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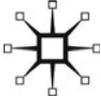
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▶ What Can Behavioral Economics Teach Us about Teaching Economics?

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WHAT CAN BEHAVIORAL ECONOMICS TEACH US ABOUT TEACHING
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Preface and Acknowledgments

This book grew out of a presentation I made at the Western Economic Association International Conference in summer 2014 at Denver, Colorado. It shares not only the same title as the presentation but also has the same goal as the presentation: to persuade economists to contribute to the multi-disciplinary research in learning sciences. The call for research is specifically directed at behavioral economists whose tools and willingness to delve into internal workings of the human mind may be particularly needed for research on learning. Involvement by economists in education research has so far been limited to documenting teaching methods and their effectiveness. A new research agenda that leverages the current knowledge and methods found in the neuroscience and cognitive psychology literature may bring new insights to the teaching of economics. I argue in the book that a systematic investigation into how people learn economics has the potential to also contribute new insights into how people make choices.

The initial motivation for this book was the goal of persuading behavioral economists to spend more resources on investigating learning processes, but various avenues are open in learning research for economists of all persuasions. I am not a behavioral economist myself, though I have been an avid consumer of the research in the field. Therefore, whether the reader is, like me, employed by a teaching institution with heavy teaching loads, or is a mainstream economist skeptical of the methods and conclusions of behavioral economics, or is a graduate student still unsure of which sub-field of economics to

embrace, the reader will find that there are many avenues of investigation open to those who wish to understand how students learn, or fail to learn, economics. It is the goal of the book to demonstrate that the research required for improving teaching and learning cannot be accomplished without the coordinated effort and involvement of the entire spectrum of the economics profession. The field of learning research is currently under-invested in by economists, and there is a vast amount and variety of knowledge that is waiting to be discovered. It is my hope that economists of diverse sub-specialties, professional ranks, and methodological preferences, will find something here that they deem worthy of exploring, using those tools with which they are most comfortable.

This book would not have been possible without the support and understanding of my husband Ram, who also served as a proof-reader and provided comments on initial drafts. I am grateful for the inspiration provided by the students, colleagues, staff, and administrators at Westfield State University, an institution whose dedication to good teaching manifests itself in myriad ways at every level. Suzanne Tiranno was especially helpful in locating sources that I could not find in the library. I have benefited from the expertise of the Teaching Innovations Program faculty; especially, KimMarie McGoldrick and Mark Maier, who provided extensive feedback and comments on my initial attempts to incorporate innovative teaching methods. I am grateful for the two best teachers, mentors, advisors, and role models, Price V. Fishback, and Ronald L. Oaxaca, who were always there to support me when I was a graduate student at the University of Arizona. They tried to correct my weaknesses as a researcher and believed in my strengths when even I did not. I would like to thank my siblings and extended family members for their support during the writing process even when I missed important family functions. Finally, my deepest thanks go to my parents for instilling a deep enough sense of service and duty, which could not be extinguished by the survival instincts provoked by a competitive world.

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