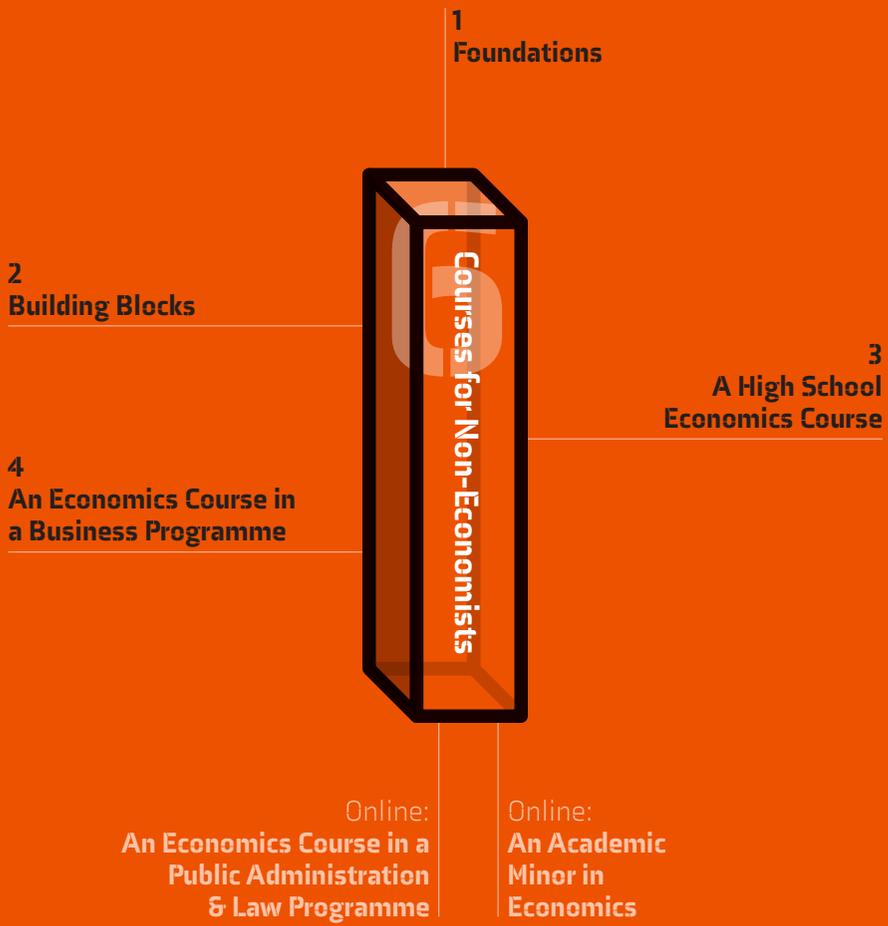




## Tool 6

# Courses for Non- Economists

Teaching economics to high school students and to those specialising in other disciplines.



The book so far has mainly focused on how economists should be prepared for their future roles in society. Economists are, however, not the only ones who receive an economics education. In fact, the majority of people who are taught economics will never become an economist or even take a specialisation in the topic. This includes high school programmes, economics minors aimed at students from other disciplines, and economics courses in neighbouring programmes, such as business and public administration.

While these students will never call themselves economists, they do take in economic ideas and will apply these in their later work and personal life. Thus, economics education to non-economists still has a large impact on the world.

This chapter starts with the application of the *Foundations* part of this book to the education of non-economists. We discuss the implications of teaching economics from the perspective of the individual who engages with economic systems in various ways, we go into the application of the principles *real-world*, *pluralism* and *values*, and we argue for the democratisation of economics through the notion of the *citizen economist*. Then, we go through the ten building blocks, separated in three categories: those we consider core, those which are optional, and those we would not recommend focusing on for non-economists. For each of these categories, we suggest teaching materials which seem most suitable for teaching economics to non-economists, such as high school students or those from other disciplines.

Teaching economics briefly, to those who do not specialise in the discipline, is an art in itself. For high school economics education specifically, we also recommend Maier and Nelson's teacher's guide *Introducing Economics: A Critical Guide for Teaching*: a practical handbook for the various dilemmas surrounding the teaching of critical economic thinking to students at a basic level. For the sake of brevity, however, in this chapter we stick to the *Economy Studies* approach, applying the principles and building blocks developed in this book to economics education for non-economists and taking out those elements that seem most important.

# 1 Foundations

## The Philosophy of Economy Studies

The central aim of economics education for non-economists is different from that of the education of economists, on which we focused in the chapter *Foundation 1: The Philosophy of Economy Studies*. Rather than preparing experts on the economy for their future societal roles, economics education for non-economists is about helping non-economists better engage with the economic world in their everyday lives, as everyone participates in the economy in a couple of respects.

