Faculty Review of Open eTextbooks

The California Open Educational Resources Council has designed and implemented a faculty review process of the free and open etextbooks showcased within the California Open Online Library for Education (www.cool4ed.org). Faculty from the California Community Colleges, the California State University, and the University of California were invited to review the selected no/low cost and open etextboks using a rubric. Faculty received a stipend for their efforts and funding was provided by the State of California, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Textbook Name:

Principles of Microeconomics

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Format Reviewed:

PDF

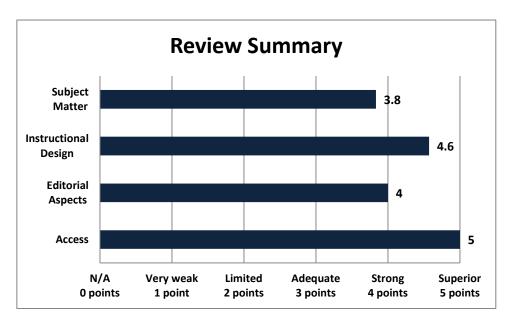A small fee may be associated with various formats.

Date Reviewed:

August, 2014

Review Summary

Subject Matter	3.8
Instructional Design	4.6
Editorial Aspects	4
Access	5

| N/A 0 points | Very weak 1 point | Limited 2 points | Adequate 3 points | Strong 4 points | Superior 5 points |

California OER Council eTextbook Evaluation Rubric

CA Course ID: ECON 201

Subject Matter (30 possible points)	N/A (0 pts)	Very Weak (1pt)	Limited (2 pts)	Adequate (3pts)	Strong (4 pts)	Superior (5 pts)
Is the content accurate, error-free, and unbiased?					X	
Does the text adequately cover the designated course with a sufficient degree of depth and scope?					X	
Does the textbook use sufficient and relevant examples to present its subject matter?					X	
Does the textbook use a clear, consistent terminology to present its subject matter?					X	
Does the textbook reflect current knowledge of the subject matter?				X		
Does the textbook present its subject matter in a culturally sensitive manner? (e.g. Is the textbook free of offensive and insensitive examples? Does it include examples that are inclusive of a variety of races, ethnicities, and backgrounds?)					X	

Total Points: 23 out of 30

Please provide comments on any aspect of the subject matter of this textbook.

- There are three things to clarify about my ratings here. First, I marked RT down on the question of "current knowledge" because game theory was neither covered in sufficient rigor (Nash equilibrium is never discussed) nor is game theory reiterated throughout the text. The text by Taylor is more integrated; after introducing game theory in the discussion of oligopoly, concepts are reiterated in terms of public goods. However, even Taylor does not define Nash equilibrium.
- To me this does not reflect the "new learning" where microeconomic theory views most problems through the lens of game theory. The text by CJ devotes the most pages to Nash Equilibrium, but I do not think most students will find its exposition particularly intuitive. (Frankly, none of these three books do as good of a job on this front as what I recall of Mankiw, but Taylor comes pretty closest.)
- Also in subject matter, I marked down CJ relatively in terms of "consistent terminology" and this requires some elaboration.
- One of the challenges I found with this book is its nonstandard outline and approach. The approach seems interesting and will appeal to some, but the authors admit upfront that, "We have written a fundamentally different text..." Again, this is an issue that is personal to me, but I imagine there are many others like me who prefer a more standard approach.   Perhaps my preference for a more standard text lies behind by higher ratings of the Taylor text.
- However, I also appreciate how Taylor covers a comprehensive range of topics in a natural sequence.

Instructional Design (35 possible points)	N/A (0 pts)	Very Weak (1pt)	Limited (2 pts)	Adequate (3pts)	Strong (4 pts)	Superior (5 pts)
Does the textbook present its subject materials at appropriate reading levels for undergrad use?					X	
Does the textbook reflect a consideration of different learning styles? (e.g. visual, textual?)					X	
Does the textbook present explicit learning outcomes aligned with the course and curriculum?						X
Is a coherent organization of the textbook evident to the reader/student?						X
Does the textbook reflect best practices in the instruction of the designated course?					X	
Does the textbook contain sufficient effective ancillary materials? (e.g. test banks, individual and/or group activities or exercises, pedagogical apparatus, etc.)						X
Is the textbook searchable?						X

Total Points: 32 out of 35 points

Please provide comments on any aspect of the subject matter of this textbook.

- Instructional Design. The test bank that FWK provides for the RT text is a real strength. I have used the test bank in conjunction with an LMS successfully at SJSU for several semesters. Students who have not learned the material cannot usually pass a random-draw multiple choice exam consisting of questions from this test bank, making the test bank a valuable tool for assessment of student learning.
- The test bank OpenStax College provides for the Taylor test is not as useful as it is only of moderate size and is not as easy to import into an LMS. Likewise, the test bank FWK provides for the CJ text is of similar size as the Taylor test bank, and while easily compatible with LMS, does not appear to correspond closely with the content of the CJ text (see an earlier note on this issue.)
- All three texts have course learning objectives (CLOs) clearly listed at the start of each section, but they are not as well written in CJ as in RT and Taylor; for example, the CLOs in CJ do not use carefully chosen "assessment verbs" to describe the objectives, and instead the CLOs look more like questions with cut and dry, right and wrong answers.
- In addition, the nonstandard outline of CJ, which I addressed above (to offer an example of what this means, in CJ there are chapters with titles like "Superstars" and "Cars".
- I don't suppose there is another Principles of Micro text that uses the same chapter names which makes the organization somewhat less apparent.
- The CJ book contains boxes at the end of each section on "Checking your understanding" but these are often open-ended questions with no correct answer presented; that is, these don't seem to be well thought out questions students can answer to "check themselves."

