

Implementing Topic-Driven Courses in Principles Economics

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Abstract- Selecting economic content to cover and effectively applying best teaching strategies are common challenges faced in principles of economics courses. We present a topic-driven course structure to lower the cost of applying evidence-based pedagogy while also helping teachers in content selection. We use the principles of backwards design to suggest teachers start by determining a topic—a social issue or question—then select economic content to apply to understand and analyze it. This is paired with a flexible course design that emphasizes skills-based learning objectives, low-cost project-based assessments, and modular units on selected topics. We discuss how Google Slides can help organize the course to benefit students while also increasing the shareability between teachers of lesson plans to greatly reduce the cost of implementing best-teaching practices in principles of economics courses.

1. Introduction

Deciding what economic concepts to cover can be hard, especially in principles courses where the entire field is fair game. Finding relevant, current and engaging examples to highlight them only increases the challenge. Perhaps this is because we are going about it the wrong way and should, instead, start by identifying important real-world issues then determining what economic

concepts can be used to better understand them. This topic-driven course design helps demonstrate to students how we can benefit from viewing the world through the economic lens while also addressing the pressing and important issues around us.

In this paper, we describe the topic-driven course design and show how it can be used to ensure survey courses cover relevant and practical material and, importantly, place the reason for learning them at the center of student awareness. Importantly, this topic-driven course design builds in many best-teaching practices that traditional “chalk-talk-test”—classes that rely heavily on lectures and exams—lack to provide a low-cost way to implement evidence-based pedagogy into the principles classroom. Geoffe and Kauper (2014) conducted a survey of principles classes and found nearly two thirds rely predominantly on lectures—with those using lectures reasons being evenly split between believing lectures are most effective and the other half believing them to be cost-effective. Walstad and Miller (2016) find 98% of principles classes rely on exams—accounting for 65% of student grades on average—despite the fact that they are often disliked by students and faculty alike. Exams incentivize students to employ surface-learning approaches, such as cramming (Scouller 1998), which has been shown to reduce learning retention (McIntyre and Munson 2008). Thus, we present a flexible, low-cost alternative course design that emphasizes skills-based learning objectives, project-based assessments, and modular units as an alternative.

We discuss the benefits and costs of this topic-driven course for both students and teachers compared to traditional teaching methods using a Principles of Microeconomics course as a case study. We show how Google Slides can be used effectively to organize the class, building an outline along the way that serves as a study-guide at the end of the semester. Importantly, this software also can help foster collaboration between teachers to promote the creation and

use of open educational resources and strengthen our teaching community and lower costs of implementing best teaching practices further.

The combination of the modular topic-driven class and use of Google Slides results in a flexible course that can quickly respond to current events and grow over time. We show how being able to reference pre-existing lectures on economic concepts using hyperlinks within Google Slides along with a project-based assessment structure allows for quickly creating lessons that address events as they happen and encourage students to apply economics to real-world issues. For instance, in the previous two years the most successful topics have been on a major ongoing issue that began during the semester (Texas Power Crisis in Spring 2021 and the War in Ukraine in Spring 2022). Faculty course questionnaires suggested these were highly popular because it made economics feel more relevant by adding to news they were already following. The topic-driven course described in this study helps reinforce the fact that economics can be applied to anything and helps us understand the world around us, which increased student engagement. While the focus of this paper discusses principles of economics courses, much of the discussion is directly applicable for other courses within and outside the field of economics. For instance, upper-level electives still cover a field/area far too vast to be captured in a single course.

2. Topic Driven Structure

The topic-driven structure we propose builds in principles of active learning and other best teaching practices. It is intended to be relatively easy to implement and flexible enough to be adjusted based on different teacher and class needs. We do not claim it is costless to redesign a class, far from it. However, most of those costs are fixed—such as learning how to apply best teaching pedagogy and changing the way content is organized. We will discuss methods for

reducing these costs in the following section, after we describe the topic-driven structure and its benefits. The topic-driven structure is designed to be a modular approach to teaching with a focus on skills-based learning objectives and class-content that is applied to important real-world topics. We start by discussing the backward design framework, which we use to organize the course to align content and assessments to best meet the goals of the course.