First and most obviously, during our working lives we fulfil crucial economic roles and tasks, and have to deal with many economic issues, both through our work and concerning our labour relations. Therefore, it is helpful for non-economists to learn more about the economic world of production and labour in general as well as more specific skills, such as how to get a job, negotiate working conditions, or (help) run a company. Besides these, occupation specific economic knowledge and skills are important. For accountants, the economics of firms seem particularly relevant, while the economics of the state seem more important for students of public administration.

Second, outside of our working hours we engage in various economic activities, such as consuming, householding, and investing our savings. Education related to this is often called financial literacy. It can help people make better informed decisions and prevent them from making unwise financial decisions. A stark example of this is the US student debt crisis and the financial problems people face because of unwise decisions, such as choosing forbearance over income-based repayment.

There is, however, also criticism on financial literacy programmes as they are normally taught, for focusing too narrowly on individual consumer misconduct. While this is important, it leaves out the more critical and

collective action aspects of financial literacy. Besides learning what the smartest option is when choosing a loan, it is helpful to have a rough understanding of how the system works, what actors it has and what their interests are. This can help people recognize wrongdoings by companies and organisations as well as dysfunctionalities in an economic system. To put it simply, it is important for students to learn that when they have a problem, it might not be their fault. Besides individual responsibility, good economic structures and regulation are thus key. And for this, public awareness and collective action are important.

To come back to the earlier example, the reason for many unwise decisions related to US student debt is not only a lack of financial literacy. It is also misinformation by student loan services. It should be illegal for institutions to misinform their clients or withhold information from them. Critical financial literacy thus not only helps people make better individual consumer choices, but also helps them better engage in collective action and fight wrongdoings by companies and organisations. An informed person would, for example, note the misinformation and can signal this to regulators.

The content of financial literacy programmes is, however, often made in collaboration with financial institutions, who often have an incentive to prevent the more critical aspects of financial literacy from being taught (Hütten et al., 2018). Therefore, it is important to also engage civil society organisations, regulatory agencies and independent scholars in the creation of the financial literacy content. This allows students to develop a broader, better and more critical understanding of the matters, and can help prevent financial literacy programmes from turning into advertisement (or even propaganda) programmes by special interest groups. And this also creates useful overlap with the third point.

Third, as citizens and members of our local, national and international communities, we engage in many economic processes and decisions. The economics education of non-economists should therefore focus on a broad understanding of economic systems and issues. In public debates about government budgets, for example, there are often misunderstandings, such as the idea that public finances work in the same way as personal household finances. Without any economics education such misunderstandings are very likely as people do have personal experience with personal finances, but have never learned anything about public finances. The goal of economics education for non-economists should thus be to help people better understand the larger economic systems they are part of and also understand counter-intuitive insights. And since most students will not continue to specialise in economics, it is important that

economics education for non-economists “focuses primarily on preparing students for citizenship rather than for intermediate theory courses” (Nelson, 2009, p. 62).

Overall, economics education for non-economics should thus be about preparing people for their future engagement with the economic world, and in particular in their working, private and public lives.

### Principles: Real-World, Pluralism & Values

Each of the three principles set out in this book is also relevant for economics education for non-economists. The only difference is the way in which these principles can be applied and put into practice, with as main difference the more limited amount of teaching time with which to convey them to students.

Firstly, pluralism. It is crucial that non-economists are exposed to different economic ideas and that they realise that these ideas of economists are theories about the world, rather than direct descriptions of how the world works. This may sound rather obvious for any economists, or any academically trained person. But many non-academics tend to think of experts as simply knowing ‘the truth’, rather than that they have different ideas about how the world *may* work and perform empirical analyses to see what the evidence suggests. To use Alfred Korzybski’s words, it is important that students learn that “the map is not the territory” (1931).

We think that this fundamental realisation best sinks in when students are exposed to a couple of contrasting economic debates. It does not require teaching full theoretical frameworks and mathematical models. This can be done by simply juxtaposing ideas about a certain economic issue, such as whether to tackle the problem of unemployment and a shrinking economy through government stimulus or austerity. Useful materials, ordered from light to heavy: the Keynes vs Hayek rap battles *Fear the Boom and Bust & Fight of the Century*, London School of Economics debate *Keynes v Hayek* with Selgin, Skidelsky, Weldon and Whyte, the book *Austerity vs Stimulus: The Political Future of Economic Recovery* by Skidelsky and Fraccaroli, or the book *Austerity: When It Works and When It Doesn’t* by Alesina, Favero and Giavazzi.

