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Teaching in Real Time

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Teaching in

It's Thursday afternoon in a Day Hall economics class and the air is swimming with calculus – lambdas, constants, derivatives. Students banter the terms around as they work through problems by hand, making sure they understand the theory before moving to the lab where computers will generate supply and demand curves.

"How much is it worth to have one more acre?" asks Eric Schuck, professor of economics at Linfield since 2006. He's explaining how to determine a shadow price, the value of something with no set market price.

Thanks to a new economics computer lab in the renovated T.J. Day Hall, Schuck and other faculty can teach economic modeling and forecasting – generating supply and demand curves tied to real data – using technology not previously available.

The new space is a stark contrast to Malthus Hall, where Schuck carried his laptop from student to student, showing them his screen. Now, students and faculty are all connected in a computer lab dedicated to economics. Work can be shared between computers and broadcast on two 26-inch LCD screens mounted on the wall.

"It is a much better teaching space to lead students through their research projects," he said. "We can talk through issues immediately."

Students, including Ron Snively '12, agree.

"The lab is right across the hall from faculty offices," said Snively. "The vicinity to our professors allows us to get the help we need outside the classroom, which is imperative."

The timing is perfect for the

burgeoning economics department, with the number of majors and minors doubling since 2006. The flexible major allows for careers as actuaries, analysts, environmental consultants and more.

"We spend a lot of time talking with students about what the economy will be like when they graduate, helping them prepare for a job market in very uncertain times," Schuck said.

With 3.3 faculty, (including Schuck, Randy Grant, Dave Hansen and Jeff Summers) it is a close-knit department. When Schuck, a naval reservist, deployed to Kuwait for a year, he gave his students his cell phone number and remained accessible. (*See sidebar.*)

"The entire economics faculty is fantastic," said Rosie Schoepfner '12, who became hooked on economics as a freshman during her Inquiry Seminar class, Food and Water Economics. "Professors are inspiring in their passion for learning, and teach in a way that is both challenging and rewarding for students."

Broccoli anyone?

Forget formality – Schuck's classes are fluid and relaxed, and packed with anecdotes.

"Good teaching is good story telling," he said. "It's more than the white board and equations. It's relating it back to things they can find useful and setting them up to understand things down the road."

Schuck recognizes that economics can be intimidating.

"We're the broccoli of disciplines," he said. "Many students walk in not because they want to be there, but

because it's a requirement and they have to be there. They're very nervous. I want to instill confidence and establish relevance for them."

Economics is the study of choices, and making the best decision in the face of scarcity. Schuck reminds students they're making economic decisions every day. He works into his lesson the simple act of deciding what to eat for breakfast.

Schuck's greatest challenge as an economics teacher is helping students to understand the difference between individuals and the macro economy. Decisions that make sense for an individual would be disastrous if extended to the community, he said.

"As individuals, it makes sense to save extra money," he said. "That's a good and rational decision. But if everyone does that, it triggers a recession."

Over the past three years, Schuck and his colleagues have studied the immense swings of the economy with interest, adapting the curriculum to offer supplemental courses to explain what is happening.

"Every day something different happens," he said. "We've seen things over the last three years that economists haven't seen since the depression. For us, it's been absolutely fascinating."

Supply and demand for water

Schuck may have grown up in a northern Washington rain forest, but his expertise is in the desert. His specialty is natural resource, environmental and agricultural

real time



Eric Schuck assists Rosie Schoeppner '12 and Ron Snively '12 in creating supply and demand curves in the new Day Hall economics lab. Work can be shared between computers and broadcast on two overhead screens.

economics with an emphasis on water use during droughts and controlling agricultural runoff. The irony is not lost on Schuck, whose first car often had moss growing on the roof.

Twice he has served as a water resource management expert for the Fulbright Senior Specialist Program, which provides opportunities for faculty and professionals to teach and research around the world. In 2006, he developed curriculum for the Integrated Water Resource Management Program

at the University of Western Cape in Capetown, South Africa. And in 2009, he spent six weeks teaching and developing a curriculum at American University of Beirut, Lebanon.

"There's nothing more fundamental to an economy than feeding people," Schuck said. "I feel very good about focusing on an area of economics that deals with that very basic human need and can help improve development." 🍷

– Laura Davis

Class is in session



He was deployed halfway around the world, but a 2010 naval reservist stint in Kuwait didn't stop Eric Schuck from teaching.

Every Sunday afternoon, at a semi-abandoned Kuwaiti naval base,

Schuck taught a four-hour Linfield economics class to military personnel. The Linfield Adult Degree Program provided free enrollment, and for some, it was their first college class.

"I was proud that their introduction to college was a Linfield class," said Schuck, who served as the logistics officer for a joint U.S. Navy/U.S. Coast Guard Task Group. He was responsible for supplying, maintaining and supporting patrol boats and their crews. For his service, he was awarded the U.S. Coast Guard Commendation Medal, a significant honor.

The teaching environment was a stark contrast to his Linfield classroom. In Kuwait, he and students carried weapons and students raised their hands before speaking, "Sir, I respectfully request to ask a question."

During the year, Schuck remained in touch with his Linfield students as well, speaking by cell phone and Skype, and communicating through email and social media. Now that he's back on campus, he said the experience strengthened his teaching.

"It provided me with real world examples to talk about with my Linfield students," he said.

The Schuck file

B.A., Pacific Lutheran University 1993

M.A., University of Montana 1995

Ph.D., Washington State University 1999

U.S. Naval Reservist since 2003

Interests: Natural resource, environmental and agricultural economics