Backward Design

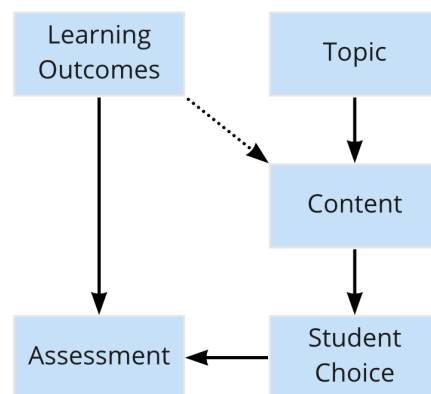
Wiggins and McTighe presented the backward design framework for course design in their seminal 1998 book *Understanding by Design* and has gained widespread usage since. Their logical structure of course design of starting by identifying the desired learning outcomes, determining how to assess them, and then designing lesson plans is ‘backward’ from common approaches teachers use of starting with content. This process helps ensure the class is designed so material, content, and assessments are aligned to best achieve the important goals of the course. We employ this strategy at the course-level by selecting learning outcomes to design assessments and the topic-level to determine content to cover.

We build in backward design principles at the course-level by initially identifying core skills-based learning outcomes that become the core grading criteria for the project-based assignments of the course. We suggest using a consistent rubric throughout the course to repeatedly emphasize and test these skills—the repetition with detailed feedback throughout the course helps students grow these core skills. Teachers have options when choosing the skills they wish to emphasize in the class, but it is essential they are broad and flexible enough to be applicable to a wide range of content. We discuss the benefits and motivations for using this skills-based learning objectives and assignment structure in more detail in the next section.

Backward design is also applied to content selection, though with slightly different specifics than traditional approaches, so as to build in flexibility and allow for additional student choice throughout the semester. While the broadly applicable skills being assessed may have some impact on content, what is covered in a topic-driven course is largely determined by chosen topics. Along the lines of the backward design, we suggest starting with what is important—in this case, the social issue or question to be answered—then determining economics content to apply to better understand it.

Starting with the important, useful, and/or interesting topic of study helps narrow down what to cover in a principles course. The daunting challenge of what to cover in the ever widening scope of economics can be paired down by identifying the context that concepts are going to be applied in. Rather than constantly working to find new and relevant examples to make content relatable, start with the examples. This also reinforces the idea that economics can be applied to understand the world around us, every important issue of the world today can be better understood by viewing it through the economic lens. Figure 1 provides a visual of the backward design framework we use and we discuss the specifics in the following sections.

Figure 1 - Backward Design Model for Topic-Driven Course



Skills-Based Learning Objectives

While economic content is an integral part of principles courses, it may not be the most important focus— weird as that may sound at first. A central feature of the proposed topic-driven course is that it emphasizes building real-world skills with assessments designed to reinforce and test for them. I like to think of it as the economic content provides context for the course, but the skills are the main goal of it, which is consistent with industry demand. There has been a rising interest in skills-based hiring (Fuller, Langer and Sigelman 2022), which while it is often discussed as an alternative to requiring a college degree, also emphasizes the importance of soft skills—such as communication and critical thinking—in the workforce. Using data from Sweden, Edin et al. 2022 find labor market returns to leadership and teamwork skills nearly doubled between 1992 to 2013 while returns on hard skills declined slightly. Nagel et al. 2020 discuss the growing dissatisfaction of college graduates skills such as problem solving and critical thinking, further indicating the demand for building skills in our classes.

An essential feature of focussing on skills rather than content, is it provides flexibility in terms of topic selection and related economic concepts and models. So long as the skills are general, it gives teachers the freedom to focus on the most current, interesting, and important topics without worrying about needing to fit them to predetermined content—such as the early chapters of a given textbook. While some content is essential in a principles course—it would be difficult to imagine principles of microeconomics without marginal analysis—most content is rather discretionary. It may be beneficial to talk within a department to determine what core concepts are essential for future courses, but most faculty I have talked to often emphasize a lack of skills being a limiting factor in upper-level electives rather than a lack of specific content knowledge.

