

Starting Point: Pedagogical Resources for Teaching and Learning Economics



<http://serc.carleton.edu/econ/>

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Co-PIs: Mark Maier, Glendale Community College, mmaier@glendale.edu
Cathy Manduca, SERC, Carleton College, cmanduca@carleton.edu
KimMarie McGoldrick, University of Richmond, kmcgoldr@richmond.edu
Scott Simkins, North Carolina A&T State University, simkinss@ncat.edu

How did Starting Point get Started?

This project grew out of recent work by Mark Maier and Scott Simkins (National Science Foundation Grants DUE 00-88303 and 04-11037) investigating pedagogies more commonly used outside of economics and adapting them for our discipline. Their work reveals that there are many pedagogical innovations that economists are unaware of, at least those teaching in the U.S. This project grew out of the recognition that a readily accessible, comprehensive, and easy-to-use set of resources for a wide range of pedagogical practices was both valuable and needed.

What is Starting Point?

Starting Point is an economics pedagogic portal that seeks to:

- ***introduce economists to innovative teaching strategies developed both within and beyond the discipline of economics.*** We are especially interested in promoting cross-disciplinary adoption and adaptation of research-based teaching/learning practices.
- ***provide instructors with the tools to begin integrating and assessing these teaching strategies in their own classrooms.*** Each teaching strategy included in the portal will include background knowledge about the strategy and how best to use it, reasons for using the strategy, and examples illustrating the teaching strategy in practice.
- ***promote the sharing of teaching innovations among instructors.*** The *Starting Point* site will encourage instructors to submit classroom-based examples illustrating the use of the teaching strategies included on the site for review and cataloging.

The *Starting Point* web site, when complete in fall, 2010, will include sixteen pedagogic modules covering the following teaching strategies:

- Context-Rich Problems
- Just-in-Time Teaching
- Quantitative Writing
- Teaching with Cases
- Cooperative Learning
- Classroom Experiments
- Teaching with Computer Simulations
- Effective use of Personal Response Systems
- Interactive Demonstrations
- Undergraduate Research
- Interdisciplinary Approaches to Teaching
- Service Learning
- Spreadsheets Across the Curriculum
- Documented Problem Solving
- Using Media to Enhance Teaching and Learning
- Interactive Lectures

Why Should Economics Instructors use the Starting Point Site?

While collectively useful for the enhancement of our understanding of pedagogical practices, currently available teaching resources in economics are often disconnected from each other and typically stand in isolation from other disciplines and from research on student learning. As a result, economists are often unaware of educational developments within their field or across disciplines. *Starting Point* provides a comprehensive array of research-based instructional strategies aimed at promoting student learning in economics. Using *Starting Point*, economics instructors can quickly compare a wide variety of effective teaching strategies to match their teaching style, course level, content, and student learning objectives.

We also hope that *Starting Point* will promote a more intentional development of communal, cumulative knowledge-building in economics education, similar to the educational research process in some science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) disciplines, especially physics education research. The extent to which teaching strategies are publicly discussed and examples are shared in economics is typically limited to formal presentations at regional and national disciplinary conferences, refereed journal articles, and collected volume publications. As part of the *Starting Point* project, we hope to promote the idea of a Teaching Commons, “a conceptual space in which communities of educators committed to inquiry and innovation come together to exchange ideas about teaching and learning and use them to meet the challenges of educating students.” (Huber and Hutchings, 2007, *The Advancement of Learning: Building the Teaching Commons*, Jossey-Bass)

How can Economics Instructors use the *Starting Point* Site?

Learning more about specific pedagogic techniques. Each module contains the following resources:

- Description of the pedagogic practice and its distinguishing features (“What is...?”)
- Information on when and why the method is particularly effective, with references to educational (general and economics-specific) and learning sciences research (Why use...?)
- Understanding how to implement the pedagogic practice, including how to use the method effectively, including tips for the instructor (“How to...”)
- References, including references to web-only material

Browsing the teaching examples library. Each example contains the following components:

- Description of the example and a complete set of teaching materials needed for implementation, such as handouts, data and instructions for students
- Teaching notes and tips for the instructor
- Context for how this activity has been used, including the type of course and at what point in the course
- Measurable goals for student learning and assessment information that describes how the instructor can measure students’ achievement of specified learning goals
- Author attribution and contact information
- References and links to other resources supporting the example

How does *Starting Point* Differ from other Economics Teaching Resources?

- Single comprehensive location; consistent and transparent structure (why, what, how, ...)
- Extensive topic coverage; inclusion of teaching/learning innovations adapted from other disciplines
- Modules developed in interdisciplinary teams; revisions of existing modules builds on work initially developed by those outside of economics
- Developing cross-disciplinary linkages; expanding vision of economics education research to include educational research in other disciplines and the learning sciences
- Dynamic library of examples, with opportunity for expansion via instructor submissions

How can you Contribute to the *Starting Point* Project?

We’d love to have you participate in this project. Two opportunities currently exist for contributing. First, we are seeking ***feedback on module content***. Each module will have links to a form that allows visitors to the site to provide constructive feedback and suggestions for enhancement. Second, we are interested in having instructors share their expertise through the ***submission of examples*** illustrating the use of teaching strategies included in the *Starting Point* site. Contributors will be asked to include the components described above using an online form. Example submissions will be reviewed before being accepted for inclusion on the *Starting Point* site.