

Introduction

The articles in this section of the *Duke Journal of Economics* are products of an undergraduate class offered each year entitled “The Uses of Economics” (Economics 150). They are not honors theses nor were they prepared during independent studies. They were written by class members who were also required to present a dozen or so short essays over the course of the semester.

This class is offered in response to a commitment in the most recent curricular reform at Duke (Curriculum 2000) by the sciences to explore the “technology” whereby the findings of science are made available to society. First of all, students are introduced to twelve alternative “styles” of economic thinking, all of which go back substantially in time: philosophical/theological, mercantilist, classical, moral critical, Marxian, historical, utilitarian (neoclassical), institutionalist, social democratic, managerial, Keynesian, and that implied by the “modern core.” These styles are defined and discussed for purposes of the course, and the class reads and comments on older and more recent examples of their use.

Next, seven segments of our society are identified and described in which conversations take place about economic issues: the economics profession embedded for the most part in colleges and universities, government and international organizations, the private sector (including special interests and public opinion), think tanks, other disciplines, the mass media, and popular culture. Class members are introduced to literature in and about these seven segments.

Armed thus with tools by which to deconstruct discussions of economic issues in our modern society and also some direction as to where the richest conversations might

be found, class members each set out to explore the treatment of a particular theme of their own choosing, on subjects as varied as whether we should encourage additional immigration and whether student-athletes should be paid. The articles contained in this collection have been selected from among those that were submitted to the *Duke Journal*.

We hope that readers of our articles may gain insight into the public policy issues addressed by these student authors, and also about how the usefulness of economic thinking may be discovered by students who are yet quite early in their study of formal economics.