



# Teaching Economics with Parks and Recreation

We outline five teaching guides that can be used by economic educators to teach topics as varied as gender pay gaps to government bailouts. Each guide is based on a variety of scenes from the NBC television show Parks and Recreation, which are freely available to educators and students online. Each guide is framed around student-to-student discussion to increase active learning in the classroom.

**Jadrian Wooten<sup>†</sup> Kalina Staub<sup>‡</sup>**

<sup>†</sup>Virginia Tech <sup>‡</sup>University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill

## 1. Introduction

*Parks and Recreation* was a political mockumentary that aired on NBC from 2009 to 2015. Styled similarly to NBC's other hit show, *The Office*, viewers observe the interactions of local government employees in Pawnee, Indiana. While currently in syndication throughout the United States, the show is also available for streaming through NBC's Peacock platform. Throughout its run, the show was nominated and won multiple major awards including a Golden Globe for best actress in a television series musical or comedy and a Peabody Award for "developing a hilarious venue to explore the good side of American democracy in an age when that side is so rarely on display." In 2020, the cast reunited for a special episode to raise funds for Feeding America, the nation's largest food bank organizer.

Economics educators have developed a variety of resources to aid instructors who are interested in teaching with media. Show-specific websites exist for television shows as varied as *Modern Family* (Wooten, Staub, and Reilly 2020) to *Breaking Bad* (Muchiri, Paraschiv, and Wooten 2021). The impetus for creating these sites was to enable educators to move from a "chalk and talk" approach to engaging students with potentially more relevant examples (Wooten et al. 2021). Despite the growth in this area, starting primarily with Ghent, Grant, and Lesica's (2011) creation of a website with clips from *Seinfeld*, educators continue to rely heavily on pure lecture as their primary form of delivery (Asarta, Chambers, and Harter 2021). Instructors have reported using more computer-generated displays (like PowerPoint) and movie clips in the classroom, as well as a marked increase in student-to-student discussion. The present work looks to provide additional resources for instructors wishing to integrate additional material in the classroom by having students work with each other to discuss solutions to problems proposed in scenes from *Parks and Recreation*.

Economic educators have taken two approaches in designing supplemental teaching resources around using media in the classroom. The Routledge Economics and Pop Culture series has published eight books that demonstrate economics in various pop culture topics like dystopian media (Acchiardo & Vachris 2018), Broadway shows (Rousu 2018a), contemporary film (Staley 2018), superheroes (O'Roark and Salkowitz 2018), The Beatles (Staley 2020), war movies (Ahlstrom and Mixon 2020), *Seinfeld* (Ghent and Grant 2020), and *Parks and Recreation* (Wooten 2021). Outside of that particular series, there are also books on economics concepts found in *The Simpsons* (Hall 2014), superheroes (O'Roark 2019), and pop music (Krueger 2019). There has been less work on demonstrating how to integrate the use of these books into the curriculum. Wooten and Smith (2018) demonstrate one method of using popular press books in the curriculum by creating randomized assignments for students using instructor-generated questions related to the books. Bohanon and Vachris (2011) more broadly summarize the use of literature in the classroom in a chapter of the *International Handbook of Teaching and Learning Economics*.

A second stream of resources comes from educators creating lesson plans that instructors can more easily implement in their classrooms. These lesson plans are often designed as a supplemental resource to websites that host clips for the instructors. An instructor looking to use pop culture to teach lessons in their principles of microeconomics course could use lesson plans developed by Geerling et al. (2018) that reference clips from *The Big Bang Theory* on the Bazinganomics website (Tierney et al. 2016). Instructors could also reference lesson plans developed by Rousu (2018b) based on scenes from popular Broadway shows, like *Hamilton* (Rousu and Conrad 2017), which is hosted on the Broadway Economics website (Rousu 2016). There is some previous empirical support for using pop culture in the classroom, predominantly for students at the lower end of the grade distribution (Chu 2014) and about remembering definitional knowledge (Anderson and Krasnozhan 2021). Geerling (2012) argues that the use

of pop culture in the classroom can make the subject more accessible and “rectify the image” of economics in the minds of students.

The following teaching guides cover topics that are often taught in undergraduate economics courses. Table 1 highlights a brief overview of each guide and a set of key concepts covered in the guide. Each teaching guide has been developed as a short activity modeled similarly to think-pair-share activities (Buckles, Hoyt, and Imazeki 2011).

Teaching Guide	Title	Relevant Concepts
#1	Comparative Economic Systems	command economy, externalities, market economy, market failures, mixed economy, regulation
#2	Comparing Market Structures	assumptions, barriers to entry, market power, models, monopoly, monopolistic competition, oligopoly, perfect competition, product differentiation
#3	Government Bailouts	bailout, enterprise, externalities, government intervention, role of government
#4	Regulating Consumption	elasticity, externalities, fairness, taxes
#5	Gender Equality & Discrimination	compensating differentials, discrimination, labor

## 2. Online Resources for Teaching with Parks & Recreation

The Economics of Parks and Recreation website<sup>1</sup> provides scenes from the show that illustrate a wide variety of economic concepts. The site provides clips, descriptions, and additional resources for instructors who are interested in teaching using *Parks and Recreation*. The site contains over 100 scenes and is organized by various topics. Most concepts cover introductory material; however, they could be used in upper-level classes as a review of principles material. Each clip has a set of associated concept tags that are searchable and allows an instructor to find other scenes with similar material.

