



# Editorial

*Ross Guest*

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In our dual roles as economists and educators, we are interested in the way incentives drive our allocation of time to teaching and other academic activities. The study by Harter, Becker and Watts investigates this question for U.S. academic economists from 1995 to 2005. Their first key result is rather nice in a way: it suggests that U.S. academic economists continue to irrationally spend too much time on teaching given the clear premium in reward for research outcomes. This echoes their own prior studies and those in other countries (Guest and Duhs, 2002, for example); all of which may be welcome confirmation that academic economists are not flint-hard *homo economicus* when it comes to caring about student learning. On the other hand it may simply reflect pressures of large classes and teaching administration that cannot be avoided. The authors' second key finding is perhaps more interesting: that female economists allocate proportionally more time to teaching than do male economists, especially at research universities. Some possible explanations are offered and further work is recommended. It does seem to us an important question, not least for its implications for female salary and career progression.

Hickson and Reid compare the assessment information provided by multiple choice (MC) and constructed response (CR) questions. They define a 'constructed question' as one which requires a student to offer their own short response to a question in contrast to a multiple choice question where students choose between alternative answers offered by the examiner. They find that their CR questions appear to be assessing something which is distinct in comparison to their MC questions and that their CR questions are better predictors of final GPA from other courses/modules. They argue that differences between their results and previous studies are due to differences in method rather than peculiar qualities of the particular questions they used.

The article by Mearman *et al.* returns to the theme of our 2009 Special Issue on pluralism in economics education. The central theme of that Issue was that the actual plurality of the economics discipline, evidenced by its many recognised branches, is in fact not reflected in the mainstream undergraduate curriculum. The new evidence provided by Mearman *et al.* is based on focus group interviews of students. While acknowledging potential bias, the authors found that students liked the plural approach to learning economics - in particular, they appreciated taking a wider perspective in drawing on other disciplines, and are comfortable with ambiguity and the partial state of knowledge. Appealing to what students like and want may be a good strategy for achieving curriculum change, given the increasing importance attached to student evaluations of teaching and student experience surveys.

We continue to publish articles that provide new insights, perspectives and strategies for dealing with particular topics in the curriculum. Three papers in this issue serve this purpose: by Dalziel, Marsden and Sibly, and Kapinos.

Dalziel reminds us that the way students construct knowledge depends on their prior learning, their prior conceptions of the discipline and their approach to learning. He cites Schumpeter's (1949) notion that students have a prior "vision" of the discipline they are learning. Dalziel's concern is with students studying introductory economics as a compulsory unit in degree programs such as environmental

management, landscape architecture or resource studies. He advocates a very applied problem-based approach for these students and presents evidence to show that this leads to improved academic performance. This study adds to the growing body of evidence that applied problem-based learning in economics can be effective for all students, including economics majors (in IREE, for example, see Rigall-I-Torrent, 2011, and a number of papers on classroom games and experiments in several IREE issues, notably the Special Issue, 9.2).

Teachers of intermediate-advanced microeconomics will appreciate the way Marsden and Sibly simplify and integrate the three degrees of price discrimination. The authors argue that the traditional textbook treatment of second and third price discrimination is rather disjointed. They explain a more coherent treatment and illustrate it with a number of real world examples.

An appreciation of the causes and consequences of the ongoing global economic crisis calls for critical reflection of the mainstream macroeconomics curriculum. Have we underplayed the role of debt, financial asset prices, balance sheets, monetary policy targets, liquidity traps? The list goes on. In this context the paper by Kapinos is timely. He presents a new analysis of the liquidity trap in an inflation-targeting framework.

## References

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Schumpeter, J. A. (1949) Science and ideology, *American Economic Review*, 39, 345–59