

Cool Websites and Other Technology Resources for Teaching about the United States Economy

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Technology is having a profound impact on teaching and learning at the K-12 level and in higher education. Many observers have studied its impact on education in general. Only a few, however, have tried to determine how electronic resources can be used effectively in the teaching of economics. This paper identifies some findings to date, highlighting exemplary resources for their potential to help teachers foster economic understanding in various courses or units of study across the social sciences.

Introduction

The basic postulate of economics can be stated simply: incentives matter. While this assumption is specifically identified with economics, it is also relevant to several areas within the social studies, including history, geography, psychology, anthropology, and sociology. It holds that in conducting their ordinary lives, all individuals make personal choices about which desires to fulfill, needs to address, projects to advance, issues to raise, and dreams to pursue. These choices are affected by a scarcity condition—resources, including time, are scarce—and the scarcity condition requires people to make decisions, choosing among alternatives. The need to choose leads, in turn, to an ongoing need to weigh benefits against costs for the options in question.

Social studies teachers need not have a strong formal background in economics to provide instruction informed by the

points that incentives matter and that scarcity requires people to make choices. They can find helpful instructional resources to support their efforts via education websites, websites for economists, video clips and audio files, email, discussion boards, and web logs (blogs). These resources make it relatively easy and cost-effective for non-economists to integrate aspects of economics into well-established social studies presentations, assignments, and projects.

The internet, in particular, can help instructors explore approaches to teaching economics in various social studies courses. It provides easy access to high quality materials, including primary sources and key data sets. The materials listed below indicate the range of possibilities.

Tools for Teaching Economics in History

History teachers will find the EH.Net

website to be a useful tool. EH.Net manages the Economic History Services website and maintains several professional mailing lists. It provides resources and promotes communication among academics specializing in economic history and other social science fields. It provides historical data and relatively current data. Access to this rich, easy-to-use database allows instructors and students to test various historical claims about, for example, changes in U.S. Real and Nominal GDP from 1790 to 2005, population trends from 1790 to 2005, price levels as measured by the GDP deflator from 1790 to 2005, the annualized inflation rate from 1775 to 2005, and the relative cost of unskilled labor from 1774 to 2004. It also provides calculators to help students determine the exchange rate of the U.S. dollar and the price of gold throughout time. It posts links to the U.S. Census data and other quantitative social science data. It provides access to articles, academic papers, discussions and book reviews on several American economic history topics. The Economic History Association, Business History Conference, Cliometric Society, Economic History Society, and History of Economics Society support EH.Net.

History teachers and other social stud-

ies teachers looking for primary and secondary sources might also consider the Library of Congress. Learning resources for instructors and students are plentiful and varied in type. Webcasts are available, but we advise instructors to preview materials before using them in the classroom because many were produced for non-instructional purposes.

Resources for Teaching the Economic Way of Thinking

Several media outlets provide resources for teaching young people how to think economically. The recent death of Professor Milton Friedman, a Nobel Prize-winning economist, has generated renewed interest in his contributions to economic education. Free to Choose Media and izzit.org are two great resources for Friedman's work.

Free To Choose Media offers various technology-laden learning materials, including webcasts, radio pieces, and television presentations by Friedman, showing how he applies the economic way of thinking to clarify human behavior in a variety of settings. His work is both comprehensible to students, and it is consistent with the best scholarly work in the discipline. It emphasizes the value of personal, economic, and political freedom sustained by the rule of law. Sample video and television clips are available.

[Izzit.org](http://izzit.org), a non-profit company, offers a wide variety of technology tools and electronic resources including educational DVDs, current events lessons, interactive games, contest information, and other items. Many of these materials would likely be of interest to professionals outside the circle of college instructors and social science educators. All materials are available at low or no cost. Interested educators are invited to accept izzit.org's offer to sign up and receive one educational DVD per year at no cost. Registration information is located at www.izzit.org/birthday/dvd_signup.php.

Interactive games and discussion questions that teach about the tragedy of the commons and other key economics lessons are also available.

Another internet resource for college and high school instructors is CommonSenseEconomics.com. This website and the accompanying Common Sense Economics (CSE) textbook provide instructional tools to help make teaching economics fun, easy, and exciting. These resources are available together or separately. They target the needs of teachers who may be interested in integrating economics content into various courses; some materials are designed specifically for Advanced Placement courses in microeconomics and macroeconomics. The CSE website and the relatively inexpensive textbook are rich in economic content. In addition, they are concise, reflective of common sense, and easy to use. The CSE website provides speedy electronic resource guidance, quality reading supplements, economic examples, and quick links to cool stuff. Compared to other textbook websites in economics, the Common Sense Economics website offers a substantially larger quantity of field-tested economics materials that focus on experience-based learning. All 20 Voluntary National Content Standards in economics published by the National Council on Economic Education are addressed. Most importantly, this website contains materials that will help instructors fashion exciting and informative courses regardless of field of study. Instructors interested in adopting Common Sense Economics may request a complimentary copy from St. Martin's Press. Details are provided at CommonSenseEconomics.com.