The website, and the teaching guides below, are intended as a supplemental resource to already existing principles of economics curriculum. Conaway and Clark (2015) outline an entire course built around *Parks and Recreation* that is targeted to non-majors interested in learning about economics. These guides intend to aid an instructor looking to make a marginal change to their course delivery, particularly in one of the topics outlined below. The teaching guides are structured in such a way as to be most relevant to principles-level instructors or those teaching advanced placement economics courses. We provide relevant content standards developed by the National Council on Economic Education (2010) and the associated unit from the College Board’s macroeconomics (2020a) and microeconomics (2020b) course guides.

### A. Lesson 1: Comparative Economic Systems

CEE Voluntary National Standards in Economics:  
Standard 3: Allocation

<sup>1</sup>[Economicsofparksandrec.com](http://Economicsofparksandrec.com).

College Board Advanced Placement Topic:  
Microeconomics Unit 1: Basic Economic Concepts  
Topic 1.2 Resource Allocation and Economic Systems

Relevant Unit:  
Principles of Economics

Concepts Covered:  
command economy, externalities, market economy, market failures, mixed economy, regulation

Learning Objectives:

- Compare market-based economies with centrally planned economies
- Identify characteristics of mixed economies
- Identify reasons why government may intervene in markets

Relevant Clips:  
Ron Swanson on Capitalism<sup>2</sup>  
Steak, Cigars, and Health Problems<sup>3</sup>  
Ron's Toxic Workshop<sup>4</sup>

Summary:

Americans tend to have a positive view of capitalism (60% have a positive image) and a not-so-favorable view of socialism (35% have a positive image).<sup>5</sup> The majority (51%) of younger adults between 18 and 29 do not support capitalism, but it isn't clear that they necessarily prefer socialism (33% support that system).<sup>6</sup> While survey respondents may take extreme views of a particular ideology, the U.S. system is positioned as a mixed-economy that leans toward capitalism. This teaching guide is designed to be introduced early in the semester to encourage students to think about the role of government in different scenarios. This guide serves as a preview of concepts that will likely be taught at later points in the course.

Discussion Questions:

Have students work together to determine the pros and cons of saving a local business on the brink of bankruptcy, and then show the clip "Ron Swanson on Capitalism." This scene shows Leslie and Ron sitting in a diner discussing the role of government in society. Ron remarks that the free market is the only way that society can move forward. Throughout the episode, Leslie works to protect an unprofitable business (a video rental store) by recommending a government bailout that Ron vehemently opposes. Government intervention in markets with market failures, like externalities and public goods, can help correct the actions of the free market, but government intervention in "well-functioning markets" is typically viewed negatively by economists. In these markets, the role of the government is based on correcting equity issues, not improving efficiency. Have students revisit their list and determine if other key items are missing. Have students work together to rank their list to determine which values they believe society should consider when determining whether to support businesses.

<sup>2</sup><https://economicsofparksandrec.com/2017/05/12/ron-swanson-on-capitalism/>.

<sup>3</sup><https://economicsofparksandrec.com/2018/04/15/steak-cigars-and-health-problems/>.

<sup>4</sup><https://economicsofparksandrec.com/2017/07/13/rons-toxic-workshop/>.

<sup>5</sup><https://news.gallup.com/poll/191354/americans-views-socialism-capitalism-little-changed.aspx>.

<sup>6</sup><https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/04/26/a-majority-of-millennials-now-reject-capitalism-poll-shows/>.

The opening scene focuses more on government intervention when something has gone wrong, but do students' perceptions of the role of government change when government intervention seems preventative rather than reactionary? Have students create a second list of actions they would like to do but can't because of some form of government limitation. Popular examples include things like voting (if presented to high school students) or drinking in bars (if presented to college students). After all students have finalized their list, have students work in pairs to determine why the government may want to limit their behaviors. The final two scenes focus on the preventative role of government in society.

After students discuss their lists and determine why a government might intervene preemptively, show "Steak, Cigars, and Health Problems." Ron focuses on how being a free American means that he can do whatever he wants with his body. As soon as he tries to light the cigar, we see the first glimpse of regulations about smoking indoors. This doesn't faze Ron as he knows he can smoke outside. In the case of smoking indoors, the negative third-party impact of smoking inside implies that government intervention is probably supported.

