

## Some *Journal of Economic Perspectives* Articles Recommended for Classroom Use

Timothy Taylor

In the first half of 2018, the editors of the *Journal of Economic Perspectives* sent out several invitations, in the back pages of the journal and via email blasts from the American Economic Association, for faculty to send us examples of JEP articles that they had found useful for their syllabus or other classroom uses.

For some JEP readers, the request raised concerns. One wrote: “I need to ask about this information collection you’re engaged in. I am inferring it is because the journal does not look as good based on traditional performance metrics and you’re trying to justify its value to the AEA publication board. Is that correct?”

Fortunately for peace of mind in our editorial offices, the JEP does just fine on traditional metrics of journal performance like citation counts. For example, according to the InCites Journal Citation Reports published by Clarivate Analytics, the JEP ranked between third and fifth during the five most recent available years, from 2014 to 2018, among all academic journals of economics in “Journal Impact Factor,” which is a measure of how often articles published in the past two years have been cited in the academic literature the following year, divided by the total number of articles (<https://jcr.clarivate.com/>; accessed July 2, 2019; log-in required). Scopus (from Elsevier) calculates a CiteScore, which is “calculated from all citations recorded in Scopus in one year to content published in the last three years, divided by the number of items published.” By this measure, the JEP ranked fourth in 2018 in the broad category of Economics, Econometrics, and Finance (<https://www.scopus.com/sources>; accessed July 2, 2019). Google Scholar calculates the “h5-index,” the

■ *Timothy Taylor is Managing Editor, Journal of Economic Perspectives, based at Macalester College, Saint Paul, Minnesota. His email address is [taylorl@macalester.edu](mailto:taylorl@macalester.edu).*

† For supplementary materials such as appendices, datasets, and author disclosure statements, see the article page at

<https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.33.3.243>

doi=10.1257/jep.33.3.243

largest number  $h$  such that  $h$  articles published in 2013–2017 have at least  $h$  citations each. The JEP ranks seventh among all economics journals by this measure ([https://scholar.google.com/citations?view\\_op=top\\_venues&hl=en&vq=bus\\_economics](https://scholar.google.com/citations?view_op=top_venues&hl=en&vq=bus_economics); accessed July 2, 2019).

But while citations to JEP articles are very welcome, the journal also aspires to fulfill some broader functions: as it says in the “Statement of Purpose” on the second page of each issue, it “attempts to fill a gap between the general interest press and most other academic economics journals.” Indeed, this broader mission was part of the reason why the American Economic Association decided back in 2011 to make the JEP freely available online. In 2018, there were about 1.5 million downloads of JEP articles from the AEA website. One reason for the choice to make JEP freely available was to make it easier for faculty to assign JEP articles to students.

When we invited faculty members to send JEP articles that had proved useful in their classrooms, with a focus on their undergraduate courses, we worried about receiving only a handful of replies and hoped to receive at least a few dozen. We ended up receiving 250 responses, many recommending multiple JEP articles for classroom use and some including syllabuses and cover letters with additional comments.

## The Categories

On the JEP website, we have created a landing page (<https://www.aeaweb.org/journals/jep/classroom>) that organizes the recommended articles into 33 categories. (This resource can also be accessed from the article page on the JEP website.) Many of them refer to specific courses, while others may be more appropriately thought of as subject headings. Of course, this classification involved a number of judgement calls. The list of categories appears in Table 1. If you visit the link above and click on any of the categories, you will see a list of papers from the JEP that were recommended by faculty members for classroom use for that category, listed in reverse date order. Each article listed includes a hyperlink to its article page on the JEP website.

A few thoughts about how this exercise was carried out, along with its strengths and limitations, seem appropriate.

First, we make no pretense of suggesting or providing a complete syllabus for any specific course. We offer only the milder hope that these recommendations from peers might suggest some additional readings for your students.

Second, there were obvious issues when categorizing papers and avoiding an undue amount of duplication. Closely related classes can have different names. Certain papers were recommended for multiple classes. As one example, many of the same papers were recommended for classes in Intermediate Macroeconomics, Money and Banking, and Financial Markets. Many of the papers listed under Econometrics turned up in a variety of other classes as well. Papers about China, for example, could be listed under Development, or under specific subjects such as Labor Economics, Environment/Energy, or Intermediate Macroeconomics. We did

Table 1

**Categories for JEP Articles in the Classroom***(for links, go to <https://www.aeaweb.org/journals/jep/classroom>)*


---



---

Principles or Introductory Course	Intermediate Microeconomics
Intermediate Macroeconomics	Money and Banking
Financial Markets	International
Econometrics	Experimental Methods
Labor Economics	Health Economics
Education	Public Finance
Environment/Energy	Behavioral Economics
Game Theory	Social Norms and Networks
Industrial Organization	Law and Economics
Household Economics	Development
Immigration and Emigration	Economic History
Urban Economics	Sports Economics
Europe: Topics Course	China: Topics Course
Soviet and Post-Soviet: Topics Course	Japan: Topics Course
Latin America: Topics Course	Middle East: Topics Course
Public Policy	Political Economy
Economics Profession	