Secondly, real-world. Especially when teaching non-economists, it is crucial to link the concepts that are discussed to the real world and the experiences of the students. If matters are only discussed in the abstract, it is likely that many students will not be able to see how it is relevant for the world around them, which will likely diminish their interest in the topic. Therefore, we advise bringing the real world in as much as possible.

As discussed in the chapter *Foundation 3: Real-World*, this can be done by using case studies, the news and economic history, visiting or having guest lectures by employees of economic institutions and companies, and exposing students to current public debates about economic issues. In doing so, we would encourage teachers to feel free to also do so in a playful manner. One could, for example, let students read an economics cartoon book, such as *Economix: How and Why Our Economy Works (and Doesn't Work) in Words and Pictures* by Goodwin and Bach. This may sound silly and of little educational value, but we would argue the opposite is true. As long as the materials are carefully selected to ensure their content is of good quality, the more playful manner in which these contents are communicated to students simply facilitates, rather than prevents, learning and is likely to leave behind longer lasting impressions on students. While the cartoon book is funny, it is surprisingly informative, helping readers better understand what the economy is about, economic history, the history of economic thought, different ways of organising economies, economic theories, normative aspects of economies and economic policies debates.

Thirdly, values. It is essential that non-economists learn to see and think about values and normative issues in the economy. This is also precisely where the views and ideas of non-economists are most relevant. They have just as much to say about value judgements related to economic issues as economists do (see more about this below in *Democratising Economics*). So students need to learn to identify value judgements in order to be able to properly interpret, value and make use of advice by experts without needing to blindly follow them. Interesting books and video's might be the book and INET video series by Michael Sandel both called *What Money Can't Buy*, Mariana Mazzucato's book *The Value of Everything* and her related TED talk *What is economic value, and who creates it?*, Robert Skidelsky's INET video *Ethics & Economics* and the chapter carrying the same title in his book *What's Wrong with Economics? A Primer for the Perplexed*.

## **Democratising Economics**

Economics education for non-economists currently too often discourages, rather than encourages, people to participate in economic debates. The strong focus on technicalities and mathematics causes economics classes to often feel more like tests or competitions of mathematical talent and economic jargon, than places of learning and questioning. In a democratic society, all citizens should, however, engage in debates about important issues that influence their lives and futures. Therefore, we strongly advise to facilitate, rather than to hinder, this through economics education for non-economists. So instead of focusing on teaching technicalities, we advise to focus on teaching substantive knowledge about the economy in an

accessible way. It is also important that students learn how to ask questions and participate in economic debates. Such an open, critical and active learning process can help create *citizen economists* according to Earle et al. (2016, p. 154):

*“We propose the idea of the ‘Citizen Economist’, an individual who has the basic knowledge, confidence and interest to engage critically with economic discourse in politics, the news and their local communities. Citizen Economists are able to see the links between their individual circumstances and the operation of the economy on a systemic level. They are able to engage with economic statements and narratives made by politicians, economists and media commentators about the performance of the economy and evaluate the values and assumptions behind their arguments. A society of Citizen Economists is one in which individuals have more understanding and thus control over their circumstances. It is a society where there are always alternatives and all of society plays an active role in proposing, debating and scrutinising them, ultimately deciding collectively and individually which paths to take.”*

In a world in which expertise is often despised, this might read as an argument to make people mistrust economists, but it’s actually the opposite. We believe blind public trust in economic experts is a recipe for disaster. Not only would this lead to undemocratic debates and decision making related to economic issues, it will lead to mistrust of economists and has arguably already done so. If something goes wrong or is seen as unfair, and citizens have no say in the matter, then the fault must be with the experts who claim the exclusive right to discuss economic issues, or at least this accusation is easily made and difficult to refute when the message is that citizens should not have a say in economic affairs.

What we need is more mutual understanding between economists and citizens. In recent years, economists have often been criticised for being ‘out of touch with normal people’ and they, for example, often misjudged how citizens would receive their economic expert advice related to the Brexit referendum. And the other side of the coin is the topic of this chapter: economics education for non-economists. This will not make everyone an economic expert, but it will help them better participate in public debates about economic issues. And it will also enable them to better understand economists as well as being better able to critically scrutinize and question their arguments.

## 2 Building Blocks

While all ten of our building blocks could be applied and used in economics education for non-economists, some are more relevant than others. Here we discuss the building blocks from high to low priority for economics education for non-economists.