Next, play the clip "Ron's Toxic Workshop." In this scene, Ron needs a license to continue operating a workshop in his home. He asks the city planner to inspect his property and issue a license. In a purely free market system, if Ron's workshop was too unsafe, he would bear the risk of injury if anything were to happen. Government regulation exists, however, to alleviate some of the risks associated with electrical wiring or safety regulations.<sup>7</sup> This typically occurs in larger companies where employees exist, but they have been extended to Ron's one-man workshop.

These scenes introduce a variety of ways governments intervene in markets, both reactively and proactively.<sup>8</sup> Because the US operates with some level of intervention, the economy more closely resembles a mixed economy instead of a pure market economy. This may explain why young adults aren't supportive of capitalism but aren't sure of other alternatives. There are advantages and disadvantages to having a mixed economy as well.<sup>9</sup> Have students vote on whether they believe each form of intervention is appropriate, but then remind them that the general population doesn't always agree either.<sup>10</sup> These results can be revisited later in the course when introducing the lesson on government intervention.

## B. Lesson 2: Comparing Market Structures

### A. CEE Voluntary National Standards in Economics: Standard 9: Competition and Market Structure

### B. College Board Advanced Placement Topic: Microeconomics Unit 4: Imperfect Competition Topic 4.1 Introduction to Imperfectly Competitive Markets

---

<sup>7</sup> Ron doesn't have neighbors, but another consideration for cities is that homes/businesses follow codes to reduce the likelihood that a fire impacts surrounding buildings or forests.

<sup>8</sup> The discussion questions presented here are designed to be tied back to the scenes mentioned above, however, there are several other government interventions worth considering. Students could be asked to work in groups to create a list of government interventions that they support and don't support. Afterward, students could participate in a structured debate (Wolla 2018) on these topics. Even though students may not be in favor of government intervention broadly, they may still be able to recognize the benefits of roads, public schools, a legal system, and more.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.thebalancemoney.com/mixed-economy-definition-pros-cons-examples-3305594>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2013/11/12/public-agrees-on-obesitys-impact-not-governments-role/>.

C. Relevant Unit:  
Market Structures

D. Concepts Covered:  
assumptions, barriers to entry, market power, models, monopoly, monopolistic competition, oligopoly, perfect competition, product differentiation

E. Learning Objectives:

- Provide examples of barriers to entry in a market
- Identify and describe characteristics of each market structure
- Explore the implications of market power on the well-being of consumers and profitability of firms

F. Relevant Clips:  
Tommy's Closet vs. Rent-a-Swag<sup>11</sup>  
Celebrity Sushi<sup>12</sup>  
The Tent Mogul<sup>13</sup>

G. Summary:

Principles of economics textbooks focus heavily on perfectly competitive markets; however, many of the markets people participate in every day are not perfectly competitive. This teaching guide outlines key features of different market structures, but it is best used as a review of market structures.

H. Discussion Questions:

Have students work in pairs to identify and describe the characteristics of the four main market structures: perfect competition, monopoly, monopolistic competition, and oligopolies. Students should focus on identifying the number of producers in the market, the types of products being sold, and whether there are significant barriers to entry into the market. A blank market structures chart is available in the Appendix and may be beneficial to students.

Show the clip "Tommy's Closet vs. Rent-a-Swag." Tom has started a successful business of renting his clothes to teens. His company is doing well, but the lack of entry barriers allows a competitor to open an identical store across the street. With no barriers to entry, new firms will enter the market, possibly push the highest cost firms out of business, and reduce the profits of the other firms. Ask students why Tom's competitor would set up shop across the street; chances are students will be able to explain the intuition behind the Hotelling model even if they cannot formally derive the result.<sup>14</sup> Have students determine which market structure most closely matches the clothing rental market.

Have students determine how Tom might be able to differentiate his business in response to his new competitor. Next, show the clip "Celebrity Sushi." In this scene, Tom and Donna treat themselves to lunch in Beverly Hills at the hottest new restaurant that sells celebrity-owned sushi. Ask students why customers might be willing to pay more for salmon previously owned by Nicki Minaj. This scene illustrates the importance of tastes and preferences in constructing demand curves for different products. The larger the slice of the market a firm can capture,

<sup>11</sup> <https://economicsofparksandrec.com/2017/12/22/tommys-closet-vs-rent-a-swag/>.

<sup>12</sup> <https://economicsofparksandrec.com/2018/05/23/celebrity-sushi/>.

<sup>13</sup> <https://economicsofparksandrec.com/2017/12/28/the-tent-mogul/>.

<sup>14</sup> Hotelling's law is an observation that producers will attempt to offer services similar to their competitors or similar competitors entering a market will try to move as close to their competition as possible.



the more market power the firm will have. Finally, ask students to predict the impact on price, quantity, and profit of a new sushi restaurant opening down the street, even if it's not celebrity-owned fish.