---

*Notes:* By following the link above, you will find a landing page listing these categories. Click on any of the categories at the landing page, and you will find a list of JEP articles in that area that have been recommended by surveyed faculty members.

not try to eliminate all duplication, and some papers appear in two or even three categories. But if we had not taken steps to limit the extent of duplication, or to create some categories like China: Topics Course, the number of entries for some of these categories would have been at least twice as large.

Third, there were many cases where a faculty member referred to a symposium, but not to individual papers. In those cases, we just listed all the papers from the symposium. However, if only one paper from a symposium was mentioned, we listed only that single paper.

Finally, our requests for suggested articles went out between February and May 2018. Thus, while the list at the website does include a few articles from late in 2017 or early in 2018, it tends to be focused on the pre-2018 period. In particular, the listings for the International class do not include the “Symposium on Does the US Really Gain from Trade?” from the Spring 2018 issue, and the Behavioral Economics class listings do not include the “Symposium on Risk in Economics and Psychology” from the same issue. The course listings for Intermediate Macroeconomics do not include the “Symposium on Macroeconomics a Decade after the Great Recession” from Summer 2018. The course listings for Environment/Energy do not include the “Symposium on Climate Change” from Fall 2018, and the course listings for Public Finance do not include the “Symposium on the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act” from that issue, either. The same point can be made for the issues of 2019, as well. The purpose of this list was to pass along recommendations from faculty, not to compile a systematic list from back issues of the JEP, and we stuck to that mission.

## How Frequently?

The compilation of recommended articles at the JEP website neither addresses the question of how frequently JEP articles appear on syllabuses nor reveals which articles appear most frequently. With regard to the first question, then-editor David Autor (2012) described a Google search of the websites of the top 100 US research universities, using the terms “Journal of Economic Perspectives” and “syllabus.” He found an average of 43 JEP articles on syllabuses at each school in 2010. He also noted that this total list is likely an underestimate, because many syllabuses are not readily available online. In addition, his search was done a year before the JEP became freely available online in 2011.

For a perspective on which JEP articles are currently most likely to appear on course syllabuses, we turned to the Open Syllabus Project, managed by the American Assembly at Columbia University. When we went to the Open Syllabus Project (<http://explorer.opensyllabusproject.org/>; accessed July 2, 2019) and used “Journal of Economic Perspectives” as the search term, we found 799 JEP articles listed. The top 30 appear in Table 2. The list, and in particular the counts of how many syllabuses, should be treated only as suggestive. The website notes: “At present, we have around 1.1 million syllabi, drawing predominantly from the past decade of teaching in the US. We think the total number of US, UK, Canadian, and Australian syllabi for the past 15 years is in the range of 80–100 million.” It’s easy to imagine that some course syllabuses are being counted in several different years, while 90 percent or more of syllabuses are not being counted at all.

However, it’s interesting to note some prominent examples of JEP articles being used in noneconomics courses. For example, the third entry in Table 2 is “Legislative Organization” by Keith Krehbiel, which appeared in the Winter 2004 issue as part of a four-paper “Symposium on Political Economy.” However, none of the 250 economists who offered suggestions mentioned the 2004 article by Krehbiel. We suspect that it is being used in political science classes.

## Lessons for the Editors

The feedback and suggestions offered some lessons for us at the JEP, as well. Many respondents just included the JEP papers that appear on their reading lists, but here are some of the other uses mentioned in correspondence.

First, JEP articles are frequently used as a basis for structured student writing or discussion assignments. A number of faculty members described doing this, or sent along their instructions for such assignments. A typical approach was to ask students to summarize key arguments, theories, and evidence—sometimes in writing, sometimes verbally. Sometimes students were asked to contrast the arguments in several JEP papers.