### Core building blocks

We advise putting the following building blocks at the core of economics education for non-economists:

- Building Block 1: Introducing the Economy
- Building Block 2: Know Your Own Economy
- Building Block 5: Economic Organisations & Mechanisms
- Building Block 6: Political-Economic Systems
- Building Block 8: Economic Theories
- Building Block 9: Problems & Proposals
- Building Block 10: Economics for a Better World

Before we go into the various building blocks, it is important to note that each of the building blocks will have to be treated more lightly than in full economics programmes. So here we suggest using elements of these building blocks, not trying to cover the full scope and depth of each in a course for non-economists. Courses can differ in how much they go into detail into economic theories, real world knowledge, or ways of organising the economy. We advise trying to cover these various topics, even if briefly, but if this is not possible one can choose to leave one or more out.

### Building Block 1: Introducing the Economy

The first step in any economics course is to explain to students what the economy is and why it is important to learn about. This can be done in many different ways, from giving students a good academic or cartoon book, watching a documentary or letting them do their own online research, to giving them exercises to go outside of the classroom and observe parts of the economy for themselves and interview people about. Key topics for such exercises can be recent changes in the local economy, the main societal challenges of the day, and what people are concerned about and find most important.

### Materials

- *Economics: The User's Guide* by Ha-Joon Chang, from 2014, chapters 1 & 2. Perhaps the most accessible and yet insightful introduction book into economics, with particular attention to why it is relevant to learn economics and what economics is in the first place.
- *Introducing a New Economics* by Jack Reardon, Molly S. Cato, Maria A.

C. Madi, from 2018, chapters 1, 3, 4, & 5. An accessible textbook which introduces students to what economics is, how it is embedded in society and the environment, and major societal challenges, such as climate change, poverty, financial instability, and inequality.

- *Principles of economics in context* by Neva Goodwin, Jonathan M. Harris, Julie A. Nelson, Brian Roach, Mariano Torras, most recent edition from 2019, chapters 0, 1, 20, and 21. This economics textbook covers many of the traditional economic topics, but pays more attention to why studying the economy is relevant and concerns, such as human wellbeing, ecological sustainability, distributional equity, and the quality of employment.
- To help students get an idea of the main societal challenges of today, it can be useful to have them take a look at reports, such as the *Sustainable Development Goals Reports*, *World Development Reports*, and *World Happiness Reports*. It can also be useful to use more engaging types of materials, such as documentaries and coverage of political protests and debates. Furthermore, it can be interesting and useful for students to also be exposed to material on the key issues in the domestic, rather than global, economy.

### **Building Block 2: Know Your Own Economy and Building Block 9: Problems & Proposals**

Building on the suggestions above, it can be very useful for students to acquire basic factual knowledge about the economic world they live in. As described in more detail in *Building Block 2: Know Your Own Economy*, this can be done by looking at and discussing key indicators, institutions and sectors. One can also take the core current problems and let students create factual overviews of them. With this, students do not only acquire factual knowledge but also practical skills to tackle economic problems. Perhaps the most often applied policy tool, which often also plays a central role in the public debate, is cost-benefit analysis. For this reason, it can be worthwhile to make students familiar with the basics of the method and its limitations, enabling them to ask critical questions and properly interpret the results. Furthermore, it is useful to also discuss different approaches to comparing policy options, such as participatory evaluation and risk-opportunity analysis, as this widens students' understanding of how policy options can be assessed.

#### **Materials**

- Material on the national economy as described in *Building Block 2: Know Your Own Economy*.
- To introduce the policy tools, reading materials can be of use, but they will probably have the most lasting impact when combined with practical exercises in which students have to apply the tools themselves.

- For cost-benefit analysis, a useful book is: *Cost-Benefit Analysis: Concepts and Practice* by Anthony E. Boardman, David H. Greenberg, Aidan R. Vining, David L. Weimer, most recent edition from 2018.
- For participatory evaluation, the following book can be of help: *Participatory Evaluation Up Close: An Integration of Research Based Knowledge* by J. Bradley Cousins and Jill A. Chouinard, from 2012.
- Risk-opportunity analysis is newer and has yet to be explained in a textbook, but a useful working paper explaining the tool and providing examples of applications is: *Risk-opportunity analysis for transformative policy design and appraisal* by Jean-Francois Mercure, Simon Sharpe, Jorge Vinuales, Matthew Ives, Michael Grubb, Hector Pollitt, Florian Knobloch and Femke Nijse, from 2020.

### **Building Block 8: Economic Theories**

Theory is normally the meat and bones of economics courses, and for a good reason. It is critical that students learn about different analytical ideas about the economy. So while we advise to pay more attention to other matters than theory, it is still of great importance. Our main suggestion is to focus on making students familiar with different ways of looking at the economy, rather than on teaching them only rudimentary theoretical models. In *Building Block 8: Economic Theories*, we explain in more detail how this could be done by first explaining the basic elements of different economic approaches and then focusing on the main approaches per economic topic. To prepare students for their economic citizenship, different economic ideas about the form and function of government can be particularly useful as these are often central to the public debate. For suggestions, see the section *Government* in chapter *Tool 1: Pragmatic Pluralism*.