Selecting skills is not trivial and the skills one teacher chooses to emphasize may not be ideal for others. It can and should depend on teaching style, student body, and what teachers find valuable. Below are a list of the skills I am currently using in my Principles of Microeconomics course that can be used as an example, but are not suggested as ideal:

1. Build economic modeling skills—including selecting, applying, and analyzing appropriate models to understand real-world problems.
2. Improve critical thinking skills to analyze problems in a logical and consistent framework.
3. Creatively apply economic concepts to new situations and contexts.
4. Improve communication to clearly demonstrate understanding in written, verbal, and visual formats.

Assessment

We use a three project-based assessment with a consistent structure that requires demonstrating each of the selected skills to be successful and use a single point rubric, as described in Fluckiger (2010), to provide flexibility to allow for ease of changing prompts across semesters. Consistent nature of the assignment and grading criteria encourage growth of desired skills while testing for different content understanding throughout the semester. Each project includes a powerpoint—or Google Slides—presentation and 2-3 minute *maximum* video presentation where students apply at least three economic concepts and models to a topic or prompt. These are intended to be short assignments that require students to pack in a lot of detail and understanding to fully demonstrate the skill-based learning objectives.

We employ a scaffolded structure where the first project prompt has very specific detail about the models and content that should be included. The second project provides choices of a few prompts with suggestions for possible models and content that may be useful. The third prompt is open and merely asks students to apply at least three economic concepts—two that were

covered in class and one that we did not cover—to a topic of their choice that we did not cover this semester. Succeeding on the final project requires being able to successfully apply concepts and models to novel situations, in other words to do economics!

Assessing skills is undoubtedly difficult and necessarily brings in more subjectivity to assessment. While this is a cost and effort can and should be made to reduce potential causes of bias, the benefits in terms of student learning may outweigh the cost. This is particularly true when you consider that objective assessments like exams have known biases built, such as through differences in test anxiety, that often disproportionately disadvantage women and minorities (Kadar 2016, Harris et al. 2019). The costs of subjectivity and difficulty in assigning grades should also be balanced against the gains in learning, which may be substantial given the detailed feedback provided in the form of the single point rubric we detail below. Feedback has been shown to be essential for gaining the most from active learning exercises (Freitas 2022) and is particularly important for growth on creative tasks (Schinske and Tanner 2014).

A single point rubric reduces complexity of creating rubrics, which can be time consuming, by identifying core areas and setting a brief description of the standard that is to be met. Feedback is then given for each category for areas for improvement as well as giving credit when students exceed the expected criteria. Rather than just deducting points, this gives students positive feedback on areas where they are showing good promise to further help them improve. While assignment details can go into more specifics about what teachers are looking for in each section, the open nature of the rubric allows for students to creatively show an understanding in different ways and allows for open prompts such as the final project. The rubric also can be used for peer-review purposes, where students can help their peers improve while also asking them to think deeply and critically about the assignment in order to evaluate their peers' work.

Figure 2 - Single Point Grading Rubric

Concerns	Category and Description	Accolades
Areas for Improvement	Standards / Goals / Expectations	Exceeding Expectations
	Modeling- Select and apply appropriate economic models. Your models should be explained simply, but with enough detail for it to be helpful in understanding and analyzing the topic / prompt.	
	Analysis- Apply consistent and logical reasoning as you address the topic / prompt. Lay out a convincing chain of analysis, with key parts supported by theory and/or empirical evidence.	
	Economics terminology- Include and define appropriate concepts to demonstrate a deep understanding. Be sure to explain how/why they apply to the question(s) being analyzed.	
	Clarity- Clearly communicate ideas verbally, written, and visually while fully completing all project requirements. Be sure to include appropriate visuals to effectively help your audience understand material you present.	

