



The Production, Consumption and Distribution of Economic Podcasts

Kathy Swan, Mark Hofer, Gerry Swan, and Joan Mazur

Scarcity: An Introduction to Podcasting in Economics

Podcasting remains one of the hot “buzz words” in technology today—both in and out of schools. For high school economics teachers, there is a growing number of podcasts targeted for instruction on economics. For example, University of South Carolina business professor James Reese hosts *Radio Economics*, where renowned economists like Paul Krugman and Jeffrey Sachs discuss challenges in today’s global economy. Other podcasting sites can supplement teaching by providing commentary on current economic issues. Sites such as NPR’s *Market Place*, *The Economist* and the *Foundation on Economic Education* are all good resources for teachers trying to connect what are often abstract concepts to real life events.¹ While these podcasts can be useful resources for teachers trying to enhance students’ economic thinking, they are not produced specifically with the 6-12 audience in mind. In fact, as we wrote this article, we found only one podcasting site created specifically for the economics classroom.²

We see the dearth of economic podcasts for classroom use as a missed opportunity. Given the emphasis on connections to the real world and the fact that many economic concepts occur dynamically in real time, economics offers many opportunities for implementing instructional podcasting in engaging and effective ways. We suspect that the limited production of podcasting in economics is due primarily to two interconnected problems. First, teachers may not be aware of the full range of possible applications of podcasting. Additionally, even if they have a vision for student- or teacher- generated podcasts, teachers may not know how to begin the production process. For these reasons, we have

developed the *Econocast* website (www.econocast.org).

We envision this site as an evolving “clearinghouse” for diverse approaches to podcasting in the classroom with examples of innovative economics-oriented podcasts, and a means to host and share teacher- or student- generated podcasts. Economics teachers are able to request a free account and generate and host their podcasts. Users are able to configure and manage their accounts completely online with few technical skills required. We write this article as an invitation to readers to contribute their own projects and ideas to the site to help realize the potential for podcasts in 6-12 economics classrooms. Our hope is that

by providing these supports, educators can create podcasts and focus on what they do best—engage their students in meaningful, substantive and hands-on learning.

In the sections that follow, we describe the *Econocast* website design. The site is intentionally framed by concepts and principles from economics that provide descriptive scaffolds for producing, implementing, and archiving podcasts. For example, the tools needed to *produce* economics podcasts are termed *Factors of Production*. Full descriptions of the various *Econocast* features follow.

Factors of Production: The Tools Needed to Produce Economic Podcasts

In economics, we talk about the factors of production being land, labor, capital, and entrepreneurial ability. When podcasting in economics, we like to think of the following factors: the *tools*, the *pedagogy*, the *web-based capital*, and *teacher imagination*. While we touched on pedagogy in the section above, we focus on the other three factors within this section.

To begin, let’s discuss the *tools* necessary for podcasting. To create a podcast, you simply need to be able to record sound and perhaps edit

your recording. Capturing sound can be accomplished using a handheld digital audio recorder that can transfer the audio files to a computer, or by recording sound directly to the computer with an internal or external microphone. Once the audio is recorded, you can use a free audio editor like Audacity or Garage Band to edit a sound file or splice multiple sound or music files together. You then export the audio as an .mp3 file to share online. While the space for this article doesn't allow for a detailed description of the production process, those new to podcasting may visit the Podcasting page at Learninginhand.com for step-by-step instructions.

Often the biggest obstacle to podcasting is finding a ready-made space to host classroom creations—we call this *web-based capital*. Because of this difficulty, we developed the *Econocast* site to provide both a collection of economic podcasts for teachers to explore and as a dedicated space to enable teachers to create their own podcast sites. For those wanting to browse existing podcasting projects, simply click on the “Consumer” tab on the website. Finished products can be searched by teacher name or by keyword. Several projects are already hosted on the site. If you would like to view a finished *Econocast* project or use samples in your classroom, click “View” on any project displayed. A lock symbol means that it is password protected and you will need to write the teacher for permission to view the files. Available podcasts include a short description of the project, student podcasting samples, as well as ancillary materials used by the teacher.

