Preface

When I entered college, I had dreams of being a chemist or a mathematician. I struggled to earn a B in freshman chemistry; so much for that major! With hard work, I earned As in math. However, my other coursework in the humanities and life experiences made me want not simply to solve math problems but rather use math to solve ‘people’ problems.

Then along came Principles of Economics. I was fortunate to have a professor who was basically a teacher as opposed to a researcher, and he was a good teacher. This made economics easy to learn, but I still longed for something more rigorous. In my senior year, I took Intermediate Macroeconomics with Professor John J. Klein, a disciple of Milton Friedman. He introduced me to economic rigor and a more math-oriented way of looking at the discipline. Then I was taught graduate macroeconomics by Professor Jim Quirk, who raised the math content of economics exponentially. I learned myriad applications of mathematics in economics and even published my first half dozen peer-reviewed papers while still a graduate student in the PhD program.

What Professors Klein and Quirk both did was raise my interest not only in economics and the tools of economics but also their many fascinating applications to real human economic problems, such as economic growth, implications of tax policy, theories of consumer behavior and complex utility functions, investment behavior, migration, interest rate determination, theories of the firm and human capital and game theory. And so much more. How my professors both taught me to love my chosen field of study was through a combination of authoritatively taught lectures mixed with humor and seriousness, with the Socratic Method and often creative class participation. For example, I was the only student in my class to prove a simple problem in qualitative economics. They made learning economics fun as well as mind expanding.

This is the context and underlying spirit of the present book. To help provide professors teaching economics with a variety of means by which to engage students, to keep their interest, to allow them access to the folly of economics as well as the brute seriousness of economics, to grow
their interest, and to challenge their minds to apply their knowledge and technical tools to an ever-expanding range of economics problems. We want to make economics more fun to learn and more fun to teach as well. The better professors can succeed in these endeavors, the more successfully we can improve the human condition.

The chapters in this book that are fundamentally true research endeavors involving economics in the classroom and the educational process serve to reinforce the goal of understanding how to put economics in the proper context for it to most effectively be taught and understood.

Hopefully, the chapters that follow will provide a variety of insights and ideas that will facilitate the enhancement of the quality of teaching economics and the degree of learning economics reasoning and how to assess problems, how to identify solutions thereto and how to choose the best of those solutions.

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