Assigning final grades from the above rubric, should you choose to do so, may be difficult due to its subjective nature. In a working paper I along with undergraduate researchers make the case for reducing our emphasis on grades—known as ungrading—in an effort to improve learning and student motivation (Montanio et al. working paper). There is growing evidence that even giving a grade reduces the effectiveness of feedback (Brookhart 2017) and that feedback without grades on assignments increases both motivation and performance compared to when grades are provided alone or with feedback (Koenka et al. 2021). That said, ungrading is not a necessary feature of the topic-driven course design. It is just another method to consider particularly if the subjectivity of the grading is prohibitive. Further research and optimization with regards to grades in the topic-driven course is an area that requires further thought and investigation.

Topic Selection

Economics is a mindset that can be applied to better understand the world around us, which means that the topics teachers can choose to cover is near infinite. A topic is any question, scenario, social issue, news wave, etc. that teachers use to link together economic content. This structure helps demonstrate how economics can be useful to understanding real-world issues. Ideally, topics should be chosen based on some combination of importance, relevance, and interest—to students and faculty alike. The goal is to find something that is engaging to hold student interest while also being something students benefit from learning more about.

From my experience, the popular topics tend to be major ongoing events. In Spring 2021, the most popular unit was about the ongoing Texas Power Crisis that connected concepts of market-structure, government regulation, and resiliency. In Spring 2022 the unit on the War in Ukraine was by far the highlight of the semester, where we covered supply and demand shifts of oil, game theory, and applied assumptions of economic agents to Putin. The discussion of if

Putin's actions were rational was one of the most engaging of the semester and allowed us to delve deeper into objectives of economic agents in the process.

Anything you can relate at least 3 economic concepts to is fair game. It is usually helpful for the teacher to choose topics they find engaging so they can bring enthusiasm and interest to the subject matter. Deep expertise is not necessary so long as you approach the topic with humility and make it clear you are seeking answers as a class. In our complex world, it is perfectly ok not to come to a definitive answers. In fact, the best discussions are usually those where there are no clear and obvious answers. Teachers should always work to represent different sides of arguments fairly and with empathy, particularly when topics touch on sensitive issues such as politics, religion, race, and gender. There are increased risks when dealing with sensitive subject matter and it is up to each individual teacher to determine what they are comfortable in leading a discussion on. That said, many of the most important issues of today deal directly with uncomfortable subject matter and there can be great benefits in including them in a course.

Content Structure

Content is determined by what is useful to understanding the topic, which provides a way to narrow down the vast amounts of possible content that could be covered in a principles course. As discussed in the backward design section above, starting with topics that are important ensures that all the economic content covered throughout the semester has clear and obvious connections to why it is important to understand. It prevents students from wondering "why would I ever need to learn this?" Content should be covered in short readings, exercises and/or lectures that cover just enough of the economic concepts and models to apply to the topic being covered. Keeping content in small and easy to digest chunks—under 15 minutes is a good rule of thumb—helps students stay focussed and engaged. The goal is to provide a baseline to prepare students for class discussions where they will be applying it to build a deeper understanding.

Often the content can be provided outside the classroom leaving class time devoted to active learning. This is consistent with the flipped classroom (Balaban, Gilleskie, and Tran 2016) and just-in-time teaching (Simkins and Maier 2004), both of which have been shown to improve engagement and performance in principles of economics courses. They can rely heavily on already established open educational resources (OER) to save instructors time. Sites like Kahn Academy and Investopedia, to name just a few, provide high quality introductions on much of the content teachers may want to cover in a semester. There is no need to redesign the wheel by spending time and energy developing content instruction if there is already existing material out there. If a stigma exists for faculty using existing resources, that is something we may need to address at a personal level and as a field—because there shouldn't be!