Second, a substantial number of faculty members used JEP papers in junior- or senior-level seminar-style classes. We did not include “Research Seminar” as

*Table 2*  
**JEP Articles Most Likely to Appear: Open Syllabus Project**

<i>Rank</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Article</i>
1	148	“Divergence, Big Time” by Lant Pritchett (Summer 1997)
2	130	“Are Your Wages Set in Beijing?” by Richard B. Freeman (Summer 1995)
3	123	“Legislative Organization” by Keith Krehbiel (Winter 2004)
4	89	“The Origins of Endogenous Growth” by Paul M. Romer (Winter 1994)
5	89	“Capital Structure” by Stewart C. Myers (Spring 2001)
6	82	“The Contingent Valuation Debate: Why Economists Should Care” by Paul R. Portney (Fall 1994)
7	77	“The Nation in Depression” by Christina D. Romer (Spring 1993)
8	77	“Political Regimes and Economic Growth” by Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi (Summer 1993)
9	75	“Valuing the Environment through Contingent Valuation” by W. Michael Hanemann (Fall 1994)
10	68	“Medical Care Costs: How Much Welfare Loss?” by Joseph P. Newhouse (Summer 1992)
11	66	“Integration of Trade and Disintegration of Production in the Global Economy” by Robert C. Feenstra (Fall 1998)
12	62	“Government Failures in Development” by Anne O. Krueger (Summer 1990)
13	60	“The Global Capital Market: Benefactor or Menace?” by Maurice Obstfeld (Fall 1998)
14	59	“Are Cities Dying?” by Edward L. Glaeser (Spring 1998)
15	58	“Real Business Cycles: A New Keynesian Perspective” by N. Gregory Mankiw (Summer 1989)
16	58	“The Boundaries of Multinational Enterprises and the Theory of International Trade” by James R. Markusen (Spring 1995)
17	57	“How Costly Is Protectionism?” by Robert C. Feenstra (Summer 1992)
18	57	“Reflections on the Economics of Climate Change” by William D. Nordhaus (Fall 1993)
19	57	“Why Has Africa Grown Slowly?” by Paul Collier and Jan Willem Gunning (Summer 1999)
20	56	“Understanding Real Business Cycles” by Charles I. Plosser (Summer 1989)
21	55	“Evidence on Discrimination in Mortgage Lending” by Helen F. Ladd (Spring 1998)
22	54	“Collective Action and the Evolution of Social Norms” by Elinor Ostrom (Summer 2000)
23	53	“Does the ‘New Economy’ Measure Up to the Great Inventions of the Past?” by Robert J. Gordon (Fall 2000)
24	52	“Can Foreign Aid Buy Growth?” by William Easterly (Summer 2003)
25	52	“Auctions and Bidding: A Primer” by Paul Milgrom (Summer 1989)
26	50	“The Case for Randomized Field Trials in Economic and Policy Research” by Gary Burtless (Spring 1995)
27	50	“The Political Economy of Trade Policy” by Robert E. Baldwin (Fall 1989)
28	50	“On the Evolution of the World Income Distribution” by Charles I. Jones (Summer 1997)
29	48	“Contingent Valuation: Is Some Number Better Than No Number?” by Peter A. Diamond and Jerry A. Hausman (Fall 1994)
30	48	“The Worldwide Standard of Living since 1800” by Richard A. Easterlin (Winter 2000)

*Source:* Search for “Journal of Economic Perspectives” on the Open Syllabus Project Explorer (beta 0.4, <http://explorer.opensyllabusproject.org/>), performed on July 2, 2019.

a separate category on the master list (shown above in Table 1), because such a category would have included several hundred articles from all different fields and areas. Often, the purpose of JEP papers in such courses seemed to be to give students a set of readings that let them use the terminology and analysis they had learned in earlier classes and to help launch students into their own research projects.

Third, one unexpected finding was that a number of faculty members are using the appendices of certain JEP articles as a basis for quantitative classroom exercises. Sometimes this occurs in an econometrics class; sometimes in other courses. Students may start by replicating the results of a JEP paper. Then they may rerun the analysis in some different way: perhaps by downloading different or updated data, or by trying an alternative statistical specification. The lesson here for the editors is that we should pay greater attention to what we request in appendices. If the authors of JEP papers know that their appendices may be used as the basis for a classroom exercise, they can structure the material and provide an appropriate level of detail with that use in mind.

Fourth, it's worth having the JEP return to prominent topics perhaps every five years or so. Many faculty members mentioned that they value papers that are relatively up to date, and some mentioned that they had used certain JEP articles for a time but eventually stopped because the paper felt aged.

Fifth, numerous respondents offered suggestions for specific topics to be addressed, or to be addressed again because a previous symposium had become dated.

As a final lesson, many readers took the time to write notes offering some pleasingly positive feedback about the JEP and how they made use of it not only on reading lists but as background for lectures and to keep up with the field of economics as a whole. Of course, we recognize that those who took the time to write are the definition of a nonrandom sample, and we are thus prohibited by the social scientists' creed from drawing any generalized conclusions about the JEP from these responses. But we do very much appreciate the kind words.

■ *Thanks to Andra Boca for organizing the survey results and to Jocelyn Rice and the staff at the American Economic Association for their work on the web pages listing the 33 categories and the underlying JEP articles.*

## References

- Autor, David. 2012. *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* at 100 (Issues). *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 26(2): 3–18.