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# **A Study of Paul A. Samuelson's *Economics*: Making Economics Accessible to Students**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of**

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# Abstract

Paul A. Samuelson is the founder of the modern introductory economics textbook. His textbook *Economics* has become a classic, and the yardstick of introductory economics textbooks. What is said to distinguish economics from the other social sciences is the development of a textbook tradition. The textbook presents the fundamental paradigms of the discipline, these gradually evolve over time as puzzles emerge, and solutions are found or suggested. The textbook is central to the dissemination of the principles of a discipline. *Economics* has, and does contribute to the education of students, and advances economic literacy and understanding in society. It provided a common economic language for students.

Systematic analysis and research into introductory textbooks is relatively recent. The contribution that textbooks play in portraying a discipline and its evolution has been undervalued and under-researched. Specifically, applying bibliographical and textual analysis to textbook writing in economics, examining a single introductory economics textbook and its successive editions through time is new. When it is considered that an economics textbook is more than a disseminator of information, but a physical object with specific content, presented in a particular way, it changes the way a researcher looks at that textbook. This thesis examines the sixteen editions of *Economics* as a physical object, and its content. Through this examination it is possible to see how Samuelson made economics accessible to students. A central question is has *Economics* evolved as the world around it has changed?

Samuelson has a very student-oriented approach when writing his textbook. Readers of *Economics* come to understand economic concepts through relevant examples. Well-known people and events are used by Samuelson to illustrate economic theory and present economic ideas. In *Economics* Samuelson presents the principles of mainstream economics. He also portrays the social, psychological, political, and historical landscape of the time. Samuelson's *Economics* provides the non-professional economist (the student, businessperson, politician etc) with the principles of economics, presented in ways that are relevant to them, and relate to the issues they see and face in the world. *Economics* has not remained static; rather, it has developed over time. The ability of *Economics* to evolve has been the key to its survival.

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# Contents

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Contents</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>List of Tables</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>List of Figures</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>Chapter One: Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter Two: Reconstructing History Through Samuelson's <i>Economics</i></b>	<b>8</b>
2.1 Introduction	9
2.2 International Conflict	10
2.3 Technology	16
2.4 Social and Demographic Issues	17
2.4.1 Shortages in the 1970s	17
2.4.2 The Environment	19
2.4.3 Discrimination	22
2.4.4 Population	28
2.5 American Politics Since 1945	30
2.6 Conclusion	35

<b>Chapter Three:</b>	<b>Analysing <i>Economics</i>: Physical Characteristics</b>	<b>37</b>
3.1	Introduction	38
3.2	Bibliographical and Textual Scholarship	39
3.3	The Physical Characteristics	42
3.3.1	The “Preface”	48
3.3.2	The Chapters	51
3.3.3	The Appendices	54
3.3.4	The Index	59
3.4	Conclusion	64
<b>Chapter Four:</b>	<b>Analysing <i>Economics</i>: Content</b>	<b>66</b>
4.1	Introduction	67
4.2	The First and Last Statements in <i>Economics</i>	67
4.3	Microeconomics	75
4.4	Macroeconomics	81
4.5	A Comparative Analysis: the First and Sixteenth Editions of <i>Economics</i>	85
4.5.1	The First Edition 1948	85
4.5.2	The Sixteenth Edition 1998	87
4.5.3	Comparing the First and Sixteenth Editions of <i>Economics</i>	88
4.6	Competing Economic Paradigms	91
4.6.1	Grand Neo-classical Synthesis	92
4.6.2	Challenges to the Grand Neo-classical Synthesis	94
	Monetarism	94
	Rational Expectations	97
4.6.3	Selected Analytical Concepts	99
	The Laffer Curve	99
	The ‘Kinked’ Demand Curve	101
	The Phillips Curve	103
	Say’s Law	106
4.6.4	Marxism	108
4.7	Conclusion	112

<b>Chapter Five:</b>	<b>Mathematisation and <i>Economics</i></b>	<b>115</b>
5.1	Introduction	116
5.2	Mathematisation	118
5.3	Samuelson and Mathematics	126
5.4	Mathematics in <i>Economics</i>	130
5.5	Case Study of Mathematisation in <i>Economics</i> : The Theory of Income Analysis Section	136
5.6	Conclusion	141
<b>Chapter Six:</b>	<b>The Government and the Market</b>	<b>143</b>
6.1	Introduction	144
6.2	The Role of Government	145
6.2.1	Government Purchase of Goods and Services	146
6.2.2	The Welfare State	149
6.2.3	Regulation and Deregulation	153
6.2.4	Stabilisation Policy	157
6.3	The Market	159
6.3.1	The Free-Market System	162
6.3.2	Market Failure	165
	Monopoly	165
	Externalities	167
	Income Distribution	169
6.4	The Modern Mixed Market System	172
6.5	Conclusion	177

