

# Engagement, Empathy and Communication – Teaching Economics to Business Students

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# What issues can arise from teaching Economics to Business Students?

- ▶ Lower module evaluation scores and negative comments
    - ▶ “Why do I have to study economics?”
    - ▶ “Economics is boring”
  - ▶ Disengaged or disinterested students
  - ▶ Frustrated students and staff
  
  - ▶ Solutions?
    - ▶ Dumb it down – just teach a “light version”
    - ▶ Complaining and trying to hand over module to the next new member of staff
    - ▶ These “solutions” are often unsuccessful
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# Objectives of the presentation

- Identifying and understanding the sources of the issues
  - Suggesting interventions to mitigate the issues:
    - By recognising differences between economics and business students, it is possible to create an environment that facilitates empathy
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# Introducing the Tourist Analogy:

- Analogous to the emotions that business students may feel when studying economics is that of a tourist away from home
- There are different types of tourist
  - Different people with heterogeneous preferences and different characteristics
- Holiday destinations differ from home
  - Different language, different traditions, “trip into the unknown”
- In such an environment tourist guides / travel agents can play an important role in helping tourists to acclimatise



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# What makes business students different? Getting to know the tourists!

- ▶ Different academic background of business students:
  - ▶ Less importance of mathematical foundation of business students (excl. finance students)
- ▶ Other differences
  - ▶ Potentially more clearly-defined career paths (especially on vocationally-focused courses, e.g. accounting or marketing)
  - ▶ More vocational focus
  - ▶ Real world applications
    - ▶ Better understanding of the inner workings or functions of firms (black box for economist).
    - ▶ Better understanding of accountancy practices
    - ▶ Expectation of immediate application
  - ▶ More focused on business rather than consumer welfare (Neymotin, 2014)
    - ▶ How does the macro-economic environment affect firms but not vice versa



# Anxiety



- ▶ Ex-ante expectations and perceptions
- ▶ E.g. Economics is difficult, mathematical, irrelevant to real world, full of diagrams
- ▶ Many students already have anxieties before entering a lecture room the first time! I.e. maths, statistics, foreign language and research methods anxieties (Onwuegbuzie et al., 1999)
- ▶ Relationship between empathy and anxiety
- ▶ Commercialisation: Amplification of anxieties
  - ▶ Students' expectations of getting high mark amplify problem of a non-core module that is perceived as difficult



# Cognitivism & Constructivism

- **Conflict of traditions**

- It is easier to understand and deal with material that is presented in a familiar way

  - Students struggle with abstraction and aggregation

  - Increased frustration

- **Conflict of motivations**

- Students engage more when material is put into context, they can empathise with material



# Interventions




- First step: GET TO KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE!
- This helps to
  - (i) identify suitable module topics,
  - (ii) identify appropriate framing, discourse and tools
  - (ii) choose appropriate teaching approaches and
  - (iii) select effective assessments
- Information about students from:
  - Benchmark statement
  - Programme directors






# Further interventions

- ▶ Creating empathy!
    - ▶ Ensure relevance of topics taught
    - ▶ Less is more
  - ▶ Adjust teaching and assessment activities to audience
  - ▶ Choose the right assessment
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# Summary and outlook:

- ▶ A main cause of conflict is the lack of empathy from students as well as staff
  - ▶ Empathy has to start with staff.
  - ▶ Through encouraging students to engage with module, they can also develop empathy towards our subject
  - ▶ Ways to ensure a smooth journey:
    - ▶ Get to know your audience
    - ▶ Ensure relevance of topics taught
    - ▶ Less is more
    - ▶ Adjust teaching tools to audience
    - ▶ Choose the right assessment
- 



Thanks for listening!



Any Questions?

