

Rethinking Economics

How-to Guide:

...Change the curriculum at
your university

This guide will show you how to:

- Talk to students at your university.
- Talk to the economics department at your university.
- Run an evidence-backed campaign for curriculum reform.

Introduction

Changing the Economics curriculum at your university is essential to changing the way economics is taught at universities everywhere. Even small changes such as the introduction of a critical module, or an increase in debate during tutorials and lectures can go a long way to changing the way people think about economics and how it is taught.

Economics departments aren't going to reform by themselves; **to persuade them to change you need to run an effective campaign**. There is no 'right' way to do this, and how you build support amongst students and academics will depend on your student population and the relationship you have with your department.

Petitions demanding change, reports and reviews can all be components of an effective campaign as can regular meetings and dialogue with the academics in charge of delivering the curriculum.

There are two key groups of people that you need to convince in order to achieve curriculum change:

1. Students at your university.
2. The economics department.

Students

Talk to them: If you're not happy with the economics education you're receiving, it's likely that others aren't too. Go out and talk to students about what they think of their degrees, what you think the problems are and how you think economics education could be improved. Regular stalls outside lectures, in the economics department or in your students union are one way to do this, you could also have discussions on social media or at socials after your events.

Show them what they could be learning: Lectures, workshops, discussions on non-mainstream economics are the best way to demonstrate how interesting, relevant and critical economics can be. For ideas for events see the 'How to...Run an event'. Students may not automatically support an overhaul of their economics degree but that's because they don't know what they are missing!

Be sensitive: Some students may not be happy with you telling them that their degree is not up to scratch as they may think of it as a reflection on them or be concerned that running a campaign that says economics training isn't good enough will devalue their degree. This is just something to be aware of, focus on how much more valuable their degree will be if the campaign at their university is successful.

The Department

Talk to them: It is absolutely key that you build a good relationship with your department! For some things, asking nicely does work so try that before you organise a full-blown occupation of the economics building.

There may be certain things that you can work on together, certain lecturers may be happy to introduce some debate into their tutorials, or teach a class on an opposing theory. It is likely that you will be met with hostility at first as no one wants to be told that the way they are currently teaching is wrong, but they are much more likely to listen to your concerns if you build a good relationship with them.

This is not to say that you shouldn't ever do anything confrontational but having regular meetings with senior academics and management whilst you run your campaign will show them that you are reasonable and informed people but also remind them that you are not going away.

Demonstrate Student Support: One counter-argument that will always be thrown at you is that you are only a small proportion of students and do not represent the views of everyone else doing the course. To counter this you need to show that other students agree with you. You can do this by organising public demonstrations, getting signatures for petitions, asking people to sign and/or contribute to open letters. Templates of these and ideas for creative campaigning actions can be found further on.

Back up your arguments

However you choose to run your campaign it is important to support it with evidence; this could include reports or reviews on your curriculum, or evidence of student support that you have gathered through petitions.

Petitions and Open Letters

Writing a petition or an open letter to your economics department outlining the problems with your curriculum and asking for change is a simple and effective way of demonstrating student support for your campaign. You may want to petition the department on specific things such as introducing a particular module or including alternative perspectives in core modules or write an open letter on more broad curriculum reform. You can find a [template petition here](#), and a [template open letter here](#). For another example of an open letter see the International Student Initiative for Pluralism in Economics (ISIPE) [open letter](#).

Student Surveys

Student surveys can be a great way to gather both data and more anecdotal evidence on which aspects of the economic curriculum students are unhappy with, which can then be used to show the department that it is not just a small group of you who want to kick up a fuss. For an example of a student survey and accompanying report see Cambridge Society for Economic Pluralism's [curriculum review](#).

Curriculum Reviews and Reports

Whilst anecdotal evidence is powerful, it will strengthen your campaign enormously if you can provide a comprehensive review of where your curriculum could be improved. Responses that you may hear quite often when in conversation with your economics department include *“well there’s a lot more critical thinking required in third year modules”* or *“you do loads of economic history in x core module”*. Conducting a full curriculum review enables you to come back with *“actually only x% of modules have any history of economic thought/ over 20% of marks assigned for critical thinking and we don’t think this is good enough”*.

For an example of a comprehensive curriculum review see Manchester Post-Crash Economics' [Report](#), .