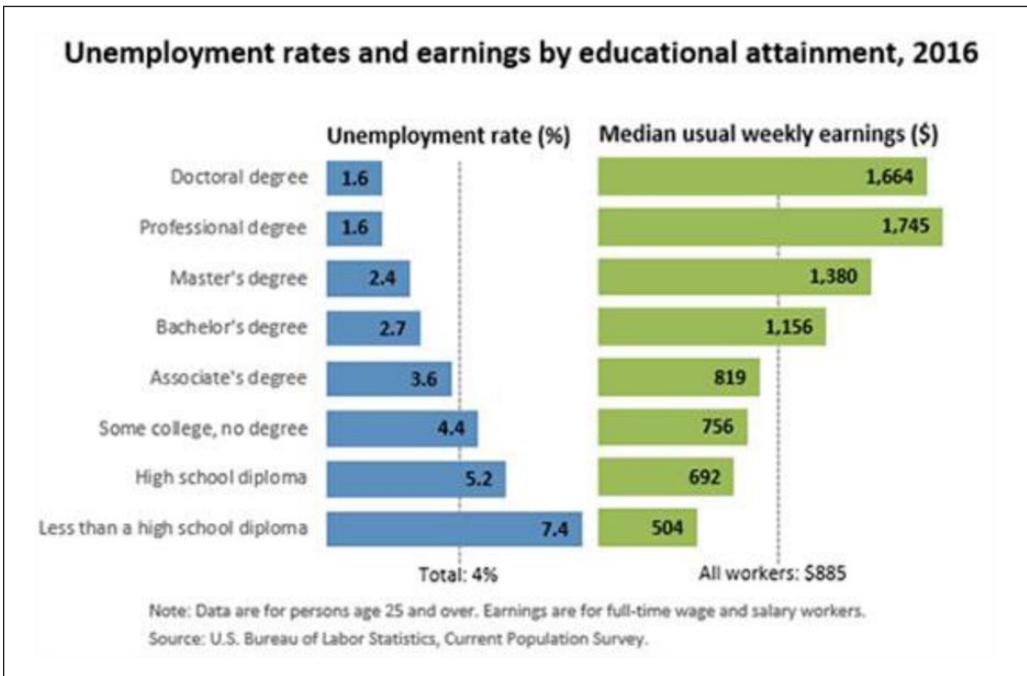
Source. Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Federal Reserve Economic Data (FRED®; <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/graph/?g=cAbi>).

Appendix B



Source. Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Federal Reserve Economic Data (GeoFRED®; <http://geofred/m/4Mu>).

Appendix C



Source. Bureau of Labor Statistics (https://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_chart_001.htm).

Appendix D



Source. FRED®, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis (<https://fred.stlouisfed.org/graph/?g=dtMk>).

Every few years or so, Congress revisits the federal minimum wage. While most of the discussion is about the nominal wage, the *real* purchasing power of the minimum wage has some interesting trends of its own. The graph above features the nominal minimum wage (green line), and the minimum wage adjusted for the price level (blue line). The green line tends to rise in steps, due to Congress’s periodic decisions to raise the minimum wage. But because the wage is not indexed to inflation, occasional increases in the minimum wage tend to be eroded by subsequent increases in the price level. We can see this in the zigzag pattern of the blue line. In fact, although the nominal minimum wage is at a historical high, the *real* minimum wage today is the same as what it was in 2008, 2000, 1997, 1993, 1987, and 1951.

Source. Text adapted from “The Real Minimum Wage” on The FRED® Blog (<https://fredblog.stlouisfed.org/2015/07/the-real-minimum-wage/>)

Appendix E

Reflection Assignment

What was the strongest argument proposed by those who supported the minimum wage?

What was the strongest argument proposed by those who opposed the minimum wage?

Did the debate experience change or reinforce your views on the minimum wage? Explain.

Explain your personal view on the minimum wage using relevant reasons and research from the debate. Your personal view does not have to be the view you argued during the debate.

Identify one significant thing you learned about the “other side’s” position on the minimum wage as a result of this debate that helps you to understand that side’s perspective.

Appendix F

Classroom Debate—The Minimum Wage

Debate Topic: “The minimum wage should be increased to US\$15 per hour.”

Students are divided into three groups:

1. Pro-minimum wage—argue for raising the minimum wage.
2. Anti-minimum wage—argue against raising the minimum wage.
3. Undecided—ask debate questions. At the conclusion of the debate, the undecided panel will cast anonymous votes to determine which side had the stronger arguments.

GRADE: Each student must have notecards prepared for the debate. Notecards must have relevant information and facts that will assist you in the debate. Students on the undecided panel must have questions prepared on notecards. Student must have verbal participation in the debate, sharing relevant information, to earn participation points. All members of the winning side will receive 5 extra credit points.

Name: _____

Group (circle one): pro-minimum wage anti-minimum wage undecided

Notecard Information	Excellent (15)	Good (12)	Acceptable (10)	Poor (5)
Participation	Excellent (15)	Good (12)	Acceptable (10)	Poor(5)
Reaction Essay	Excellent (15)	Good (12)	Acceptable (10)	Poor (5)
Total	_____ / 45			

Suggested Teaching Resources

Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2017). *Characteristics of minimum wage workers, 2016* (BLS Report 1067).

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Author's Note

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