Students should start to recognize that many markets are monopolistically competitive, but firms could benefit by moving closer to a situation where they are the only seller in town. Using one of the examples above (Rent-a-Swag or Celebrity Sushi) have students list popular or creative barriers to entry those stores could employ to increase their market power. Often, at least one student will discuss mergers as a way to capture the market. Have students list the impact these barriers might have on consumers. Next, show "The Tent Mogul" scene linked above. This scene illustrates the potential consequences of a single firm with complete market power.<sup>15</sup>

### 3. Lesson 3: Government Bailouts

A. CEE Voluntary National Standards in Economics:  
Standard 16: Role of Government and Market Failure

B. College Board Advanced Placement Topic:  
Macroeconomics Unit 5: Long-Run Consequences of Stabilization Policies  
Topic 5.7 Public Policy and Economic Growth

C. Relevant Unit:  
Government Intervention

D. Concepts Covered:  
bailout, enterprise, externalities, government intervention, role of government

E. Learning Objectives:

- Describe the major government interventions during the 2008 financial crisis
- Explore the role of government intervention in enterprise

F. Relevant Clips:  
Why God Loves Capitalism<sup>16</sup>  
The Pawnee Video Dome is Failing<sup>17</sup>  
Ron Swanson on Capitalism<sup>18</sup>

#### G. Summary:

One of the major controversies of the 2008 financial crisis was the US government's bailout of the financial sector with the passage of the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008. This Act authorized the US Treasury to buy risky assets from troubled banks to the tune of \$700 billion. The government would go on to bail out General Motors and Chrysler as well as offer a line of credit to Ford in case they needed it down the line. Chrysler and General Motors would eventually file for bankruptcy. Initially, the American public supported bailing out the financial sector (57%), but a few years later only 39% of Americans felt it was the right course of

---

<sup>15</sup> Another great scene (<https://economicsofparksandrec.com/2016/01/11/market-power-with-22-white-vans/>) involves Leslie's campaign team attempting to rent a fleet of vans. There's only a small number of vans available and the owner realizes they are in high demand. Since he owns this scarce resource, he recognizes he has a monopoly over their use.

<sup>16</sup> <https://economicsofparksandrec.com/2017/09/05/why-god-loves-capitalism/>.

<sup>17</sup> <https://economicsofparksandrec.com/2017/12/22/the-pawnee-video-dome-is-failing/>.

<sup>18</sup> <https://economicsofparksandrec.com/2017/05/12/ron-swanson-on-capitalism/>.

action.<sup>19</sup> The opposite was true in the case of the auto bailout where 37% of Americans initially believed the loans were good for the economy compared to 56% of Americans a few years later.

#### H. Discussion Questions:

Start by showing the scene “Why God Loves Capitalism,” which introduces Ron’s Pyramid of Greatness.<sup>20</sup> Ron argues that capitalism is God’s way of determining who is rich and who is poor, despite people generally believing society should be more equal than it currently is.<sup>21</sup> Have students work together to determine the pros and cons of a capitalist system. Draw a line segment on an overhead board and have students place sticky notes from left to right based on their belief that government should intervene to address inequality.

The second and third clips listed above focus on a single episode later in the series in which a local video rental store is going out of business. Leslie wants the city council to save the store for cultural reasons. Ron is unhappy since it represents a government bailout of a small business and believes the government should not intervene in an enterprise. Have students list considerations for protecting the local video store besides what Leslie lists. In addition, ask students to brainstorm policies that could benefit the owner and/or the employees beyond a traditional bailout. Popular examples from other countries could involve the city hiring (or subsidizing the hiring) of business consultants to help improve profitability or providing stipends and rebates for students to enroll in job training programs that would allow them to transition to another occupation in Pawnee. This could have the added benefit of targeting structural unemployment concerns.

The considerations above focus on potential rippled effects within the Pawnee community. It’s unlikely that closing a local video rental store will have much of an effect on the city as a whole, but there may be additional impacts. If students haven’t already considered spillover impacts, encourage students to think about the impact that a failing business might have on an employee’s future job opportunities or on neighboring businesses. Once students recognize the interconnected nature of the economy, a more thorough discussion can ensue related to financial bailouts or the automotive bailouts during the Great Recession. Instead of a single business failing, it appeared that entire industries would be impacted. The ripple effects are much larger when an industry struggles to be profitable compared to a single business. If time allows, government intervention at the industry level could be linked back to the opening lesson that has students question the role of government.

## **4. Lesson 4: Regulating Consumption**

A. CEE Voluntary National Standards in Economics:  
Standard 16: Role of Government and Market Failure

B. College Board Advanced Placement Topic:  
Microeconomics Unit 6: Market Failure and the Role of Government  
Topic 6.4 The Effects of Government Intervention in Different Market Structures

C. Relevant Unit:  
Negative Externalities

<sup>19</sup><https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2013/09/20/majority-of-americans-say-banks-large-corporations-benefitted-most-from-u-s-economic-policies/>

<sup>20</sup> This poster is for sale on NBC’s website: <https://www.nbcstore.com/products/parks-and-recreation-swanson-pyramid-of-greatness-poster>

<sup>21</sup> [https://www.ted.com/talks/dan\\_ariely\\_how\\_equal\\_do\\_we\\_want\\_the\\_world\\_to\\_be\\_you\\_d\\_be\\_surprised/](https://www.ted.com/talks/dan_ariely_how_equal_do_we_want_the_world_to_be_you_d_be_surprised/).



