

## **A Review Activity for Economics**

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Much of the recent focus of the economic education literature concerns the instructional methods used in college courses. Becker and Watts (1996) described the primary teaching tools employed by economists as chalk and talk. In their survey of college faculty, they found that 83 percent of class time in the median undergraduate economics course is spent using the lecture format and chalkboard presentations. While some students may prefer passively absorbing material from lectures, research shows that retention, thinking skills, and motivation are improved when students are more actively involved in the learning process (McKeachie, 1997). Instructors may prefer lecture presentations as well because this format allows faculty to present a large quantity of material to a large number of students (Brozik and Zapalska, 1999). Perhaps Becker and Watts were correct in hypothesizing that economics faculty were reluctant to adopt new teaching techniques to improve effectiveness because they have achieved equilibrium in teaching efficiency.

Simkins and Sosin (1999) noted that current lecture-based teaching practices do not develop students' cognitive learning skills or interest in economics, thus students are not motivated to continue studying economics. The benefits of employing active teaching techniques are well documented. Claxton and Murrell (1987) found that using a variety of teaching techniques, including active learning, improves student performance. More specifically, student problem-solving skills, critical thinking abilities, and attitudes are improved as students become actively involved in class (Becker and Watts, 1995; Johnson and Johnson, 1989, 1991; and Maier and Keenan, 1994). Shuell (1986) suggests that all meaningful learning requires the active participation on the part of the learner.

There are many ways to incorporate active learning in economic classes. For example, Carlson and Schodt (1995) discuss using case studies and discussion; Carlson and Skaggs (2000) use

moot courts to explore controversial issues; Brozik and Zapalska (1999) demonstrate supply and demand using a market game; and Simkins and Sosin (1999) use World Wide Web applications to improve problem-solving skills. While learning theory and education research endorse the use of active teaching techniques to improve student performance and student attitudes, Guest (2001) warns that the advantages of active teaching methods must be balanced by the time costs.

### **Review activity**

This paper describes a review activity that can be used in medium sized classes and completed in one normal class meeting. This activity, entitled "Etch-A-Nomics," is modeled after the popular board game, Pictionary. Teams of students earn points by correctly identifying pictorial representations of economic concepts drawn by their peers.

In preparation for this game, the instructor prepares slips of paper, listing various economic concepts. These slips can include concepts like *law of supply*, *gross domestic product*, or *price inelasticity*. Because the activity is more fun and challenging when there is a wide range of concepts, it is best used in the latter part of a course.

To play Etch-A-Nomics, the class should be divided into approximately five teams. Each team is given a turn, during which the team selects a sketcher who randomly chooses a slip of paper from the prepared basket of economic concepts. She may use her notes and textbook to formulate a drawing plan. The sketcher then attempts to describe the concept on the board without using words, sounds, or gestures. She is given ninety seconds to draw clues on the board while the team attempts to identify the concept.

In drawing the clues for her team, the sketcher may use variables in the sketched clue to label graphs and/or to specify equations. However, she may not use a variable that is used to identify the concept being drawn. For example, if the sketcher is attempting to draw the *velocity of money*, she could give the quantity equation, leaving a blank where  $AV$  is usually included. If the concept is *aggregate supply*, she could draw an aggregate supply/aggregate demand graph, labeling the axes (P and Y) and the

aggregate demand curve (AD) while leaving the aggregate supply curve blank. Full words and numbers cannot be used in the clue, but any portion of the clue identified by the team may be noted on the board.

Everyone on the team earns two points if the concept is correctly identified. If the concept has not been identified at the end of the turn, the other teams may submit one written guess. When all written guesses have been submitted, the concept is announced. Teams with correct written responses are awarded one point. Sketching teams are not permitted to participate in the written response round. This activity is repeated for multiple rounds as class time permits. Accumulated points can be given as participation credit or homework credit.

By requiring that students think creatively about economics, Etch-A-Nomics encourages them to engage in higher-level thinking. The students also become more actively involved in the learning process as the class format is altered from a passive-learning lecture to a student-focused review activity. According to the economics and education literature, effective teachers should use a variety of teaching methods, including both lecture presentations and active learning techniques. Active learning improves retention and understanding of the course material. Former participants of the Etch-A-Nomics game confirmed that they had learned a lot and that the game left a lasting impression of the material. In addition, several students noted other benefits associated with the game. In particular, they commented that the game encouraged the interaction of students who were otherwise reluctant to participate in class; helped students think for themselves; and improved their confidence on exams. Somewhat surprisingly, students commented that their effort in the class increased following this activity. One student commented, "I felt that I should put forth more effort since you were trying so hard to make the class interesting. I have not missed a day of class since we played the game."

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