### **Materials**

- *Economics: The User's Guide* by Ha-Joon Chang, from 2014. This book provides a brief and accessible pluralist introduction to a broad range of theoretical insights the discipline has to offer. While theoretical, this book is never dry. It is clearly written and has a very succinct style.
- *Rethinking Economics: An Introduction to Pluralist Economics* by Liliann Fischer, Joe Hasell, J. Christopher Proctor, David Uwakwe, Zach Ward Perkins, Catriona Watson, from 2017. This collection of essays provides an accessible introduction into post-Keynesian, Marxian, Austrian, institutional, feminist, behavioural, complexity and ecological economics.
- The website *Exploring Economics*: [www.exploring-economics.org/en/](http://www.exploring-economics.org/en/). This website provides sharp and helpful introductions into the different economic perspectives and furthermore gives many useful overviews of related teaching materials, video's and existing (online) courses.

- *Principles of Economics in Context* by Jonathan Harris, Julie A. Nelson and Neva Goodwin, most recent edition from 2020. A useful textbook that treats much of the traditional content, but also consistently discusses the social and environmental challenges inherent in economic questions.
- *Economics After The Crisis* by Irene van Staveren, from 2015. This well-written textbook describes twelve central topics in economics at an introductory level from four different perspectives: the neoclassical, institutional, social and post-Keynesian perspectives.
- *The Economy* by The CORE Team, from 2017. This highly successful textbook, freely available online with additional resources, provides a treasure trove of empirical data, context and recent research. The CORE Team has also been working on developing teaching material for high school economics education, see their website for the latest materials: [www.core-econ.org](http://www.core-econ.org)
- *Introducing a New Economics* by Jack Reardon, Maria A. Madi, and Molly S. Cato, from 2017. This ground-breaking textbook introduces many of the core issues in economics today and weaves together pluralist theory and real-world knowledge in an eminently readable way.
- *Political Economy: The Contest of Economic Ideas* by Frank Stilwell, most recent edition from 2011. This well-written textbook provides a good introduction to economic ideas from multiple perspectives, with particular attention to classical, Marxist, neoclassical, institutional, Keynesian and more recent insights related to capitalism.

### **Building Block 5: Economic Organisations & Mechanisms and Building Block 6: Political-Economic Systems**

*Economic Organisations & Mechanisms* and *Political-Economic Systems* are about showing to students that there are multiple ways of organising and thinking about economies. In both cases, the point is not that students need to remember and reproduce specifics. The focus should, however, be on making them realise the economic world can be organised and thought about in multiple ways and giving them a rough idea of the various options and perspectives that exist. This can be done by discussing various economic organisations, mechanisms and theories in an accessible, engaging and non-technical way. This knowledge can help students understand the different options that are discussed (or ignored) in the public debate or in an organisation they are involved in.

#### **Materials**

- *Introducing a New Economics* by Jack Reardon, Molly S. Cato, Maria A. C. Madi, from 2018, chapters 10, 11 & 12. Three accessible and brief chapters, with accompanying classroom activities and questions, introducing students to what public goods, commons and firms are

and how they can be governed, for example as a corporation owned by shareholders or as a cooperative owned by its workers or consumers.

- *Economics: The User's Guide* by Ha-Joon Chang, from 2014, chapter 5. A short well-written chapter on different economic actors and organisational forms, from multinational corporations, cooperatives, and labour unions, to governments and a variety of international organisations.
- *Organisations: A Very Short Introduction* by Mary Jo Hatch, from 2011. A brief, accessible and yet highly informative book full with scientific theories and ideas on what organisations are, how they can be structured, how they change, and their internal dynamics and interaction with markets and society.
- *Capitalism* by Geoffrey Ingham, from 2008. A highly insightful introduction into capitalism with chapters on key ideas from Smith, Marx, Weber, Schumpeter and Keynes, and core institutions, such as market exchange, the enterprise, money, capital, financial markets and the state.
- *Capitalism: A Very Short Introduction* by James Fulcher, most recent edition from 2015. A brief and yet useful book on capitalism's definition, historical evolution, varieties, global networks, and recurring crises.
- *Socialism: A Very Short Introduction* by Michael Newman, most recent edition from 2020. A similar brief and yet useful book, but then on capitalism's main rival socialism, with chapters on its varieties around the world, historical traditions and more recent developments.