#### D. Concepts Covered:

elasticity, externalities, fairness, taxes

#### E. Learning Objectives:

- Have students review real-world economic examples of government intervention
- Link elasticities with taxes to determine welfare effects
- Have students consider the purpose and outcome of government intervention when negative externalities are present

#### F. Relevant Clips:

Soda Sizes<sup>22</sup>

Soda Taxes<sup>23</sup>

Soda Tax Layoffs<sup>24</sup>

#### G. Summary:

Recent public policy has focused on the health effects of consuming refined sugar and local authorities across the country have decided to impose taxes on sugary beverages.<sup>25</sup> An initial concern was the regressive nature of the tax because low-income consumers were more likely to purchase sugary beverages.<sup>26</sup> Other issues involved which beverages would be taxed (since many juices weren't taxed, but still contain lots of sugar) and how to prevent consumers from purchasing those same products in nearby cities that are subject to the tax. Ghosh and Hall (2018) provide a summary on the political economy of soda taxation.

#### H. Discussion Questions:

The first discussion around the topic should be based on the tradeoff between the efficiency and equity surrounding this form of taxation. Have students list the pros and cons of a city instituting a soda tax. If governments are concerned about the health of their citizens, attempting to restrict their intake of sugary beverages is one place to begin. A counter-argument would be that citizens have the right to consume items they would like and that governments shouldn't be involved in such areas of personal life; however, this leads to an inefficient amount of sugary beverage consumption since people may not be considering the costs to their future selves of sugary beverage consumption now (imposing a negative externality on their future self) and will not factor in that their future increased healthcare costs will raise insurance premiums and health care costs for everyone (imposing a negative externality on other members of society).

A follow-up discussion revolves around the elasticity of demand for sugary beverages. If consumers are very price inelastic to their beverages, taxes won't have a large impact on the quantity of soda consumed, but it will result in a lower amount of deadweight loss and higher tax revenue for the government relative to a more elastic curve. Have students vote on whether they believe soda consumption is an elastic or inelastic product. Students should discuss with a partner the different factors that determine the elasticity of a product and how soda may fit into those characteristics. After the discussion, have students revote to see if the outcome changes.<sup>27</sup>

This can also lead to a discussion of why governments don't ban sugary beverages if they

<sup>22</sup> <https://economicsofparksandrec.com/2017/12/22/soda-sizes/>.

<sup>23</sup> <https://economicsofparksandrec.com/2017/12/22/soda-taxes/>.

<sup>24</sup> <https://economicsofparksandrec.com/2017/12/24/soda-tax-layoffs/>.

<sup>25</sup> Berkeley, CA and Philadelphia, PA were the first two major cities to enact a tax on sugary beverages.

<sup>26</sup> <https://taxfoundation.org/case-against-soda-taxes/>.

<sup>27</sup> Colcher et al. (2015) studied price changes for soda in Mexico and found that the elasticity of soft drinks was 1.16, implying that a 10% increase in the price of sodas would decrease the quantity consumed by about 11.6%. The effects were larger for poor families (hinting again at the regressive nature of the taxes) or families living in more remote areas.

contribute to obesity and increased healthcare costs. Have students list examples of other types of government mandates (e.g., many vaccines are required to enroll in public school, kids are required to attend school, no alcohol until age 21, no gambling or smoking until age 18, most drugs are illegal, etc.). Then have them list examples of instances where the government uses taxes or subsidies to try to influence behavior and internalize externalities (subsidized higher education, coronavirus and flu vaccines, high alcohol and cigarette taxes, gasoline taxes, etc.). This can lead to a discussion of mandates versus other types of government intervention, why governments might choose one or the other, and how they affect efficiency.<sup>28</sup>

## 5. Lesson 5: Gender Equality & Discrimination

A. CEE Voluntary National Standards in Economics:  
Standard 13: Income

B. College Board Advanced Placement Topic:  
Microeconomics Unit 5: Factor Markets  
Topic 5.1 Introduction to Factor Markets

C. Relevant Unit:  
Factor Markets

D. Concepts Covered:  
compensating differentials, discrimination, labor

E. Learning Objectives:

- Explore gender gaps in various occupations and fields
- Determine the requirements for discrimination to exist
- Propose causes of current gender issues in the United States

F. Relevant Clips:  
Sausage Fest<sup>29</sup>  
Why No Female Garbage Collectors?<sup>30</sup>  
Pie-Mary and Gender Roles<sup>31</sup>

G. Summary:

The gender pay gap is covered in the news on a regular basis and is often taken as proof of discrimination in the workplace.<sup>32</sup> The cause of this particular pay gap has been analyzed by economists and public policy researchers extensively.<sup>33</sup> A recent study using data on Uber drivers confirms previous work that most of the gap can be attributed to different preferences for how men and women are expected to allocate their time (Cook et al. 2020). Some of those preferences may be based on social roles placed on men and women, but they have significant impacts on future labor market outcomes.

