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## Setting an Agenda for the Future

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## SETTING AN AGENDA FOR THE FUTURE

*Short title for running header: Agenda for the Future*

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Anniversaries are a time for reflection and planning for the future. The fiftieth year of the *Journal of Economic Education* motivated us to invite those who have been intimately involved with the *Journal* to provide reflections, which appear within this symposium. In addition to providing a wealth of information about the past, they set the stage for initiatives that support the path forward.

### THANK YOU

Academics call it “service” when we give our time to an endeavor that is not part of the teaching and research that serve as the primary, and secondary, determinants of promotion, tenure, and raises. The reality is that much of this service could also be described as volunteer work. The payoff is small, and the work is done from a sense of responsibility to the profession or the field. The *Journal of Economic Education (JEE)* has benefited from an incredible amount of volunteer effort in the 50 years since its inception. Walstad’s article in this issue identifies many of those who have given of their time, and, as the current editors, we want to also extend a thank you. The past editors and associate editors of the *Journal* have worked incredibly hard to make the editorial process as timely and fair as possible. That does not mean that mistakes are always avoided—there is certainly somebody out there who feels they have had a “bad” experience with

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the review process—but we know that the past and current editors and associate editors make every effort to ensure that each submission is processed fairly and in a timely manner.

*Journal* editors are known because their names appear in every issue and on the journal Web site. As a result, the work of an editor is not thankless. The economists we interact with are almost always appreciative of the work that is done. (Almost? See the comment above about bad experiences.) However, the most underappreciated part of manuscript processing is the work completed by reviewers. Peer review is essential to the publication of innovative teaching ideas and economic education research, and this process is impossible without those willing to take the time and energy to carefully and constructively evaluate a manuscript. While we do not have a precise count, the *Journal* undoubtedly has benefited from the efforts of ten to twenty thousand reviews over its 50-year history. There is no way to adequately thank all of these individuals, but the editorial staff of the *JEE* is continually thankful for those that click “Yes” when they receive invitation to review request.

Aside from editors and reviewers, the *Journal* has also relied on a people that do much work without as much acknowledgement as they deserve. During William E. Becker’s tenure as editor he was helped immeasurably by the work of Suzanne R. Becker. William B. Walstad relied similarly on Sharon Nemeth, and Sharon has continued her great work during our time as editors. We are also pleased to have the current administrative support of Tricia Fanney.

## **REFLECTIONS**

The first three papers of this anniversary issue provide context for much of what has been published in the *JEE* over the last 50 years. Walstad notes that the mission of the *Journal* has not changed and is still relevant. Although the faces of those involved have changed over time, the relationship with the American Economic Association-Committee on Economic Education

(AEA-CEE) remains a vibrant link between the *Journal* and the broader profession. The layout and the frequency of publication have changed since the first issue, but the section-oriented structure has not changed much since 1983. As Walstad identifies, however, the emphasis has changed with research comprising a slightly smaller percentage of what is currently published. Walstad's article highlights that the evolution of the *JEE* reflects its response to the needs of its contributors and readers.

The next two articles provide insights on the two main sources of content for the *Journal*: research and instruction. The article by Allgood and Schaur provides a lens for viewing how much has, and has not, changed in the profession. It is clear that research in economic education addresses new questions over time because teaching has evolved, in part because of the new technologies available. Yet, not that much has changed. In 1969, we wondered about the relative benefits of having students watch a television program, and now there are Web sites dedicated to identifying television, movies and other pop culture topics that instructors can bring into the classroom. The evolution of technology has also changed the nature of research. Estimating a linear regression was state-of-the-art in 1970, but now we expect regression discontinuity and difference-in-difference estimators. Perhaps more importantly, the field of economic education was using experiments to generate data before it was the standard in any field of economics. As Allgood and Schaur note, it is important that economic education keep up with the standards and methods employed in the discipline.

Hoyt and McGoldrick provide a thematic summary of instruction-related articles throughout the life of the *Journal*. They are able to identify common themes that span the decades as well as changes and trends in economic instruction within decades that reflect adaptation and growth in the profession. Technological innovation is an ever-present theme and,

with each passing decade, classroom practice is shaped by advances from mainframes to microcomputers to handheld devices and the Internet. Pedagogic innovations designed to engage students through the use of games and experiments also transcend decades, but both the types and formats of these pedagogic practices have expanded as a result of the changes in technology. They also find a consistent focus on student learning (as opposed to instructor teaching) in the form of objective-driven pedagogy, interventions that motivate on student reflection and critical thinking, and examples of learning by doing.