This process also helps determine the depth you go into the content. After you have chosen what economic concepts are important to help understand the topic of interest, next determine how much students need to know about them in order to apply them. It may be that some standard models and methods may be unnecessary to using the concept effectively—and therefore should be skipped. This may dramatically shift content away from what is traditionally presented in textbooks or what teachers are used to covering, which may be uncomfortable. But again, we are thinking backward from what is the purpose of learning this concept, which is to apply it to understand the important topic we are addressing.

Often, material can and should be added to previous concepts. When more detailed models and methods become useful to understanding another topic, use them! Not only does this build repetition in the basic concept, it also demonstrates the modeling process—building in complexity as needed to better understand the question at hand. The key is still to cover only as much as is useful at any given point.

Math in principles courses- Math and how we use it in the principles setting is an area that could change drastically depending on the desired learning objectives and topics selected when applying this topic-driven course structure and provides a good example of how to apply the approach. For any given topic and corresponding content, teachers using this method would need to think critically about what math—and how much—is necessary to understand the topic.

When considering how much math is appropriate, it is important to note that math provides a convenient way to objectively test students. Math problems usually have one correct answer and standardized steps to get to it. This may play a disproportionate role in explaining why math is so prevalent in economics classrooms though, we would argue, it is not a sufficient reason for doing so. This is particularly true if what is being assessed is not actually related to economic understanding—students who can calculate the area of a triangle between demand and price, but who cannot describe what consumer surplus has not demonstrated economic mastery.

The heavy reliance on math can and should be questioned, particularly as it may impede the understanding of the economic concepts it is intended to illuminate. Does the calculation for elasticity help students understand responsiveness to price changes or is it just a complicated formula for them to get lost in? How often will students need to calculate the equilibrium when applying concepts of supply and demand to real-world situations? These questions are important because mathematical ability is an all-too-common stumbling block for many students. Additionally, there is well known math achievement gap based on race (e.g. Kuhfeld, Gershoff, and Paschall 2018) and a strong connection between socioeconomic status and math ability that is only growing since the COVID pandemic (Bailey et al. 2021), indicating there may be equity benefits of reducing our reliance on math in principles classes.

This is not to say that math should be removed, or even necessarily reduced, in principles classes. Rather, if it is included, it should be for the right reasons—to gain a deeper understanding of economics and how it can be used to understand the world around us.

Student Choice

A central feature that is built into the topic-driven class is student choice. Class surveys throughout the semester can help determine which topics to cover and students get to more input on the topics and content they cover in projects as the semester progresses. The first project entails some choice as to a personal decision they want to apply marginal analysis to, the second project gives them a choice of prompts and requires them to identify what concepts to apply to it, and the third prompt is entirely up to them. This encourages—perhaps forces—students to apply concepts to questions and events that they find personally engaging and interesting. Student choice also helps build intrinsic motivation, which has long been shown to increase engagement and learning in children (Cordova and Lepper 1996) and in a meta analysis of 41 studies on children and adults, Patall Cooper and Robinson (2008) find choice increases intrinsic motivation, effort, and task performance.

Beyond increasing motivation, providing choice also builds in the application skills to take concepts learned in the classroom and use them in the real world. Knowledge of content that is only applied within a class has little to no practical value unless it can be generalized to other contexts. The topic-driven structure and scaffolded projects described help guide students towards being able to apply economics to their daily lives to increase its usefulness and practicality. This may increase interest in the field while also helping to solidify a deeper understanding of content presented in the class.

Employing Google Workspace

While not a necessary feature of a topic-driven course, the applications in the Google Workspace complement the course design and are particularly useful for sharing and collaboration between faculty, which we discuss later in the Public Goods section to help lower the cost of teaching better. Within the class it has many benefits to make accessing information easier for students and faculty while providing a platform for collaboration. Some students may resent having information and in multiple places—rather than just being able to rely on the school's learning management software like Blackboard or Canvas— but this is a small cost relative to the gains and learning to use Google Workspace is a valuable skill itself.