Resources for Economics and Social Studies

The National Council on Economic Education (NCEE) uses the MarcoPolo search system through EconEdLink.org, which provides internet-based economics and personal finance lessons. The NCEE resources are connected to MarcoPolo. NCEE also offers its own search system providing access to many valuable technology tools and hyperlinks enabling users to find, for example, specific ideas and materials helpful for creating and implementing professional development

workshops in economic education and economic history. Sample syllabi are also offered, along with internet-based activities, group assignments, and teaching tips for use in a variety of economics, history, geography, and other social science courses.

An even wider variety of technology tools and educational resources can be found at the MarcoPolo search system. MarcoPolo is supported by a non-profit consortium of international education organizations and the Verizon Foundation. For almost a decade, it has continued to expand and broaden its collection of standards-based, discipline-specific educational websites. For users interested in economics, MarcoPolo locates video files and lectures with economic content; it also finds relevant, downloadable worksheets, puzzles, and images. Through this search system, instructors can locate resources and tools useful for cross-disciplinary efforts to integrate economics content with various standard activities, assignments, and projects in political science, history, geography, philosophy, religion, languages, English, composition, social studies, science and math courses. College instructors interested in integrating economics within these content areas will discover a multitude of advanced materials for high school courses that can easily be modified for use by undergraduates in introductory college courses. We encourage college instructors and high school teachers to experiment with the dynamic MarcoPolo search system.

Social studies teachers often ask how disciplinary principles might be applied to the study of current affairs. Video clips and webcasts informed by disciplinary principles allow instructors to capture student attention and generate interest in economics. For example, ABC News recently released a new DVD series presenting 31 very short clips (usually four minutes) illustrating the point that incentives matter and explaining economic events of the past and present. Initially prepared for ABC's *20/20* series and various John Stossel television specials, these clips have been modified and

designed especially for classroom use. A manual for college instructors and a guide for high school teachers are available. Both high school and college versions of the Micro and Macro DVDs are available through ABC News.

Resources for Economists provides access to a wide range of economics concepts and applications. Sponsored by the American Economic Association, RFE.org lists 2,100 resources in 97 sections and sub-sections available on the internet, primarily addressing the needs of academic and professional economists teaching economics courses. RFE.org offers quick links to teaching and learning resources for instructors teaching standard economics principles and applications. It provides basic exercises on supply and demand, pure competitors versus natural monopolists, and fiscal versus monetary policies. Online textbooks in microeconomics and macroeconomics, study notes, interactive exercises, tutorials, economics glossaries, dictionaries, encyclope-

dias, economics news links, teaching resources and blogs are made available at no cost. These materials are used frequently by economics instructors and students; other social scientists also will find RFE.org to be a useful source for supplementary course materials. For all interested parties, RFE.org provides



direct links to the agencies or organizations responsible for collecting, processing, and releasing social science data. These data include the Gross Domestic Product, U.S. Census, employment and unemployment figures, inflation rates, demographic statistics and geography data released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Economagic.com provides U.S. economic data, graphing tools, and downloadable data in spreadsheets. To illustrate trends in data or relationships among economic variables, instructors can select data sets from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Federal Reserve System, the Census Bureau, the U.S.



Commerce Department and other U.S. agencies; they can identify key economic variables, click, and generate a chart. Many data series can be downloaded as Excel files, making it a straightforward task to gather and use economic data for student analysis and class projects. We encourage instructors to contact Economicmagic.com for full access to the site on a trial basis.

Finally, the Federal Reserve System (Fed) now hosts an interactive website, the Federal Reserve Education Portal. It is designed to educate and inform the general public on issues regarding money, banking, monetary policy, and financial services. Electronic quizzes, interviews with Fed presidents, downloadable Fed videos, diagrams, classroom guides and numerous educational resources are available. The Fed offers all of its websites, curricula, newsletters, booklets, and other educational resources at no cost.

Conclusion

Teachers and students can use technology in and outside the classroom to make connections to the past, the present, and the outside world in general. Websites, databases, spreadsheets, audio files, simulations and other electronic resources can even be stored in a computer's cache or on an MP3/video player, permitting students to learn at any time and from any setting—at school, at home, from a

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Today's students think, live and thrive outside the brick-and-mortar classrooms of yesteryear. Born when technology was hitting its stride, the vast majority of them grew up using personal computers, personal email, the World Wide Web, and the internet. Instant messaging, posting to discussion boards or blogs, and downloading audio files are increasing in popularity. We encourage instructors to tap into this technological lifestyle and use the resources it provides to meet and exceed essential learning objectives. Properly applied, technology can reduce the time needed to reach learning objectives, thus releasing resources for use on other educational goals—for example, to expand the scope of existing courses or deepen the study of selected topics. 🌐

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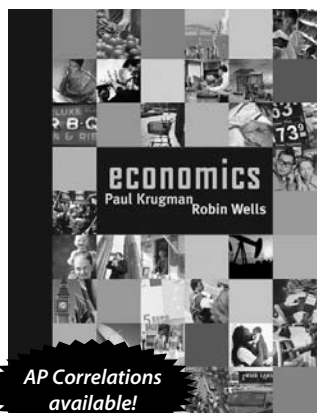
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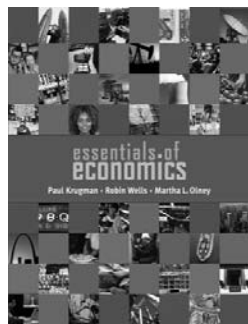
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