### **Building Block 10: Economics for a Better World**

The public debate about the economic matters is often normatively loaded and focused. Therefore, it is of great importance that students become familiar with the normative foundations and ideas on which economic debates are built. As discussed in more detail in *Building Block 10: Economics for a Better World*, this can be done by discussing normative principles for decisions and visions for the economy. The point here is not that students should learn political philosophies by heart or make sophisticated normative arguments. It is rather about giving them a basic understanding and feeling for the different ways in which normative issues can be looked at.

### **Materials**

- *A Guide to Ethics and Public Policy: Finding Our Way* by D. Don Welch, from 2014. A brief but insightful book providing a broad framework for evaluating policy proposals and outcomes, organised around five moral principles: benefit, effectiveness, fairness, fidelity, and legitimacy.
- *Political Ideologies: An Introduction* by Andrew Heywood, most recent

edition from 2021. A useful and accessible introduction into a wide variety of political ideologies, from liberalism, socialism, and conservatism to feminism, nationalism, and green ideology, that shape much of our normative thinking on the economy.

- *Moral Views on Market Society* by Marion Fourcade and Kieran Healy, from 2007. An insightful overview paper on the key different normative perspectives on capitalism, enabling readers to better understand and place ideas and arguments prevalent in many debates about the economy.
- *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets* by Michael J. Sandel, most recent edition from 2012. A highly influential and well-written book reflecting on the moral place of markets in society and asking the key question whether everything should be up for sale. The Institute for New Economic Thinking has also launched a video series on the book and topic: <https://www.ineteconomics.org/perspectives/videos/what-money-cant-buy>

## Additional building blocks

If the teacher has a personal affinity with these topics, we recommend including them, but otherwise they do not have priority:

- Economic History (BB3)
- History of Economic Thought and Methods (BB4)

While we would argue that the two building blocks devoted to history are not of the highest priority, we think they can be of great value added if it is done well. As such, we would thus advise to include it if history is of particular interest to the teacher and he or she knows how to use it well to engage students more with economic ideas and realities. So rather than putting it at the core of economics education for non-economists, we see it as a didactical option to possibly teach the other contents in a more interesting way. It should be noted that this is not the case for full economics programs, for which a basic understanding of the histories of economic ideas and realities is essential.

## Materials

- *Capitalism: A Short History* by Jürgen Kocka, from 2016. A concise and yet broad-ranging account of how capitalism developed from early merchants, colonialism and slavery to the recent wave of globalisation and financialisation, accompanied by discussions of capitalism's key thinkers, such as Smith, Marx, Weber, and Schumpeter.
- *Economics: The User's Guide* by Ha-Joon Chang, from 2014, chapters 2 & 3. Two short and well written chapters on how the economy has changed over the last centuries and how capitalism evolved.
- *Global Economic History: A Very Short Introduction* by Robert C. Allen, from 2011. A brief but insightful introduction into the economic history

of the world with chapters on industrialisation, the rise of the West, great empires, the Americas and Africa.

- *The Worldly Philosophers: The Lives, Times and Ideas of the Great Economic Thinkers* by Robert Heilbroner, most recent edition from 1999. While first published in 1953, it remains perhaps the best introduction into the history of economic thought to this day. In a remarkably well-written and accessible manner it discusses the ideas of key economists and puts them into historical context.
- *Grand Pursuit: The Story of Economic Genius* by Sylvia Naser, from 2012. Another very accessible but more recent book introducing the history of economic thought through captivating narratives.

### Less relevant building blocks

Finally, we would recommend avoiding the following building block when teaching non-economists:

- Research Methods (BB7)

Research methods are, of course, of great importance, but given the aim of economics education for non-economists we would argue that teaching time can be better spent on the other building blocks. Non-economists are not prepared to do detailed analyses of economic issues, as economics students are. Rather, non-economists need to acquire a rough understanding of economic issues and learn about how to deal with them. Learning the specifics of various research methods will only very indirectly help with this and have therefore least priority. Another important downside of focusing on econometrics and mathematics-heavy material, is that it makes economic ideas and topics inaccessible for those without an affinity for mathematics. The current focus on technique harms students from understanding the economy: *“If a student is not capable of understanding graphs, then subsequent success in one’s economics class is less likely. ... It could be that if the intention is to prepare students to use economics to understand policy and everyday life, graphs generate more harm than good.”* (Hoyt & McGoldrick, 2012, p. 338). Economics education for non-economists should therefore be understandable for everyone and not require a high level of mathematical expertise.