Although not as many articles appear in the Content section as other sections in the *Journal*, it provides an important and timely link between the frontiers of economic knowledge and classrooms filled with future generations of potential economists. This section offers a venue to influence what is taught now, and how, before the slow progress of textbooks comes to fruition. Since its formal inception in 1983, it has included materials associated with a wide range of fields within the discipline. This section is unique in that it does not include articles that simply state what content should and should not be taught, but rather it stresses the pedagogic advantage that shifts in content provide and what might make it difficult to generate such shifts nonetheless. While most often such articles stand alone, sometimes they appear as part of a symposium designed as a conversation among experts, such as how to teach macroeconomics after the financial crisis (Colander 2010).

The Features and Information (F&I) section provides an important role for the *Journal*. As Allgood and Schaur note, papers that go into the research section are either theoretical papers or empirical papers testing a hypothesis. This criteria rules out descriptive articles and ones that provide only correlative results. The F&I section provides an outlet for these papers, and they are important for at least two reasons. First, it is essential for economists to know what is going on at

other departments and institutions. Often what we know about how departments handle matters related to teaching is only what we do in our own class or what is done at our own institution. Articles such as “How Departments of Economics Evaluate Teaching” (Becker, Bosshardt, and Watts 2012) and “What's in a Grade? Grading Policies and Practices in Principles of Economics” (Walstad and Miller 2016) are two of many examples of articles that help provide this context.

Although F&I is not a pedagogy-focused section per se, it does contain articles that readers might find helpful for their pedagogic practices. For example, “Students’ Persistent Preconceptions and Learning Economic Principles” (Busom, Lopez-Mayan, and Panades 2017) does not tell the reader how to teach, but it does motivate instructors to consider why our students are not learning. Second, new research and new teaching innovations start with an understanding of the current state of economic education, and Features and Information articles play an important role in providing this understanding.

The Online section was added in 2000 to highlight “exemplary material for teaching and learning economics that is interactive or otherwise not conducive to traditional printed-page format” (Goffe 2014, 180). Publications in this section are purposefully short, consisting of a 300 word note describing the materials located at the designated site. This section highlights the fact that while the Internet has made sharing of pedagogic resources much easier, the proliferation of information has also made it more challenging to locate and sift through resources to determine their relevance. More recent publications in this section highlight simulations and media compilations for use in the classroom.

Each of the above described *Journal* sections has a complementary guide for publishing written by a current or former associate editor.<sup>1</sup> These include descriptions of the characteristics that make for a quality submission as well as what each associate editor viewed as promising

future topics. We remind the reader of these helpful guides because we wish to stress that the perspectives of these associate editors are still consistent with the expectations of the current editors and that potential contributors would be well-served to review them. Finally, although not associated with a dedicated section, “the *JEE* also encourages submission of articles on financial education. What is of particular interest to the *JEE* are studies of personal finance education for children, youth, college or university students, and adults” (Walstad 2017, 63).

### **WHAT WE WANT FOR THE *JEE* AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION**

We want to see economic education continue to play an important role in our profession and we want the *Journal of Economic Education* to continue as the preeminent journal in the field. In order to achieve these outcomes, there are some advancements we would like to encourage and initiate. We should make clear that such developments will not “just happen,” but we believe they are changes that would enhance the field of economic education and that we should actively promote.

First, research in economic education must keep up with the standards of the profession. Economic education has a long history of using experiments in conducting research. Empirical economic research is almost exclusively focused on identifying causal relationships, and current methods for doing so reflect the changes in how economists are conducting research. In particular, the use of experiments with random assignments are becoming the norm. Using observational, administrative data has fallen out of favor because it is difficult, or even impossible, to identify causal relationships with such data. At the *Journal*, we see many papers rejected because the authors did not carefully design their studies and they are unable to identify the effect they want to measure. We want to create opportunities for economic educators to obtain the training needed to conduct high-quality economic education research because many

have not received formal training on appropriate methods. Our goal is to facilitate this change. For example, the AEA Conference on Teaching and Research in Economic Education (CTREE) may provide the perfect venue for continuing education programs associated with economic education research similar to those held after the ASSA meetings.