Teachers wanting to produce their own podcasts can simply request a user id and password (directions are on the site). Once logged in, the teacher would click on the Create/Manage button.

From there, the teacher creates a title for the podcast and provides a brief description. By clicking on “Attach File to Project,” teachers can upload

any handouts provided to students, as well as the project's audio files. Here, teachers can also choose to password protect their podcast by clicking on the password check box.

Even with the proper tools, pedagogy, and capital, an imaginative spirit is required. A teacher's understanding of the economic concepts he or she is trying to teach and his or her ability to creatively pull together the other three factors of podcasting production are key to making this kind of project worthwhile. To assist grade 6-12 teachers in getting started, we have worked with several teachers to develop examples that work. These are by no means exhaustive, but rather a starting place for beginning podcasters.

Producers and Consumers of Podcasts: Three Classroom Applications

To explore approaches to podcasting in economics, we partnered with three social studies teachers to develop activities that would assist their students in thinking economically. All three teachers were working at public high schools in Lexington, Kentucky, teaching ninth-grade social studies classes that covered three disciplines over the course of the

school year: geography, civics, and economics. Like most teachers faced with this scope and sequence, the teachers struggled “to get it all in” and engage the students with economics material that can often be abstract. Each of the examples falls along the pedagogical continuum of Studycasts, Student Presentations, and iReports. We have abstracted their projects below, but please visit the *Econocast* website to listen to the student work and to read more about their podcasting experience.

Studycasts: Developing the Economics Vernacular

Ms. Hill developed an “iKnow Economics” activity in which students would review for the vocabulary portion of an upcoming exam by choosing a term from the unit and creating a two-minute podcast that made the concept more accessible. Ms. Hill provided the students a list of 20 terms including, “market economy,” “opportunity costs,” and “factors of production.” In pairs, students developed a script and created short audio-skits involving the assigned terms. Using the software Audacity on Ms. Hill's MacBook, the students recorded their podcasts and Ms. Hill uploaded those to the *Econocast* site

so students could listen to each other's podcast to review for the end-of-unit exam.

Student Presentation:
World Economic Reports

Mr. Sizemore had his students prepare an economic report on one of ten countries, such as Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, and Turkey. In groups of three, students used class time to research the chosen country, using the CIA World Factbook website, and gather information on the country's current economic position—including its Gross Domestic Product, Unemployment and Inflation rates, level of imports and exports, as well as its main trading partners. Mr. Sizemore required that the written report be read by all members of the group into an iMovie—he used his MacBook and taped over the camera so it would only capture the audio. Mr. Sizemore then created a podcasting page using *Econocast* and the students shared their podcasts in laptop learning stations.

i-Reports:
"Are We in a Recession?"

Ms. Call was interested in having students do economic fieldwork. Her students were tasked with investigating whether the national recessionary trends in 2008 were evident in their hometown of Lexington, Kentucky. The students began by selecting a person in the community to interview and then developing an interview protocol that focused on the person's impressions of the national economy, as well as the local one. Additionally, students asked questions about the economy's impact on the person's particular occupation or business—for example, "Is your business looking to hire new employees in the upcoming months?" "Based on your experience, do you think Lexington is in a recession?" Using their interview data, as well as in-class readings and discussion, students then worked in their groups to create a script from which they developed their i-Report—a journalistic report on the state of Lexington's economy. They took turns recording their podcasts using the software, Garageband, on Ms. Call's MacBook. Using *Econocast*, students accessed their classmates' reports for a culminating written assignment, "Is Lexington in a recession?"

