

Lights, Camera, Economics: A novel video project assessment in introductory microeconomics

Michael P. Cameron, Department of Economics, University of Waikato

Steven Lim, Department of Economics, University of Waikato

Abstract

Due in part to the increasing diversity and practicality of course offerings at high school, few freshman business and economics students begin their first introductory economics paper at university with a background in economics. However, many of these students have experience with multimedia or video production. Furthermore, the students with a background in, for example, film or media studies, have no background in economics. While our past research (e.g. Cameron and Lim, 2010) has shown that despite this lack of formal background in economics these students have a high level of underlying economic literacy, they still lag behind their peers who have previously studied economics.

In A Semester 2011, we have been trialling a new, optional assessment in our freshman microeconomics paper, which typically has around 300-350 students enrolled. This assessment was initially intended as a way to motivate weaker students to engage with economics. The risk is that such an assessment may be seen by students (and our more traditional colleagues) as a 'softer option' with little pedagogical merit. However, our results demonstrate that there is little difference in the types of students choosing this assessment over a more traditional written assignment.

In this assessment, students are asked to work in groups of up to five to create a *YouTube* video of between three and four minutes duration. The students were given a theme, which in this first semester was "Why should you study economics?". Participation in the group project was optional – students who chose not to participate in the group project completed an individual written assignment instead. In all, 16 groups containing 61 students chose to complete the group video assessment.

At the beginning of the semester, most students in the paper completed an economics literacy pre-test (the Test of Economic Literacy, 3rd Edition [TEL3]). Based on TEL3 results, students who chose to complete the group multimedia assessment had slightly but not significantly higher economic literacy (24.8 vs. 23.7, $p=0.343$). Surprisingly, a higher proportion of students who chose to complete the multimedia assessment had completed a course in economics at high school level but again the difference was not statistically significant (48.1% vs. 41.3%, $p=0.376$). There were also no significant differences between those who chose to do the multimedia assessment and those who did not by gender and English language ability.

In this paper we discuss our experiences as instructors and our students experiences (using the results of focus groups conducted at the end of the semester) with using the multimedia assessment to assess student learning and encourage active engagement with the subject. We also compare our students' outcomes in terms of their improvement in economic literacy (using a post-test of economic literacy at the end of the semester) and exam performance. In our quantitative evaluation we use both the augmented difference-in-difference approach and propensity score matching. At the time of writing this abstract, the assessment is still ongoing (the 2011 A semester finishes in June 2011), but results will be available to be presented at the NZAE conference.