We also observe many promising research and teaching method papers that do not progress beyond the stage of a working paper. This issue has become more obvious since the inception of CTREE. The purpose of the *Journal* is to disseminate information of value to those interested in economic education. We realize that some faculty have little monetary or career incentive to publish their work, but the profession and the field are better served if more working papers are completed and published. It is our hope that those developing work for conferences will take that next step and complete their work and submit it to the *Journal*. We recognize that faculty are busy, and finding time to complete projects is often a challenge. In addition to time constraints, it is likely that some of the difficulty arises from the challenges of knowing how to finish a project and then navigate the publishing process. Solving this problem requires more opportunities for researchers to interact. CTREE provides an important such opportunity, but once-a-year engagement is not sufficient. Researchers need other avenues for circulating their work and getting valuable feedback. For example, a working paper series would allow a network of economic educators to review projects in progress and provide feedback that would help researchers and those developing new teaching pedagogy to identify and overcome shortcomings to bring their work to the finish line. The final result will be more completed manuscripts, and manuscripts that are more likely to be published.

A working paper series would also help create a greater network among researchers with similar interests. Collaboration with researchers that have similar interests can energize one's

effort, identify potential coauthors, and help solve problems that arise during the research and development process. Such activities promote cross-institution studies that enhance our knowledge of best practices. The organizers of CTREE already facilitate interactions for some groups and this could be expanded to include instructors and researchers with similar interests. CTREE is a natural launch point for these efforts, but established groups should extend their collaborative efforts at other economic meetings as well. In addition, online discussion groups would provide an ongoing opportunity for economic educators to post questions or obtain feedback throughout their projects.

Nearly all academic economists have some instruction-oriented role and, for most, this is a significant component of their time allocation. In fact, Allgood and Walstad (2014, 656) report that the average number of hours spent each week on the teaching enterprise is over 30 (with even faculty at top-100 institutions dedicating over 20 hours). We argue, then, that a healthy conversation about best practices should include more voices. However, the reality is that many of the voices of those involved in this educational enterprise are heard only in the halls of their own institutions. The profession as a whole would benefit from a more broadly shared conversation as personal experiences, innovations, and evidence of learning gains could and should be shared to continue to advance the field. In future issues of this *Journal*, you will see a greater number of symposiums designed to extend the microphone to those previously silent voices.

The perception of what constitutes best practices changes over time, as we better understand how students learn and with advances in technology. Over the years, a number of leading contributors to this *Journal* have produced edited volumes that serve as handbooks on best practices for teaching principles (Walstad and Saunders 1990), various active learning

techniques (Becker, Watts, and Becker 2006; Salemi and Walstad 2012), and the state of economic education (Hoyt and McGoldrick 2013). We feel that it is time to update our understanding of what constitutes current best practices, one that incorporates the latest advances in cognitive science and is compiled into a resource that might serve to smooth the transition of Ph.D. students and new faculty into their teaching role. The *Journal* will continue to build on its partnership with the American Economic Association's Committee on Economic Education (AEA-CEE) and its sponsorship of the Conference on Teaching and Research in Economic Education (CTREE) to develop opportunities to document and share best practices.

It is a well-documented fact that not all graduate students receive (high-quality) teacher training. This lack of training in both basic and advanced educational practices puts students at a disadvantage: "40 percent of new faculty do not believe they are prepared to teach and over 30 percent of chairs believe that new faculty are not prepared" (Allgood, Hoyt, and McGoldrick 2018b, 216). Additionally, Allgood, Hoyt, and McGoldrick (2018a, 926) provide evidence that "Ph.D. granting departments might better serve their students by providing more teaching preparation," given inconsistencies in the relative importance placed on the teaching role by those that produce and those that hire new Ph.D. students. Providing graduate students with solid teacher training also has the potential to enhance research productivity to the extent that such training saves teaching preparation time. CTREE is an ideal venue to host teacher training programs and it has the added benefit of exposing those who attend to economic education as a field of study.

### **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

The field of economic education is critical to the success of our discipline. To the extent that we can identify best practices and encourage more students to major in economics we are training

the next generation of economists. We, as editors, understand the critical role that the *Journal* does and will continue to play in this process. We look forward to initiating steps identified herein and supporting projects proposed by others to continue and expand upon the good work of those who identify with the field of economic education.

## **NOTE**

<sup>1</sup> See Allgood (2014), Colander et al. (2014), Emerson (2014), Goffe (2014), Hoyt (2014), and McGoldrick (2014).

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