---

<sup>28</sup>Mandates (often known as command-and-control approaches) are often inflexible and require the same standards for everyone involved. Since legislators write the mandates, they may be subject to compromises in the political process. Market-oriented solutions (like taxes or subsidies) create incentives for firms to find more flexible solutions. In our sugar tax example, firms may be incentivized to lower the sugar content of the beverage or find suitable substitutes, which achieves the same outcome and allows consumers to continue consuming soda. Customers who want the original level of soda can still do so while paying a price that incorporates the external costs.

<sup>29</sup><https://economicsofparksandrec.com/2018/05/21/sausage-fest/>.

<sup>30</sup><https://economicsofparksandrec.com/2018/05/21/why-no-female-garbage-collectors/>.

<sup>31</sup><https://economicsofparksandrec.com/2018/05/22/pie-mary-and-gender-roles/>.

<sup>32</sup><http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/04/09/gender-pay-gap-facts/>.

<sup>33</sup><http://freakonomics.com/podcast/the-true-story-of-the-gender-pay-gap-a-new-freakonomics-radio-podcast/>.

## H. Discussion Questions:

Have students list reasons why men and women may not be paid the same. This discussion may be supplemented with work from the Pew Research Center that extensively tracks trends in gender gaps for measures like pay, college completion, and time allocation.<sup>34</sup> It is important to start the discussion of gender gaps by focusing on how the pay gap is measured, using median earnings for all workers. From there, investigate what types of jobs men and women are most likely to perform. Women tend to be overrepresented in low-paying occupations like preschool education, secretaries and administrative assistants, and hairdressers.<sup>35</sup> Men tend to be overrepresented in physical labor occupations like brick masons, heavy vehicle operators, and power-line installers.

Labor economists traditionally define market discrimination as “individual workers who have *identical productive characteristics* are treated differently because of the demographic groups to which they belong.” (Ehrenberg and Smith 2016, p. 404). Ask students to identify which characteristics an economist would believe are considered “productive characteristics.” Afterward, show the clip titled “Why No Female Garbage Collectors?.” Then ask students to articulate whether businesses should be proactive when they receive a disproportionate share of male applicants or whether the government needs to intervene to encourage female applicants.

Depending on the size of the class, a discussion on the impact of social norms may be engaging. A large portion of the gap is associated with the role of women in society and how they are often burdened with the work of raising children and managing the household. Show the clip, “Pie-Mary and Gender Roles,” which is a satirical look at how women are treated in Pawnee. Leslie notes that many of the norms held for women aren’t expected of men. To end the discussion, have students identify comments or remarks they have encountered (or made) that they wouldn’t say to someone of the opposite sex. Guide students through the data visualization from the Pew Research Center on people’s different perceptions of men and women.<sup>36</sup> Have students list jobs that are typically more male-dominated and more female-dominated and show them the chart in this article from Equitable Growth that shows the gender composition of the highest paid and lowest paid jobs.<sup>37</sup> Finally, discuss how different social norms for men and women contribute to both gender differences in time use,<sup>38</sup> (differences that may have been exacerbated by school and daycare closures during COVID<sup>39</sup>) and occupational segregation and how these both contribute to the wage gap.<sup>40</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

The short guides listed above capitalize on the growth of educators who have been increasing their use of student-to-student discussion in the classroom by providing five topics of interest to many undergraduate students. The topics listed above take advantage of scenes that are freely available to educators and students online and emphasize key concepts covered in principles-level courses. Depending on the amount of available time, these teaching guides

<sup>34</sup><https://www.pewresearch.org/topic/gender-lgbtq/>

<sup>35</sup>Each of the occupations is at least 90% represented by women.

<sup>36</sup><https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/interactives/strong-men-caring-women/>.

<sup>37</sup><https://equitablegrowth.org/fact-sheet-occupational-segregation-in-the-united-states/>.

<sup>38</sup><https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2013/03/14/chapter-6-time-in-work-and-leisure-patterns-by-gender-and-family-structure/>.

<sup>39</sup><https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/05/06/working-moms-in-the-u-s-have-faced-challenges-on-multiple-fronts-during-the-pandemic/>.

<sup>40</sup>For a more in-depth discussion of these issues, see Blau and Winkler (2021).

could be adapted into an assignment that requires students to debate one another over the proposed topics (Wolla 2018). While these guides cover only five topics that may be discussed in a principles course, several other topics could easily be updated to include scenes from *Parks and Recreation*.

