

A USER FRIENDLY APPROACH TO TEACHING ECONOMICS

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ABSTRACT

I will be sharing my experience in using a supplement to a textbook I use in teaching the following courses: Principles of Macroeconomics (ECON 200), Principles of Microeconomics (ECON 201), and Economics (BSAD 300).

BACKGROUND

Economics is housed under the College of Business at The University of Findlay.

Students taking ECON 200 and/or ECON 201 may or may not be business majors. Some of the students are majors in the following areas: Education, Social Work, and Equestrian Studies. Though the majority are freshmen and sophomores, there are some upper classmen from time to time.

Students taking BSAD 300 are the adult off-campus students. BSAD 300 is offered either as “live” or online. The online version of BSAD 300 has been around for almost 4 years. These students are under the “degree completion program.” Students have finished 2 years of college work before entering the program.

THE TEXTBOOK

The required textbook for the 3 courses is [Economics by McConnell and Brue](#). The book is now on its 15th edition. McGraw-Hill is the publishing company. This has been a required text since I started teaching at The University of Findlay.

Undoubtedly, I had found the text to be excellent. However, my view is not the same as that of the students. It is not uncommon to hear students saying “reading an econ book is like reading something in an entirely foreign language.” Many students (along with some colleagues, too!) view Econ as difficult and boring. With such reputation of economics, there is no doubt it is very challenging to teach economics.

Over the years, I have developed some handouts. These handouts basically assist students in

understanding and deciphering the critical segments of relevant chapters.

THE SUPPLEMENT

In the early part of 1999, I started asking our McGraw-Hill rep about their custom publishing. After a full understanding of what custom publishing is all about, I then agreed to create the [Economics Notebook](#). In 1999, the first edition of the Economics Notebook was published.

The Economics Notebook became a required supplement to the textbook I am using in class. The Notebook contains syllabi for ECON 200 and ECON 201. It also contains most of the handouts I have developed through the years.

The Economics Notebook is now on its third edition. The edition changes along with the textbook. The Notebook was first published when the text was on its 14th edition.

Note that the Notebook is not a stand-alone material. Students will have a hard time answering the materials on the Notebook without the text.

- I hope to be able to pass some copies of the Notebook during the presentation.

THE BENEFITS

These are the benefits I have seen from using the Notebook as a supplement:

- Students come in more prepared because they have a guide to go by. They answer questions or exercises on the Notebook based on the text materials.
- Students are able to follow the lecture much better.
- The Notebook assists them in identifying the critical segments of relevant chapters.
- Students do not “lose” their handouts anymore.
- I do not have to carry hundreds of handouts anymore.

- Students have found the Notebook helpful in preparing for the test.
- Lecturing online is more manageable due to the use of the Notebook.
- Best of all, my overall evaluation has improved dramatically.

WHAT ON-CAMPUS STUDENTS SAY

These are comments from students regarding the Notebook:

- Very helpful
- Very explicit and explanatory
- It explains the material covered in the textbook in a way that is easy to understand
- Good, I've never had a teacher provide a NB and I like it.
- The notebook is a very good idea
- It is a reasonable collection of the main ideas and concepts. It is useful for exam and personal study
- Gives a good guide as to what we're doing
- Great, without the notebook I would be lost!
- It really helps bad note takers like myself
- Right to the point, easy to read, informative
- I'm glad we have it

WHAT ONLINE STUDENTS SAY

These are comments from my BSAD 300 online students:

- BSAD 300 was my first experience on the internet. Not knowing what to expect, I was pleasantly surprised at how smoothly the classes ran. I don't honestly know of anything I would change. Having the workbook to be able to follow along made the course so much easier. I wish the internet classes I am taking now had a workbook to accompany the text.
- I have taken classes at Davis-Besse, the Internet, Owens, and Fremont branches. I only have 3 classes remaining until I'm done. Your BSAD 300 Economics class was the best one I have taken. The text was clear and very understandable. Your class was well thought out and easy to follow with the specific instructions

you provided. Learning was structured so that the topics were covered and we had fun.

- I just wanted to drop you a line to say how much I enjoyed your class. I've taken several internet classes and yours was by far the most well prepared and organized. It was nice to take a class on the internet and not feel that you have missed out on anything that would have been offered in a traditional classroom. I think you did a great job in keeping the class interesting and moving forward. Once again, just wanted to thank you for your time and effort. Great job, it was a pleasure !!
- I enjoyed your class very much. Great format.

I do believe the Notebook has a lot to do with these very positive and heart-warming comments.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

My Econ classes on-campus are now web-based. The University of Findlay uses Blackboard. The server is in-house. Students and faculty must have a University of Findlay email account to access their classes via Blackboard.

On Blackboard, I am able to post some questions for students to answer ahead of time through the Discussion Board feature.

One of my on-campus classes (ECON 201) went 100% online this semester. The class is synchronous. This means we have a regular chat session and we do not meet "live" at all. The chat is conducted for 2 hours. Lectures are conducted during the chat session. We use the Economics Notebook during the lecture.

Another recent development is the e-book version of the Notebook. The custom publishing division of McGraw-Hill has constructed an e-book version. I have not used the e-book version but I will next school year.

The e-book allows me to delete chapters I do not use for certain classes. This will help decrease the cost to students.

On-campus, we now have more "smart" classrooms. I can pull up the economist.com during class time. This forces students to read some current economic events for the day. Or I can take them to bea.doc.gov and show them the most recent GDP.

For my online classes, I can do the same. Blackboard allows us to pull those websites and the students can view them during the chat session.

CONCLUSION

As instructors, our main objective is how to make students understand and appreciate our area of expertise. The challenge is how. To me, the answer is through the use of the Economics Notebook along with other teaching strategies.

Do you have some strategies you would like to share? Please do so as I would like to learn from others.