- Finally, there are fewer end of chapter questions compared to both RT and Taylor

Editorial Aspects (25 possible points)	N/A (0 pts)	Very Weak (1pt)	Limited (2 pts)	Adequate (3pts)	Strong (4 pts)	Superior (5 pts)
Is the language of the textbook free of grammatical, spelling, usage, and typographical errors?					X	
Is the textbook written in a clear, engaging style?					X	
Does the textbook adhere to effective principles of design? (e.g. are pages latid0out and organized to be clear and visually engaging and effective? Are colors, font, and typography consistent and unified?)					X	
Does the textbook include conventional editorial features? (e.g. a table of contents, glossary, citations and further references)					X	
How effective are multimedia elements of the textbook? (e.g. graphics, animations, audio)					X	

Total Points: 20 out of 25

Please provide comments on any aspect of the subject matter of this textbook.

- Two of these books (RT and CJ) were published by FWK. As a result, most issues of design and editing are similar between them.
- Taylor, while published by OpenStax, has different but comparably high quality editing and design.
- The only difference in my ranking here is I've marked RT down somewhat for what I found to be a poorly written introduction, that I fear might fail to hook most students.
- I have read earlier editions of both RT and Taylor cover to cover, and I perceive that Taylor has a more uniform voice throughout.
- I have not read CJ from cover to cover but from what I have read sounds engaging; thus giving the benefit of the doubt, I ranked CJ above RT and at the same level as Taylor, in terms of engaging style.

Access (30 possible points)	N/A (0 pts)	Very Weak (1pt)	Limited (2 pts)	Adequate (3pts)	Strong (4 pts)	Superior (5 pts)
Is the textbook compatible with standard and commonly available hardware/software in college/university campus student computer labs?						X
Is the textbook accessible in a variety of different electronic formats? (e.g. .txt, .pdf, .epub, etc.)						X
Can the textbook be printed easily?						X
Does the user interface implicitly inform the reader how to interact with and navigate the textbook?						X
How easily can the textbook be annotated by students and instructors?						X

Total Points: 30 out of 30

Please provide comments on any aspect of the subject matter of this textbook.

- All of these books have Creative Commons licenses and thus qualify as OER.
- In my mind, this makes them all very strong in terms of access, at least compared to the traditional "all rights reserved" textbook market.
- This is the basis on which I evaluated these books, and explains why I have given them all "5s" for all Access category questions.
  However, and this is something not revealed in my quantitative rankings, I have a somewhat strong preference for Taylor here, given its CC – BY 4.0 license is much less restrictive than the CC BY SA NC 3.0 license of RT and CJ.

Overall Ratings (10 possible points)	Not at all (0 pts)	Very Weak (1 pt)	Limited (2 pts)	Adequate (3 pts)	Strong (4 pts)	Superior (5 pts)
What is your overall impression of the textbook?					X	
	Not at all	Strong reservations	Limited willingness	Willing (3 pts)	Strongly willing	Enthusiastically willing

Overall Ratings (10 possible points)	Not at all (0 pts)	Very Weak (1 pt)	Limited (2 pts)	Adequate (3 pts)	Strong (4 pts)	Superior (5 pts)
	(0 pts)	(1 pt)	(2 pts)		(4 pts)	(5 pts)
How willing would you be to adopt this book?						X

Overall Comments

If you were to recommend this textbook to colleagues, what merits of the textbook would you highlight?

- Both my quantitative rankings on the questions, and the qualitative facts that I've shared in the narrative, influenced my overall rankings.
- As textbooks, I rate Taylor > RT > CJ. The text by CJ looks interesting and seems professional, but the approach is simply too nonstandard for my tastes.
- I prefer Taylor over RT because I find it has a better integrated and more successful pedagogical approach.
- However, in terms of willingness to adopt the books, my ranking indicates my short-run feelings, where the availability of a high-quality test bank forces me to rank RT above Taylor, even though RT is not my favorite of the three texts. This is because the quality of the text is not the only consideration when adopting the book.
- At the moment, there are better ancillaries out there to support RT, making it a good choice in the short-run. (In the long-run, I anticipate the ancillaries for Taylor will improve, making it a more attractive option.)

What areas of this textbook require improvement in order for it to be used in your courses?

- As far as areas of the RT text that require improvement, it would be nice if the text was modified to address some of the issues I raise above, namely the writing could be more engaging, especially in the introduction, and more attention could be paid to game theory.
- I might also add that I'd also like to see an earlier treatment of consumer and producer surplus, and a supply and demand analysis of trade. Most of these issues are handled in Taylor.
- Therefore, instead of improving the writing of RT, I would rather suggest that decision makers direct resources towards improving the ancillary materials for Taylor.

We invite your feedback on the textbook or the review to the textbook site in MERLOT.
(Please register in MERLOT to post your feedback.)

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