



Editorial

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Interest in classroom experiments and games continues to grow. The previous special issue of IREE was testament to this trend and several papers in the current issue feature classroom experiments or games. Two of these papers, one by Moore and the other by Rigall-I-Torrent, are about Cournot games for intermediate microeconomics. Cournot games can help students to see the relationships between the alternative market structures, in particular that between oligopoly and monopoly, and can provide a useful introduction to game theory. Rigall-I-Torrent shows how this can be done by setting up a Cournot game with increasing complexity. In Moore's game, the typical textbook model of costs is extended in order to show that colluding firms do not necessarily behave like a monopolist as they do in the typical model. Damianov and Sanders describe an experiment that shows how the pursuit of positional goods by individuals in order to signal their relatively high income is socially sub-optimal, and that mechanisms for publicly disclosing their income would allow a Pareto improvement. Students are encouraged to explore implications for public policy.

It is perhaps not surprising that the majority of classroom experiments and games that have been published to date, including those in this journal, have been in the field of microeconomics broadly defined. Students can readily play the roles of individuals and firms. It also reflects the increasing prominence of game theory and behavioural economics in the economics literature over perhaps the past two decades. Yet a number of unresolved puzzles in macroeconomics have resurfaced in the literature of recent years. Obvious examples are the genesis and evolution of financial crises, the efficacy of fiscal stimulus in response to such crises, and the role for monetary policy in a very low inflation economy. There is a gap in the economics education literature of classroom experiments that can help students to explore these ideas. Indeed the collection of experiments/games on macroeconomics is relatively thin. Further work beckons.

Echoes of another special IREE issue, Issue 8.2 in 2009 on pluralism in economics education, are evident in the article in this issue by Colander and Nopo. They argue for two separate streams in graduate economics education, at least in Latin America – one focusing on the traditional, more technical, economics training and another on a 'heterodox' approach to economics which would give weight to alternative schools of thought, and to institutions and politics. The latter stream would lead to a PhD in political economy so the authors argue. This view is based on surveys of students and faculty in Latin America, Europe and the US. The Latin American students were found to place greater importance on topics such as history of economic thought and economic development, and on a practical working knowledge of the institutions in an economy.

Turning to student achievement, we are publishing a critique by Edmund Cannon of an article in IREE, Issue 7.2 in 2008, which argued that students who downloaded PowerPoint slides prior to attending the lecture performed better than those students who attended the lecture but did not download the slides prior to attendance. Cannon argues that the econometric methodology was flawed because it did not take account of endogeneity of attendance and downloading decisions. We gave the original authors, Chen and Lin, the opportunity to respond to this critique which they did and we publish their response here. This debate highlights the difficulty in isolating determinants of educational achievement. The endogeneity problem is pervasive.

University teachers are under increasing pressure to provide evidence of their performance in promoting student learning through their teaching. The well known limitations of the traditional student evaluation instrument are prompting the search for alternatives. One such alternative is a face-to-face interview or discussion group between students and an evaluator. In this case the students' comments are confidential but not anonymous since the students are present in person. The article by Meagher in this issue provides statistical evidence showing that the resulting student evaluations are biased in favour of the teacher compared with evaluation data which is both confidential and anonymous. The reason given is fear by students that negative comments about teaching may lead, somehow, to negative consequences for them. One possible response to this problem and also to the accepted shortcomings of evaluations, might be some form of statistical adjustment of student evaluation scores to correct for biases. In addition to the biases identified by Meagher, there are potential biases in student evaluations arising from class size, whether the course is mandatory or an elective, and various aspects of the teaching environment. Again, there is scope for work in this area.

We are delighted to announce that this and future issues of IREE will incorporate articles that would have otherwise appeared in CHEER (Computers in Higher Education Economics Review). We look forward to continuing CHEER's longstanding contribution to the development of innovative practice in the use of ICT in economics education. Insofar as this exciting field is ultimately about enhancing learning and teaching in higher education economics, it is within the scope of IREE. So incorporating articles in this field into IREE will provide a unified reference for readers and help to build connections between ICT and other innovations in economics education.

The first of two articles in this field refers to a well-known business problem: the travelling salesman problem (TSP). A salesman needs to visit all his customers located in different cities in his region, and he would like to find the cheapest route that assure all cities have been visited. Unfortunately the TSP is not easy to formulate, and relatively hard to solve. Our paper by Rasmussen shows how innovative use of spreadsheets can render TSP that were previously regarded as 'big' easily solvable. The paper details how the flexibility of spreadsheets can be used in solving many real world variants of the TSP, and discusses important issues in the careful formulation of TSP solutions using spreadsheets.

Finally, we look at a further innovative use of spreadsheets to illustrate Hannah and Kay's concentration axiom. Most courses in industrial economics and industrial organisation cover the measurement of industry concentration. The classic paper of Hannah and Kay (1977) details a set of desirable criteria against which any of the numerous concentration measures may be judged. The paper by Latreille and Mackley shows how these criteria can be illustrated for students, for several of the most popular measures, using an Excel spreadsheet designed to give them an improved understanding of some of the strengths and limitations of a range of the commonly used statistical measures and hence their value in underpinning policy and regulation.

References

Hannah, L. and Kay, J.A. (1977). *Concentration in Modern Industry: Theory, Measurement and the UK Experience*, London: Macmillan.