This also relates to another point: Do not focus on techniques. What matters is that students gain more knowledge about the substance of economic ideas and topics. Whether students are able to work with a model and have technical skills related to statistics, should not matter. Especially when considering that the technical skills they could acquire will be too minimal to be of any significant use in the real world. If an organisation needs someone to construct or work with a mathematical model about an economic topic, this person would need considerably more training to do

so properly. In fact, many organisations consider even a full university economics programme not enough and hire trained mathematicians and statisticians to work on the technical aspects. Furthermore, leaving the technical aspects out frees up teaching time to focus on the various things discussed above. In the current dominant way of teaching, the technical and substantive aspects are often supposed to be conveyed to students by teaching them a few simplified models. This demands a lot from teachers to be able to convey both at the same time to all students, especially considering the different levels of talent for the technical and substantive aspects that the students have. Putting the focus (exclusively) on the substantive aspects will make it more doable for teachers to convey economic ideas and real-world knowledge to students.

### Example Courses

Whether it is for economics majors or for a smaller side programme such as described in this chapter, the *Economy Studies* framework can be flexibly applied to create a wide variety of courses. To illustrate this in practice, we provide in this section an example economics course for high school students and one for business students, both built on the basis of the *Economy Studies* framework. Online, we provide two more examples: an economics course in a public administration and law programme, and an academic minor in economics.

# 3 A High School Economics Course

**Title:**

Preparing 'Citizen Economists' for their future personal economic lives and participation in public life

**Required background knowledge:**

None

**Nominal workload:**

1-2 years of economics classes in high school education

**Course goals:**

This course enables students to better understand the economic world they are part of, to understand political debates about it, to envision their own roles in it and to be practically able to play those roles.

**Course outline:**

The course is divided into the following three parts:

- 1 Welcome to the economic world
- 2 The key problems of our times
- 3 How should we organize the economy?

**Part 1: Welcome to the economic world**

The first part of the course focuses on giving students a basic understanding of what the economy is and why it is relevant. This is done through a combination of explanations of relatively abstract concepts and explorations of the real-world economy the students live in. The purpose here is helping students realise that their personal lives and experiences are connected to a larger economic world.

Besides teaching basic conceptual and real-world knowledge about the economy, students learn practical skills needed for their current and future roles in the economy as consumers, citizens, household members, students and (future) workers. Financial literacy is a part of this, but it is broader than that. It also relates to life choices about choosing what to study and what kind of career to pursue, as well as practical skills related to, for example, finding a job or negotiating.

The course focuses not only on instrumental knowledge that can help students themselves, but also enables them to reflect on the broader implications of their economic decisions, for example when it comes to their personal consumption.

For more details, teaching materials and practical advice on teaching these topics, see the following building blocks:

- Building Block 1: Introducing the Economy
- Building Block 2: Know Your Own Economy
- Building Block 9: Problems & Proposals

### **Part 2: The key problems of our times**

The second part of the course focuses on the current big societal challenges, such as climate change, economic instability, aging populations, and growing economic inequality. The first step is always to explain to students what the challenge is and providing them some basic factual knowledge about the current state of the issue. Creating such factsheets could also be an assignment for students.

To help students grasp the relevance of these issues, a couple of things can help. Firstly, to connect the material to the personal lives of students. How are, or will, they and the people around them be influenced by these big societal problems? Secondly, to make use of more engaging material, such as documentaries, music, poems, and news articles, next to the more dry (written or academic) material on the issues.

Once students have acquired a basic understanding of the issue, the focus is on the main different perspectives on the issue, its causes, mechanisms, consequences and potential solutions. The chapter *Tools: Pragmatic Pluralism* can be helpful in determining which perspectives are most relevant for the issue at hand.

Having learned different ways of thinking about the problem, students are given the assignment to write an essay in which they have to advocate a solution of their choosing and present this to the class. Following this, they are matched with another student who advocated a different solution and are given the assignment to reach a compromise together.

For more details, teaching materials and practical advice on teaching these topics, see the following building blocks:

- Building Block 1: Introducing the Economy
- Building Block 8: Economic Theories
- Building Block 9: Problems & Proposals
- Building Block 10: Economics for a Better World

### **Part 3: How should we organize the economy?**

The last part of the course centres on making students familiar with the different ways of organising an economy and arguments for and against them. The focus is first on economic organisations and mechanisms. This is mainly to prepare students for their personal future lives both at work and outside of it, as they will participate in organisations for their career but also through their community and civic life, as well as their hobbies and sports. Besides explaining the different organisational forms and mechanisms as abstract concepts, students will also visit actual organisations and be required to analyse them.