Google Slides has the benefit of being able to be opened using a hyperlink. As content will often be referenced throughout the semester, it helps put it right at the hands of students to easily access it. It is easy for teachers to incorporate previous slides when a topic draws on, or builds on, content from a previous unit. Hyperlink capability also helps with organization. It makes it easy to have a course outline (Figure 3) that provides a one-stop-shop for topics, content, and assignments along with upcoming due dates. Anytime in the semester, students can quickly jump to content and discussions that they want to reflect on.

Figure 3 Course Outline Example

Week	Topics	Content	Assignments
1 1/18-1/23	T1. Class Structure	What is Economics? Models	
2 1/24-1/30	T1. Class Structure T2. Productivity and Study Skills	Opportunity Cost Productivity	HW2
3 1/31-2/6	T2. Productivity and Study Skills	Marginal Analysis	HW3

Content and topic slides are also easy to update—without the need to re-upload documents to learning management software when you need to make corrections or input information from discussions. This can be particularly useful when you want to ‘hide’ information that would give away answers to discussion prompts, but will later want students to access the information.

The nature of the topic-driven course is that content may change from year to year, which creates many small content-specific slide decks. Google makes it easy to find content when stored in Google Drive because, well, it’s Google—search engines are kind of what they are known for. While it takes time and energy to transfer content over to the Google Slides, once it is there it is easy to find across classes and years. This makes content readily available to be applied to the most current events that cross teachers’ news feeds.

Benefits and Cost Savings

The topic-driven course proposes large changes from the traditional class many are used to teaching. While we discussed many benefits to students in doing so, it may be difficult to convince teachers to make a change without addressing the costs of doing so. Redesigning a

class can have large upfront costs, but there are some long-term cost savings to the topic-driven course that should be considered as well.

Low Cost Assessments

The open and flexible nature of the project-based assignments has some large—and, perhaps, underappreciated—cost savings in terms of assessment creation and maintenance. Traditional classes that rely on exams require teachers to spend time and energy creating a large number of test questions that are ever changing to prevent cheating. Additionally, most teachers often curate practice problems to help prepare students for their tests. While much of this work can be done before the semester when the opportunity cost of time may be low, it does represent a large time investment. This is particularly true if test questions are designed to measure deep learning, which is often more in alignment with course learning objectives.

Projects that all follow the same format with identical grading rubrics allow for project prompts to change across semesters with ease based on the selected topics being covered. There is no need to worry about changing established exam questions when a current event grabs your class' attention. At most, it just requires coming up with a new prompt for the second midterm project. Having an established first project with detailed instructions that is constant year to year and a final project that is entirely open-ended means that the second project prompts are the only questions that need to change. These only require a general question and a few pointers about what models, concepts, and methods to include, so they are often easy to come up with.

The suggested short length of projects makes them reasonably quick to provide feedback on and grade. While they will undoubtedly take more time than marking a multiple choice exam, they may take less time to grade than exams with short answer questions and far less time to grade than essays. While the subjective nature of the assignments do come with

challenges—most notably ensuring fairness in grading across students—the varied topics and methods greatly reduces the monotony of grading. The mental cost of grading is not something we should discount and having assignments where there is a good chance your students will teach you something new is a benefit you will not find in tests.

This topic-driven structure also provides opportunities to shift some of the grading responsibility to students through peer evaluations. The last week or two of class could be spent watching peer presentations and evaluating them based on the rubric they should be rather used to. This application of cooperative learning not only further reinforces concepts through review, it also builds valuable metacognition skills. Even if teachers are not comfortable having peer evaluations impact other students' grades, the freed up time—both preparation and the class time itself—can be spent by the teachers to grade. It's essentially built-in grading time at the end of the semester when opportunity cost of time is often highest.

Thinking on the Margin

A major hurdle of implementing best teaching practices is the daunting prospect of redesigning an entire course complete with the most up-to-date pedagogical practices. It is hard to find the time, energy, and willpower to even begin such an overhaul. However, this mental setback can be overcome by making incremental improvements—the way almost any major project is accomplished. The topic-driven structure can help by having discrete units that can be created and improved individually. For those who have an established class, a good starting point would be to create one topic to end the semester with. The projects also can be instituted into any class and the topic-driven lessons can be added over time.

