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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lecture-Based Chalk &amp; Talk</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Active Learning Pedagogies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Instructor Centered&quot; Lessons</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>&quot;Student Centered&quot; Lessons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12/30/09
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
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Familiar</th>
<th>Experimented</th>
<th>Adopted</th>
<th>Most Beneficial</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Context Rich Problems</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just-In-Time Teaching</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quantitative Writing</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching with Cases</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cooperative Learning</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>23%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Classroom Experiments</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>34%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Computer Simulations</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal Response Systems</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>11%</td>
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<td>Guided Inquiry</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>11%</td>
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<td>1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Research</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<td>Service Learning</td>
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<td>Spreadsheets Across Curriculum</td>
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<td>Documented Problem Solving</td>
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<td>5%</td>
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<td>Media-based Teaching</td>
<td>45%</td>
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<td>14%</td>
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<td>Interactive Lecturers</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interdisciplinary Approaches</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>6%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Sources of Information on Alternative Teaching Methods**

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