

Title: Interactive Models for Pluralist Intermediate Microeconomics

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Project Summary:

This project will bring an exciting new learning technology -- student driven simulations -- to bear on topics typically neglected in intermediate microeconomics courses -- power, instability, alternatives to rational self interest, distributional conflict and non clearing markets -- to assist instructors wishing to introduce a more pluralist approach to a course that in most universities remains a citadel of neoclassical thinking.

Instructors are challenged by great diversity in student capabilities and preferences: some students think visually and intuitively about economics, shifting curves gleefully; others want the concreteness of a second derivative to tell them whether their answer is 'correct!' Bridging the divide and enabling students to take control of their own learning challenges any instructor. We plan to provide one option -- interactive simulations -- for instructors to improve their own teaching and, crucially, their students' learning.

Economics lends itself to thinking dynamically and interactively, but we often teach with static graphs on the page. INET has, with its CORE project, provided graphs that are 'step-by-step' and permit students to see how a graphic is built. Even though this advances economics instruction, it does not allow the student to vary a model's parameters, to see how outcomes change as relevant variables change. We propose the development of model simulations covering a variety of topics, focusing on ideas neglected in most intermediate microeconomics courses.

We will provide an online resource with graphic simulations, questions, screencasts and additional interactivity to reduce the fixed costs of teaching these important topics for a prospective instructor in intermediate microeconomics or other upper level courses. We plan to cover topics such as the role of social preferences in decision-making, the role of information asymmetry, power and non-contractuality in non-clearing labor and credit markets, the effects of power, externalities and institutions on exchange, and many other topics relevant to a broad economics education. As much as some changes have begun to be enacted in introductory-level courses, fewer changes have been enacted at the intermediate level where instructors seem to hope that a student interested in pluralistic or heterodox approaches might, for example, pick up a history of economic thought course. We argue that, while essential, this is insufficient and changes need to be made at the intermediate level to promote comprehensive reform and address issues that are at the heart of undergraduate economics education.