## References

- Acchiardo, C. J. R., & Vachris, M. A. (Eds.). (2018). *Dystopia and Economics: A Guide to Surviving Everything From the Apocalypse to Zombies*. Routledge. DOI: [10.4324/9781315168333](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315168333)
- Ahlstrom, L. J., & Mixon Jr, F. G. (Eds.). (2020). *War Movies and Economics: Lessons from Hollywood's Adaptations of Military Conflict*. Routledge. DOI: [10.4324/9780429296628](https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429296628)
- Anderson, J. L., & Krasnozhan, L. A. (2021). Effect of the Use of Music on Definitional Knowledge in an Introductory Statistics Course: Evidence From A Pareto Chart Activity *Decision Sciences Journal of Innovative Education*, 19(4), 265–274. DOI: [10.1111/dsji.12237](https://doi.org/10.1111/dsji.12237)
- Asarta, C. J., Chambers, R. G., & Harter, C. (2021). Teaching Methods in Undergraduate Introductory Economics Courses: Results from a Sixth National Quinquennial Survey. *The American Economist*, 66(1), 18–28. DOI: [10.1177/0569434520974658](https://doi.org/10.1177/0569434520974658)
- Bohanon, C. E., & Vachris, M. A. (2011). Economics and Literature: The Gains From Trade. In G.M. Hoyt and K. Goldrick (Eds.), *International Handbook on Teaching and Learning Economics* (pp. 223–233). Edward Elgar Publishing. DOI: [10.4337/9781781002452](https://doi.org/10.4337/9781781002452)
- Blau, F. D., & Winkler, A. E. (2021). *The Economics of Women, Men, and Work*. Oxford University Press.
- Buckles, S., Hoyt, G. M., & Imazeki, J. (2011). Making The Large-Enrollment Course Interactive and Engaging. In G.M. Hoyt and K. Goldrick (Eds.), *International Handbook on Teaching and Learning Economics* (pp. 118–128). Edward Elgar Publishing. DOI: [10.4337/9781781002452](https://doi.org/10.4337/9781781002452)
- Chu, S. Y. (2014). An Assessment of Teaching Economics With *The Simpsons*. *International Journal of Pluralism and Economics Education*, 5(2), 180–196. DOI: [10.1504/IJPEE.2014.063505](https://doi.org/10.1504/IJPEE.2014.063505)
- Colchero, M. A., Salgado, J. C., Unar-Munguía, M., Hernandez-Avila, M., & Rivera-Dommarco, J. A. (2015). Price Elasticity of the Demand for Sugar Sweetened Beverages and Soft Drinks in Mexico. *Economics & Human Biology*, 19, 129–137. DOI: [10.1016/j.ehb.2015.08.007](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ehb.2015.08.007)
- College Board. (2020a). *AP® Macroeconomics: Course and Exam Description*. Retrieved May 2021, from College Board: <https://apcentral-stg.collegeboard.org/pdf/ap-macroeconomics-course-and-exam-description.pdf>
- College Board. (2020b). *AP® Microeconomics: Course and Exam Description*. Retrieved May 2021, from College Board: <https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/pdf/ap-microeconomics-course-and-exam-description.pdf>
- Cook, C., Diamond, R., Hall, J. V., List, J. A., & Oyer, P. (2020). The Gender Earnings Gap in the Gig Economy: Evidence from Over a Million Rideshare Drivers. *The Review of Economic Studies*, 88(5), 2210–2238. DOI: [10.1093/restud/rdaa081](https://doi.org/10.1093/restud/rdaa081)
- Conaway, L. B., & Clark, C. (2015). Swansonomics: Using “Parks and Recreation” to Teach Economics. *Journal of Economics and Finance Education*, 14(1), 41–68. DOI: [10.1080/00220485.2018.1551098](https://doi.org/10.1080/00220485.2018.1551098)
- Ehrenberg, R.G., and Smith, RS. (2016). *Modern Labor Economics: Theory and Public Policy*. Routledge. DOI: [10.4324/9780429327209](https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429327209)