All three teachers reported that their students predictably enjoyed working with the technology. All three said they were surprised that the students enjoyed the performance aspect of podcasting as well—students asked to re-record many times to capture the perfect podcast. All three teachers, however, seemed apologetic about the students' final projects, lamenting that they seemed more like rough drafts than final ones. In retrospect, the teachers would have allotted more time instructing students on oral presentation—specifically voice inflection, transitions, and additional sound effects. Another concern was the lack of equipment—while one laptop is sufficient to do this kind of project, the teachers felt that with additional equipment, the activities could have run more

efficiently. Even though more computers would certainly be ideal, all three teachers expressed enthusiasm for their individual projects and felt that their overall learning goals were met—namely, that students would become more active with the economics material. Ms. Call stated the following:

Students were engaged throughout the unit, which is a reason for me to stick with this project and refine/revamp as needed. I found that students asked more questions relating to current events and the economy, and would seek out information independently rather than just wait for me to *teach* it. From observing students' attitude and participation levels, I found that they took home a sense of ownership over their *Econocast* project. The work felt "real." It was a great way to apply terms/concepts taught in the economics unit of study to what the students are hearing (either directly or indirectly) about the United States 'state of the economy.'

The Market Place of Ideas: An Invitation for Collaboration

Educational researchers increasingly understand the interconnected nature of content, pedagogy and technology in the effective integration of technology. In essence, the more tightly connected these three domains of knowledge are, the more likely the technology will effectively support student learning.⁴ We see the range of pedagogies that support economics as having clear connections with podcasting. Our goal in developing the *Econocast* site is to minimize the technical barriers teachers may encounter so they may focus their valuable time and energy on connecting the content with the pedagogy. As the examples offered above illustrate, there are many creative ways to appropriate podcasting for the economics classroom.

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We recently were awarded a grant from the Calvin K. Kazanjian Economics Foundation to work with 13 ninth-grade social studies teachers in Kentucky to design and implement economics podcasting projects using the Econocast site. We extend an invitation to readers of this article to join those teachers in opening up new avenues for using podcasting to encourage students to think economically. We invite you to create an account on the site and share your work in the classroom. We look forward to seeing where you take the site in the future. 🌐

Notes

1. "Marketplace," National Public Radio, <http://marketplace.publicradio.org/>; *The Economist*, www.economist.com/; The Foundation for Economic Education, www.fee.org.
2. The Shanghai American School, <http://welkerswiki.nomics.com/students/> (accessed January 5, 2009).
3. P. Mishra and M.J. Koehler, "Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge: A New Framework for Teacher Knowledge," *Teachers College Record* 108, no. 6 (2006): 1017-1054.

KATHY SWAN is an assistant professor of social studies education at the University of Kentucky. She is the recipient of the National Technology Leadership Award in Social Studies Education in 2005, 2007, 2008 and 2009 and is the co-creator of the Historical Scene Investigation Project, Digital Docs in a Box and the Digital Directors Guild. She can be reached at kswan@uky.edu. **MARK HOFER** is an associate professor of educational technology in the School of Education at the College of William & Mary. He is the recipient of the National Technology Leadership Award in Social Studies Education in 2005, 2007 and 2009 and is the co-creator of the Historical Scene Investigation Project, Digital Docs in a Box and the Digital Directors Guild. He can be reached at mark.hofer@wm.edu. **GERRY SWAN** is an assistant professor of Instructional Systems Design. Dr. Swan's interests include the use of interactive media with instruction and computer managed instruction and research. His research looks at how online environments can be used in data collection and presentation to facilitate the use of best practices in educational environments. He can be reached at gswan@uky.edu. **JOAN MAZUR** is a professor in Instructional Systems Design/Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Kentucky. Dr. Mazur's current research interests focus on the design and use of emergent interactive media and visualization environments to support teaching, learning, curriculum design and teacher development in a variety of instructional contexts. She can be reached at joan.mazur@uky.edu.

We would like to gratefully acknowledge the contribution of the three teachers who so willingly collaborated with the *Econocast* project. Thank you Brent Sizemore, Christy Hill and Colleen Call!



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