

The French students' petition

open letter from economic students to professors and others responsible for the teaching of this discipline

We, economics students of the universities of France, declare ourselves to be generally dissatisfied with the teaching that we receive.

This is so for the following reasons:

1. We wish to escape from imaginary worlds!

Most of us have chosen to study economics so as to acquire a deep understanding of the economic phenomena with which the citizens of today are confronted. But the teaching that is offered, that is to say for the most part neoclassical theory or approaches derived from it, does not generally answer this expectation. Indeed, even when the theory legitimately detaches itself from contingencies in the first instance, it rarely carries out the necessary return to the facts. The empirical side (historical facts, functioning of institutions, study of the behaviors and strategies of the agents . . .) is almost non-existent. Furthermore, this gap in the teaching, this disregard for concrete realities, poses an enormous problem for those who would like to render themselves useful to economic and social actors.

2. We oppose the uncontrolled use of mathematics!

The instrumental use of mathematics appears necessary. But resort to mathematical formalization when it is not an instrument but rather an end in itself, leads to a true schizophrenia in relation to the real world. Formalization makes it easy to construct exercises and to manipulate models whose significance is limited to finding “the good result” (that is, the logical result following from the initial hypotheses) in order to be able to write “a good paper.” This custom, under the pretence of being scientific, facilitates assessment and selection, but never responds to the question that we are posing regarding contemporary economic debates.

3. We are for a pluralism of approaches in economics!

Too often the lectures leave no place for reflection. Out of all the approaches to economic questions that exist, generally only one is presented to us. This approach is supposed to explain everything by means of a purely axiomatic process, as if this were THE economic truth. We do not accept this dogmatism. We want a pluralism of approaches, adapted to the complexity of the objects and to the uncertainty surrounding most of the big questions in economics (unemployment, inequalities, the place of financial markets, the advantages and disadvantages of free-trade, globalization, economic development, etc.).

4. Call to teachers: wake up before it is too late!

We appreciate that our professors are themselves subject to some constraints. Nevertheless, we appeal to all those who understand our claims and who wish for change. If serious reform does not take place rapidly, the risk is great that economics students, whose numbers are already decreasing, will abandon the field in mass, not because they have lost interest, but because they have been cut off from the realities and debates of the contemporary world.

We no longer want to have this
Autistic science
imposed on us.

**We do not ask for the impossible, but only that good sense may
prevail.**

We hope, therefore, to be heard very soon.