- Geerling, W., Mateer, D., Smith, B., Tierney, J., and Wooten, J. (2018) Lesson Plans for Teaching Economics With *The Big Bang Theory*. *Journal of Economics Teaching*, 3(1), 162–184. [DOI:10.58311/jeconteach/115fc4b6915c205359c9ec4bbb9a30fb42ef0194](https://doi.org/10.58311/jeconteach/115fc4b6915c205359c9ec4bbb9a30fb42ef0194)
- Geerling, W. (2012) Bringing the ‘Dismal Science’ to Life: Teaching Economics Through Multimedia. *International Review of Economic Education*, 11(2), 81– 90. [DOI:10.1016/S1477-3880\(15\)30010-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1477-3880(15)30010-4)
- Ghent, L. S., & Grant, A. P. (2020). *Seinfeld and Economics: Lessons on Everything from the Show About Nothing*. Routledge.
- Ghent, L. S., Grant, A., & Lesica, G. (2011). The Economics of Seinfeld. *The Journal of Economic Education*, 42(3), 317–318. [DOI:10.1080/00220485.2011.581967](https://doi.org/10.1080/00220485.2011.581967)
- Ghosh, S. & Hall, J. (2018). The Political Economy of Soda Taxation. *Economics Bulletin*, 38(2), 1–8.
- Hall, J. (Ed.). (2014). *Homer Economicus: The Simpsons and Economics*. Stanford University Press. [DOI:10.1515/9780804791823](https://doi.org/10.1515/9780804791823)
- Krueger, A. B. (2019). *Rockonomics: A Backstage Tour of What the Music Industry Can Teach Us About Economics and Life*. Broadway Business.
- Muchiri, S., Paraschiv, M., & Wooten, J. (2021). Teaching Economics With *Breaking Bad*. *Journal of Economics Teaching*, 7(1), 74-91. [DOI:10.58311/jeconteach/16f1dfeaa6ba84c7bfa6dfecc057b35d90063caa](https://doi.org/10.58311/jeconteach/16f1dfeaa6ba84c7bfa6dfecc057b35d90063caa)
- National Council on Economic Education. (2010). *Voluntary National Content Standards in Economics*. New York: National Council on Economic Education.
- O’Roark, B., & Salkowitz, R. (Eds.). (2018). *Superheroes and Economics: The Shadowy World of Capes, Masks and Invisible Hands*. Routledge. [DOI:10.4324/9781351258166](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351258166)
- O’Roark, J. B. (2019). *Why Superman Doesn’t Take Over the World: What Superheroes Can Tell Us About Economics*. Oxford University Press.
- Rousu, M. C. (2016). Broadway Economics. *The Journal of Economic Education*, 47(3), 268–268. [DOI:10.1080/00220485.2016.1179147](https://doi.org/10.1080/00220485.2016.1179147)
- Rousu, M. C. (2018a). *Broadway and Economics: Economic Lessons From Show Tunes*. Routledge. [DOI:10.4324/978135168364](https://doi.org/10.4324/978135168364)
- Rousu, M. C. (2018b). Using Show Tunes to Teach About Free (and Not-So-Free) Markets. *Journal of Private Enterprise*, 33, 111–128.
- Rousu, M. C., & Conrad, C. A. (2017). Economic Lessons from the Musical Hamilton. *Journal of Economics Teaching*, 2(1), 30–50. [DOI:10.58311/jeconteach/5ad3a4399bbe849ec7d857d9b2715603ad12dc1d](https://doi.org/10.58311/jeconteach/5ad3a4399bbe849ec7d857d9b2715603ad12dc1d)
- Staley, S. R. (2018). *Contemporary Film and Economics: Lights! Camera! Econ!*. Taylor & Francis. [DOI:10.4324/9781351258203](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351258203)
- Staley, S. R. (2020). *The Beatles and Economics: Entrepreneurship, Innovation, and the Making of a Cultural Revolution*. Routledge. [DOI:10.4324/9780429431586](https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429431586)



Tierney, J., Mateer, G. D., Smith, B., Wooten, J., & Geerling, W. (2016). Bazinganomics: Economics of The Big Bang Theory. *The Journal of Economic Education*, 47(2), 192. [DOI:10.1080/00220485.2016.1146099](https://doi.org/10.1080/00220485.2016.1146099)

Wolla, S. A. (2018). Yours, Mine, and the Truth: Using a Structured Minimum Wage Debate in the Economics Classroom. *The American Economist*, 63(2), 245–259. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26754450> DOI:10.1177/0569434517736241

Wooten, J. (2021). *Parks and Recreation and Economics*. Routledge. [DOI:10.4324/9781003094906](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003094906)

Wooten, J., Al-Bahrani, A., Holder, K., and Patel, D. (2021). The Role of Relevance in Economics Education: A Survey. *Journal for Economic Educators*, 21(1), 11–34. [DOI:10.2139/ssrn.3606301](https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3606301)

Wooten, J., & Smith, B. (2018). Create Random Assignments: A Cloud-Based Tool to Help Implement Alternative Teaching Materials. *The Journal of Economic Education*, 49(3), 297. [DOI:10.1080/00220485.2018.1464983](https://doi.org/10.1080/00220485.2018.1464983)

Wooten, J., Staub, K., & Reilly, S. (2020). Economics Within ABC's Modern Family. *The Journal of Economic Education*, 51(2), 210. [DOI:10.1080/00220485.2020.1731382](https://doi.org/10.1080/00220485.2020.1731382)

## Appendix

The following matrix allows students to record various characteristics of market structures for ease of comparison.

Type of Market	<i>Market Characteristics</i>				Examples
	Number of firms	Similar or different products	Ability to control prices	Ease of entering market	
<b>Perfect Competition</b>					
<b>Monopolistic Competition</b>					
<b>Oligopoly</b>					
<b>Monopoly</b>					