



Changing the Landscape of Instruction: Economic Development

ERWIN F. ERHARDT, III, PHD
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS
UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI

Economic Development: The First 12 years

- ▶ I started teaching Economic Development circa 1999.
- ▶ Students were lively, interested, participated in class, and gave oral presentations on their research papers during the last week of the semester.
- ▶ Those with excellent papers were invited to present them at the Global Studies Conference at the University of Nebraska—Omaha in the following school year.
- ▶ (In 2008, along with a few students from Political Science, I took 12 University of Cincinnati undergraduate and graduate students to Omaha. It was a remarkable experience and an excellent learning opportunity.)

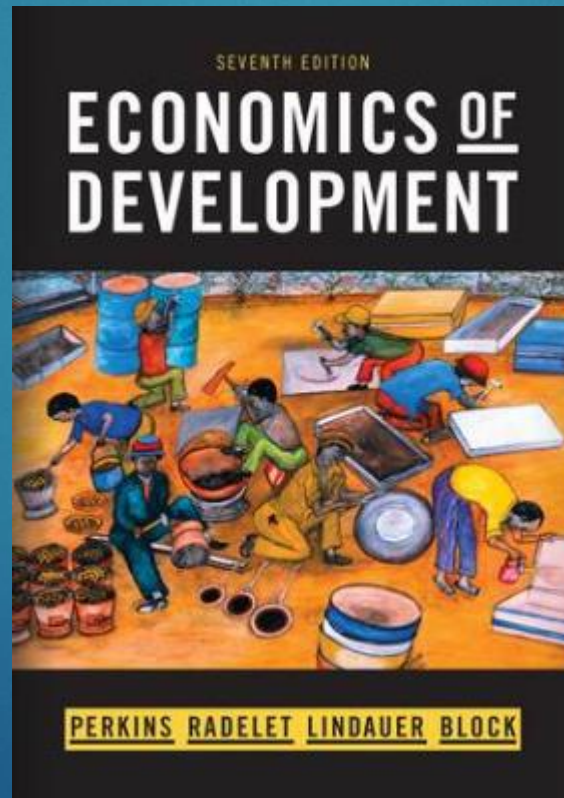
Economic Development: The Last 12 Years

- ▶ During the 2010-11 academic year, the Department of Economics moved from the College of Arts and Sciences to the College of Business.
- ▶ The atmosphere in the classroom changed significantly. Note-taking was out; doc cam notes were in. It was an adjustment.
- ▶ The participation level fell in the new setting, despite attempts to foster discussions around current events from sources such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Times of London*, and others.
- ▶ Taking exams that involved writing essays suddenly became more challenging.
- ▶ From 2014 onward, no one elected to go to Omaha to present. (Two years later, that conference came to a permanent end)

Challenges: The Textbook
W.W. Norton

By 2015, it was becoming apparent this would be its final edition. It was starting to become dated. What was more troubling was that the other the other competing textbooks in the publishing industry were just as voluminous—if not more so.

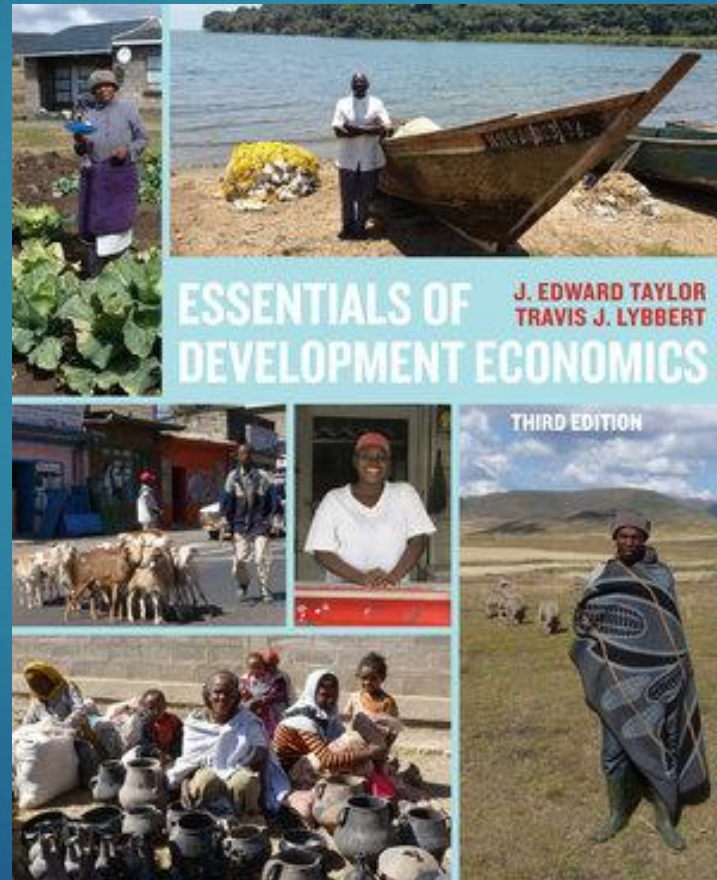
Most of the primary Economic Development textbooks were running about 800 pages in length. Not only was the book-size intimidating, but I personally felt they were designed for a full one-year course in Economic Development.



Essentials of Development Economics
University of California Press

By J. Edward Taylor and Travis J. Lybbert

After searching for several days for other up-to-date textbooks, I discovered this text was only 259 pages and had just entered its 3rd edition!