This lets teachers dip their toes into best teaching practices while focussing on a topic they find particularly important and/or interesting. This lowers the mental cost of learning and applying

best teaching practices because it is devoted to an area of particular interest that teachers may be willing to invest additional time and energy to ensure it is learned deeply. It is much easier to design deep and well-structured discussions around a topic one cares about intimately as well.

Public Goods

The modular and self-contained structure of each topic also allows for ease of sharing lessons complete with content and best teaching practices already embedded. Google Slides makes it easy to transfer these seamlessly between faculty and is major benefit of migrating to the Google Workspace. Imagine the cost-savings of implementing best practices if there were a repository of lessons on a wide range of current topics. Much of this already exists in bits and pieces around the web, but there are large potential gains from synthesizing it into a coherent structure such as the topic-driven structure we describe here to reduce search and implementation costs. This can and should build on the wonderful OER resources currently available while making it more accessible to faculty by organizing it into stand alone modules.

A major benefit of sharing work is that students will be exposed to different perspectives and teaching styles. Rather than having an entire course through the bias of the primary instructor, students will benefit from faculty with different expertise, viewpoints, backgrounds, and identities. This may have particular gains in the realm of diversity, equity and inclusion as women and minorities typically report feeling lower levels of relevance and belonging after taking principles of economics courses (Bayer et al. 2020), which can be reduced by exposing students from more diverse economists. For instance, Porter and Serra 2020 found women are significantly more likely to take more economics courses and major in economics when they were exposed to successful women who graduated with an economics degree from their university. Resources like *Diversifying Economic Quality* (Bayer 2021) help teachers build

inclusive classrooms that represent diverse views, and the topic-driven course shared across faculty can further help ensure principles classrooms are as inclusive as possible.

Future Work

The topic-based structure can be used to provide easy-to-implement principles of economics courses, which provides a good starting point for teachers looking to adopt anything from an entire course to a single topic. The course structure makes use of many best teaching practices, providing a low-cost way to improve introductory economics courses. We hope the ease of sharing and modular nature will also entice teachers to create modules based on their interests and specializations then share them with our learning communities, further reducing costs of class preparation and increasing the quality of lessons.

So, how do we get there? It would not be very difficult nor time consuming to get to a point of having an entire OER class that teachers can implement right off the shelf. With minimal organization to ensure different topics and content are selected, ten teachers contributing a lesson would be able to create a best teaching practices packed course. Each would probably be able to make this contribution by adjusting already existing course material and methods they already rely upon at relatively low cost. If teachers are like me, they probably have favorite lessons, concepts, and activities that are the highlight of their class that could be easily molded to fit this topic-driven class structure.

Think about that, a minimum of 10 faculty devoted to perfecting their favorite unit—perhaps in less time than they typically devote to prepping a course—could create a top-notch shareable course. The more faculty that contribute, the better and more choice and flexibility teachers would have. With this course, it would be trivial to create a standardized evaluation to measure

student interest and self-reported learning from each topic. These data would represent a massive repository, relative to typical pedagogy studies that often contain data from a single instructor. The variability in topic selection and choices in how each instructor grades and implements their course could be used to further optimize the topic-driven course.

This paper is not intended to provide a silver bullet to perfect teaching in the principles classroom. Rather, it presents an alternative to chalk-talk-test methods that currently dominate that can be modified and improved upon to help improve how we teach economics. As this is a new approach, the topic-driven course is ripe for areas of improvement. Issues such as how to grade would benefit from having a wide range of teachers employing a similar class design and structure while varying assessment strategies. Empirically testing whether the structure can effectively reduce the cost of implementing best teaching practices is another area that would provide large benefits. Long term studies of improvements of skills, understanding of content, and major selection would be valuable as well to test effectiveness. We hope teachers will be open to discussing and, perhaps, trying this alternative method to further our understanding of how to employ best teaching practices to improve economics education.

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