<b>Chapter Seven:</b>	<b>The International Economy</b>	<b>180</b>
7.1	Introduction	181
7.2	The International Economy	182
7.2.1	Trade Liberalisation	182
7.2.2	Regionalism and Trade Groups	184
7.2.3	Protectionism	186
7.2.4	Leaders in the International Economy	189
7.3	International Economics in <i>Economics</i>	191
7.3.1	The Open Economy Model	195
7.3.2	Protectionism and Free Trade	198
7.3.3	The 'Cheap Foreign Labour' Argument	200
7.4	Conclusion	204
<b>Chapter Eight:</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>206</b>
<b>Appendices</b>		<b>210</b>
Appendix One:	Paul Anthony Samuelson – biographical sketch	211
Appendix Two:	William D Nordhaus – biographical sketch	216
Appendix Three:	A Selection of Words that Appear in the Index of <i>Economics</i>	216
Appendix Four:	The Forty-Five Degree Diagram	218
Appendix Five:	Countries Appearing in the Index of <i>Economics</i>	220
<b>Bibliography</b>		<b>222</b>



# List of Tables

Table 1.1:	<i>Economics</i> Reference Table	6
Table 2.1:	“Comparative [Median Wage Incomes] of Men and Women and of Negroes and Whites” (Sam. 1 1948, 82).	24
Table 2.2:	Earnings Differential – earnings of group (as percentage of earnings of white males)	25
Table 2.3:	Cherry and Feiner’s Study of Discrimination in Introductory Economics Textbooks – <i>Economics</i> Compared with all Textbooks in the Study	27
Table 3.1:	The Physical Dimensions of Introductory Textbooks – McEachern (1996)	44
Table 3.2:	The Physical Characteristics of <i>Economics</i>	45
Table 3.3:	Total Number of Chapters in <i>Economics</i> , and the Content Composition Across Editions	52
Table 4.1:	The First and Last Statements in <i>Economics</i>	68
Table 4.2:	Comparing the First and Sixteenth Editions of <i>Economics</i>	89
Table 4.3:	The Number of Pages with Reference to Karl Marx and Marxian Economics in the Sixteen Editions of <i>Economics</i>	109
Table 5.1:	The Number of Equations and Graphs in <i>Economics</i>	131

Table 5.2:	The Number of Pages, Equations and Graphs in the Income Determination Section in <i>Economics</i>	137
Table 6.1:	The Inequalities in the Distribution of Income in American Households 1935-1936 and 1995 as Presented in the First and Sixteenth Editions of <i>Economics</i>	170
Table 6.2:	The Total Number of Chapters in <i>Economics</i> with 'Individual' or 'Personal,' 'Government' or 'Federal,' and 'Market' in their Titles	176
Table 7.1:	Protectionist Tools in <i>Economics</i>	189
Table 7.2:	The Number of International Chapters and Appendices in <i>Economics</i> , and International Chapters as a Percentage of Total Chapters	192
Table 7.3:	The Number of Subheadings Under International Trade in the Index of <i>Economics</i>	193
Table 7.4:	Countries Listed in the Index in Nine or More Editions of <i>Economics</i>	194
Table 7.5:	Industries Used in <i>Economics</i> to Illustrate the Cheap Foreign Labour Argument	201
Table A.1:	A Selection of Words that Appear in the Index of <i>Economics</i>	217
Table A.2:	Countries Appearing in the Index of <i>Economics</i>	220

# List of Figures

Figure 3.1:	Comparing the Number of Pages and Standardised Pages of <i>Economics</i>	46
Figure 3.2:	Number of Chapters and Percentage of Textbook Given to Microeconomics and Macroeconomics over the Sixteen Editions of <i>Economics</i>	53
Figure 3.3:	Comparing the Number of Appendices and Chapters in <i>Economics</i>	55
Figure 4.1:	Samuelson's Guns and Butter Figure (Sam. 1 1948, 19)	77
Figure 5.1:	Total Number of Equations and as a Percentage of the Standardised Pages across the Editions	132
Figure 5.2:	Total Number of Graphs and as a Percentage of the Standardised Pages across the Editions	133
Figure 5.3:	The Number of Equations in the Section, the Theory of Income Determination in <i>Economics</i>	138
Figure 5.4:	The Number of Graphs in the Section, the Theory of Income Determination in <i>Economics</i>	139
Figure 6.1:	Wage Rates Per Hour of the American and English Workers in the Cheap Foreign Labour Argument, <i>Economics</i> Editions One to Eleven (1948-1980)	203

**“I don’t care who writes a nation’s laws - or crafts its advanced treaties - if I can write its economics textbooks” Paul A Samuelson.<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> (Nasar 1995).