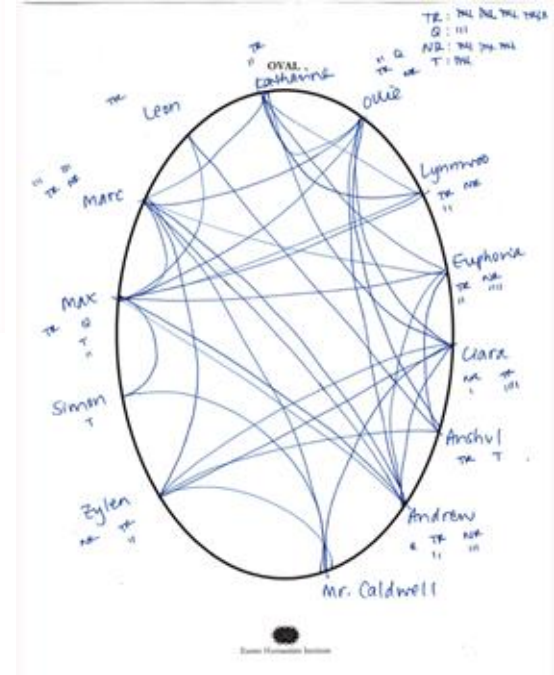
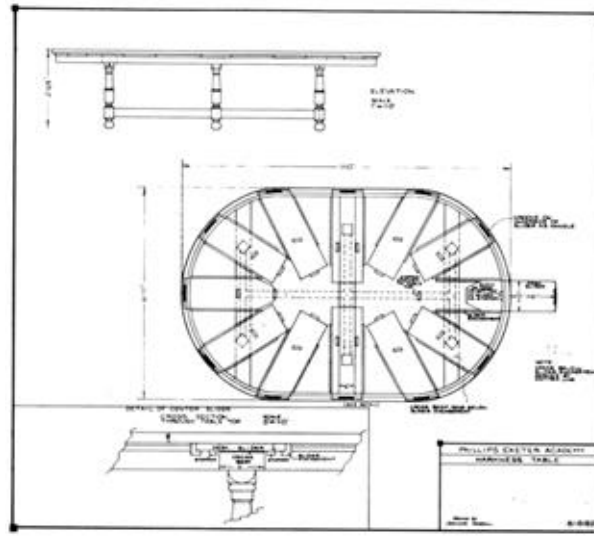


Oval Economics: Harkness Learning in the Economics Classroom

Bryan Boucher
Phillips Exeter Academy
Exeter, New Hampshire
bboucher@exeter.edu

What is Harkness?

- Originated by Edward Harkness in the early 1930s and designed as a “conference method” of teaching and learning, centered on discussion-based, student-centered exploration
- By the mid-1970s, all classes at Phillips Exeter Academy were taught using the Harkness method - today, students experience Harkness learning in every class, every day



What Does This Mean for Economics?

- Students drive the discussion and content pathway
 - Expectation for students:
 - Come to class having completed the previous night's reading, with annotations, questions, and confusions
 - While some classes are structured, many classes are guided by the questions of the students, who then receive responses from other students
 - Students (hopefully) “embrace the confusion,” with the knowledge that the instructor will guide and steer the conversation as needed to clear up misconceptions and get the class where they need to be by the end of the class period
- Economics without lecture - this is challenging to give up! But, empowering for students!

Structure of a Unit: Supply & Demand

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
- Opening Simulation & Debrief <i>HW: Written Reflection on Simulation</i>	- Group Practice of Problems (Easy Version) <i>HW: Introductory Textbook Reading</i>	- Group Practice of Problems (Challenging Version) <i>HW: Problem Set Questions #1-2</i>	- Problem Set Discussion w/extension problems <i>HW: Problem Set Questions #3-4</i>	- Problem Set Discussion w/ extension problems <i>HW: Current Event Articles</i>
Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10
- Current Event Analysis Activity (Part Harkness Discussion w/ graphical application) <i>HW: Problem Set Questions #5-6</i>	- Problem Set Discussion w/extension problems <i>HW: Case Study Reading and Analysis</i>	- Case Study Harkness Discussion <i>HW: Practice Questions and 1-1-1 Assignment</i>	- Group Review and Graphing Practice <i>HW: Review for Test</i>	TEST

Decoding the Calendar

- **Opening Simulation:** Creating a Classroom Market (many online versions of this - choose your favorite); pick the most interactive or applicable concept per unit (even if it is not introduced until later in the unit).
- **“Practice of Problems:”** Giving students supply and demand problems *before* they have learned the technical concept (the challenging version adds concepts - in this case, perhaps price floors or ceilings, quotas, etc. that build off of their previous work)
- **Problem Set:** A set of detailed, technical questions with explanatory writing that serves as the most important conceptual content for the course (extension problems are potential additional problems for the group if time permits)
 - We will often work through these in small groups and use small whiteboards or whiteboards around the classroom to display graphs and answers
 - I encourage/expect students to make “improvements” to their problem set questions as they are discussing in groups - I spot check that they are complete and then collect at the end of the unit, looking for both their original work and their improvements (in a different color ink)
 - Problem set questions are assigned in tandem with corresponding textbook pages or online resources - students know the expectation is to use the textbook as a resource to attempt the problem set questions, but are not reading as in-depth as they would in the history or English classroom

Decoding the Calendar (cont.)

- **Current Event Analysis Activity**
 - World Cup Transit = Elasticity
- **Group Review and Graphing Practice**
 - **1-1-1 Review Activity**
 - 1 question you have
 - 1 concept you want work on
 - 1 concept you feel confident about
- **Case Study Analysis:** For my auto industry case study, at various points we have discussed the following subtopics:
 - Used car market during and after Covid
 - Supply-chain issues related to new car production
 - Rising costs of inputs (oil, lithium batteries, etc.)
 - The rise (or not?) of EV-cars and how that impacts the overall market



Challenges and Conclusions

● Challenges

- How do you work with students that have a lot of knowledge of a subject (in other subjects, we call these students “Harkness Warriors”)?
- How do you keep moving forward in content without leaving questions and confusion behind?
- How do you give up the control of the dialogue in the classroom?

● Conclusions

- While other school settings may not work to go “full Harkness,” it is worth exploring activities, lessons, or topics that can be moved into more student-centered discussions/activities.
- Giving away control of the classroom can be daunting, but is ultimately rewarding for the students.
- Please reach out - we run a week-long Exeter Humanities Institute every June on our campus, and another one in CA in July - please join us!

Questions?

Thank you!

Bryan Boucher
Phillips Exeter Academy
bboucher@exeter.edu