Taylor and Lybbert: User friendly 'above and below'

- ▶ I wrote by email to co-author Travis Lybbert and discussed my textbook situation and concerns. I discussed how the books were too big and were also becoming dated as we spoke.
- ▶ I did not prefer to use World Bank publications.
- ▶ Prof. Lybbert sent me a PDF copy of the 2nd edition of their text, as the 3rd edition was currently undergoing a reprint. He also directed me to the website where I could set up a book order/provide an e-book link to my students in their syllabus.
- ▶ <https://www.ucpress.edu/book/9780520343580/essentials-of-development-economics-third-edition>

Promo from the
University of California Press
on *Essentials of Developmental Economics*, 3rd, Ed.

- ▶ The University of California Press is pleased to announce this new title available for use in your course:
- ▶ ***Essentials of Development Economics, Third Edition* by J. Edward Taylor and Travis J. Lybbert**

Written to provide students with the critical tools and approaches used by development economists, *Essentials of Development Economics* represents an alternative approach to traditional textbooks on the subject. Offering a compact broad overview of key topics and methods in the field, its fourteen easy-to-read chapters introduce cutting-edge research and present best practices and state-of-the-art methods.

UC Press Continued

► **This new edition includes:**

- Updated references to international development policy process and goals
- Substantial updates to several chapters with new and revised material to make the text both current and policy relevant
- Replacement of several special features with new ones featuring widely cited studies

"Provides students access to the most contemporary ideas such as experimentation while simultaneously engaging them with a compelling synthesis of the most broad, historical, and important ideas that have emerged in the field."—Bruce Wydick, Professor of Economics, University of San Francisco

"Taylor and Lybbert respond in this book to the profession's call for seeking answers to the big questions in development. Their essentials are indeed essential for any student of development."—Finn Tarp, Professor of Development Economics, University of Copenhagen

From the authors:

- ▶ *Our approach to teaching development economics has evolved over time, and not just as we gained experience and received feedback from students and teaching assistants. It's also been shaped by the distinct research shift in the field towards empirical and experimental methods that emphasize causal inference. In this sense, the book represents what we believe to be the most efficient and effective way to teach development economics in an era when both the field and the students we teach are different than they were before.*

-Taylor and Lybbert

Emily A. Beam: *Journal of Economic Education*,
(52:4, 274-285, 2021)

- ▶ *“Leveraging outside readings and low stakes writing assignments to promote student engagement in an economic development course”*
- ▶ *Concerns structuring Economic Development around outside course readings—from journals, policy briefs to news articles.*
- ▶ *Students complete low-stakes, high-frequency writing assignments that promote accountability and encourage critical thinking...*”

Nature of written work: (Beam)

- ▶ Provides for some choice among outside readings
- ▶ Fosters and encourages critical thinking and analysis in the written response—*think critically*.
- ▶ *The Reading Response should be 400-500 words. (Pre-assign guiding questions for consideration). This leads to ...*
- ▶ *Utilizing small-group discussions in class on a regular basis.*
- ▶ *Instructor 'checks in' on each group.*
- ▶ *One important result of this process: learning about differing points of view in development. Who is right? What about the voices of the native stakeholders themselves?*

Thought on Beam

- ▶ Class discussion on readings, even when the students have prepared a written summary—it often fall flat. The idea of the discussion groups is worth the time—especially if it bears fruit.
- ▶ My concern: design of classrooms. Fixed position desks/tables may complicate this process.
- ▶ Group activity may push students to a higher lever of interaction and discussion.
- ▶ My concern: that no one student tries to dominate nor direct the course of the discussion. Perhaps a group leader should be appointed and it should rotate within the group.

(The concerns are there, but worth attempting in the classroom)

Utilizing podcasts, videos, and seminars (Beam)

- ▶ These can certainly be useful if students are properly motivated to tap into such resources (some can be used in class)
- ▶ (My new idea). I can invite people working in the field of developmental economics from a variety of backgrounds, into my classroom through the use of Zoom. The guest can make a 20 minutes presentation, take questions, and leave time for the class to discuss the presentation and its meaning for development.
- ▶ I believe that whether the resources are in print or on another media, students need to be taught—now more than ever—to be discriminating readers. Learning the art of *critical thinking* should be at the forefront of all of our courses (especially in an age where disinformation and controlled information flows are prevalent).

Conclusion

- ▶ The course, as I've historically taught has become more of a struggle. This has been made worse by current social-cultural behaviors among our students—made even more so by the pandemic shutdown.
- ▶ Taylor and Lybbert's *Essentials of Development Economics* (2nd Edition) provides an exceptional text to work along side of Beam ideas of outside reading as a critical part of the course, along with the incorporation of in-class discussions and Reading Response (written assignments).
- ▶ The Reading Responses and class participation should better engage students in the learning process, expand their abilities to think critically, and better prepare them for their capstone paper.
- ▶ The written work should also serve them well as it will become an essential part of their final exam preparation.

Concluding Goals/Remarks

- ▶ To combine the Taylor and Lybbert text with the 'best practices' suggested by Beam to elevate the level of classroom engagement and performance through the use of more outside reading and group discussion.
- ▶ To foster a desire to do competent research to help determine possible answers to the problems facing developing nations.
- ▶ To hopefully inspire students to consider presenting good research papers at academic conferences where undergraduate and graduate student papers are welcome. (State-wide academic organizations often offer these opportunities).