After this the focus shifts towards macro political-economic systems. The goal here is to enable students to more critically and confidently follow and participate in (future) political debates about how the economy should be organised or reformed. To help them do so, the different political-economic systems and their varieties are discussed, giving most attention to the current domestic one (most likely, a particular variety of capitalism) and prominent proposed alternatives to it. As an assignment, students are tasked to analyse and reflect on recent developments and changes in the domestic political-economic system, enabling them to get a better and more nuanced understanding.

For more details, teaching materials and practical advice on teaching these topics, see the following building blocks:

- Building Block 5: Economic Organisations & Mechanisms
- Building Block 6: Political-Economic Systems
- Building Block 8: Economic Theories
- Building Block 10: Economics for a Better World

# 4 An Economics Course in a Business Programme

**Title:**

Introducing business students to the world of economic thinking

**Required background knowledge:**

None

**Nominal workload:**

Equivalent of 6 ECTS (180 hrs)

**Course goals:**

This course enables business students to understand how businesses are embedded in the economy at large. It provides them with an overview of the economic system and the various types of organisations in it such as commercial, cooperative and non-profit entities, as well as various forms of government which interact with the private sector. It also provides students with a basic, intuitive understanding of the main theories about firms and markets.

**Course outline:**

The course is divided into the following three parts:

- 1 The role of business in society
- 2 The composition of the business world
- 3 Economic theories about markets and firms

**Part 1: The role of business in society**

The first part of the course concerns the role of business in society. It starts with a discussion of the concept 'the economy', including the question where its boundaries lie and how this system is embedded in a broader ecological and social context. Students also learn about the concept of capitalism as a political-economic system. Using several readings, they discuss with each other the advantages of this system and its inherent problems.

The discussion then zooms in on the societal role of business. Various perspectives are discussed, from the shareholder value theory to democratic and stakeholder theories. Possible materials:

- The series of articles on the shareholder-stakeholder debate '*Milton Friedman 50 Years Later*' edited by Zingales, Kasperkevic, & Schechter, from 2020.

- The book *Change Everything: Creating an Economy for the Common Good* by Christian Felber, from 2015.
- The fierce yet constructive video debate between Zingales and Felber ‘*The Future of Capitalism #10: Can a Different Market Economy Work in Practice?*’, from 2020.

A case study is presented on the interplay between government and commercial actors in Germany’s famous and relatively early turn to green energy production (*Grüne Wende*). This case study is mainly used to demonstrate how the commercial sectors are interwoven with each other, how big firms and small- to medium-sized enterprises together make up an industrial ecosystem. It also demonstrates to students how change can occur in an economy, in this case a deliberately orchestrated transition from polluting forms of energy production to cleaner techniques.

For more details, teaching materials and practical advice on teaching these topics, see the following building blocks:

- Building Block 1: Introducing the Economy
- Building Block 6: Political-Economic Systems
- Building Block 10: Economics for a Better World

### **Part 2: The composition of the business world**

The second part of this course focuses on a real-world overview of the main economic sectors in the country, and their relation with public and civil sectors. For instance, say this course were to be taught in Germany, students might learn about the structure of the automobile industry, the mechanical engineering sector, the chemical industry and the electrical industry.

This second part of the course also introduces to students the wide variety of economic organisations: from commercial firms to cooperatives to non-profits. The concept of cooperatives is illustrated with the German cooperative banking sector, including a brief historical overview, from their local formation by citizen collectives to the subsequent series of mergers between them to form larger organisations.

For more details, teaching materials and practical advice on teaching these topics, see the following building blocks:

- Building Block 2: Know Your Own Economy
- Building Block 5: Economic Organisations & Mechanisms

### **Part 3: Economic theories about markets and firms**

In the third part of the course, the focus becomes more systemic. Students learn of the main government policies regarding the country’s commercial

sectors, both those designed to stimulate and protect them and those designed to regulate their impacts on the environment and their potential monopoly powers. Students also gain a brief overview of the sectors' relations with civil society, such as labour unions and NGOs, and the main points of contention between these parties.

This part also introduces students to the main economic theories about markets and firms. On firms, there is a short presentation of field theory, which sets out how firms stabilise and shape power relations in an economic system, and of institutional economics, which sees firms as a way to limit the transaction costs, which would be impossibly large if an economy only consisted of individual free agents. On markets, students are presented with the contrasting views of neoclassical economics, which sees competition as a harmonious process with an optimal outcome, and classical economics, which sees competition as a ruthless process more akin to war.

For more details, teaching materials and practical advice on teaching these topics, see the following building blocks:

- Building Block 6: Political-Economic Systems
- Building Block 8: Economic Theories

For two more examples, visit our website.

- An Economics Course in a Public Administration and Law Programme (30 ECTS)
- An Academic Minor in Economics (30 ECTS)

[economy.st/nonecon](http://economy.st/nonecon)

