

Features and Information

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WILLIAM WALSTAD, Section Editor

Women and Minorities in Economics Textbooks: Are They Being Adequately Represented?

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Abstract: The author examined 12 recent editions of principles of economics textbooks to determine the quantity of race- and gender-related material. Comparing the results to earlier studies demonstrates how efforts to incorporate more such coverage within the economics curriculum have influenced economics textbooks. In general, there has been an increase in the quantitative coverage of race- and gender-related material as measured by the number of pages, names, and tables of the textbooks.

Key words: economic education, gender and race issues

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In this study, I investigate the number of references relating to race, ethnicity, and gender (REG) contained in different principles of economics textbooks and compare the results with two previous studies (Feiner and Morgan 1987; Feiner 1993). Their studies found little discussion (less than 2 percent of the pages) of REG in the principles of economics textbooks written prior to 1991. In a study of labor economics textbooks, Gray (1992) found gender equity issues, such as occupational segregation, discrimination, and labor force participation, averaged only 2.5 percent of pages. More recent studies on gender in the principles text-

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books by Ferber (1995, 1997) found that on average only 5 percent of the individuals (including noneconomists) mentioned were women, and many texts failed to mention the rise in the labor force participation of women, an important economic development over the last 40 years.

Economics teaches students how to analyze alternatives by examining facts and data to determine the costs and benefits of each available alternative. Exposing students to REG perspectives and data expands their understanding of the complexities of our economic system and increases their ability to recognize which analyses are simplistic and incomplete, and which represent a truer picture of our economy.

There have been discussions about where more REG needs to be incorporated and how it can be done.¹ For example, the National Science Foundation (NSF) sponsored a series of workshops designed to train instructors on integrating REG perspectives into their classrooms.² Books, such as Becker and Watts' (1998) *Teaching Economics to Undergraduates*, Saunders and Walstad's (1990), *The Principles of Economics Course*, Walstad and Saunders' (1998) *Teaching Undergraduate Economics: A Handbook*, and Aslanbeigui and Naples' (1996) *Rethinking Economic Principles: Critical Essays on Introductory Textbooks*, include chapters on integrating REG perspectives; Bartlett (1997) edited an entire book, *Introducing Race and Gender into Economics*. Although it is possible to bring non-textbook REG materials into the classroom, students regard textbooks as authoritative sources of information about the economy, consequently, they impart credibility to the topics being covered. It is, therefore, advantageous to address REG issues in textbooks, so students can draw a meaningful picture of the economy.³

This study examines whether the 12 economic textbooks currently used in the majority of principles of economics courses have integrated more REG materials in their books by comparing the quantity of such materials in these books with that of the two earlier surveys. The sample includes the six current top-selling books—Case and Fair (C/F) (1997), Colander (Col) (1998), Mankiw (Man) (1998), McEachern (McE) (1997), Parkin (Par) (1998), and Schiller (Sch) (1998)—and six later editions of the textbooks used by Feiner and Morgan (1987) and Feiner (1993) [Baumol and Blinder (B/B), Gwartney and Stroup (G/S), Lipsey, Courant and Ragan (L/C), McConnell and Brue (M/B), Miller (Mil), and Samuelson and Nordhaus (S/N)].⁴ Quantitative results of REG page counts are given in Table 1.

The method used for determining the page count is similar to that used by Feiner and Morgan (1987) and Feiner (1993). The page counts were based on the number of pages that contain the words Blacks, African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, Asian Americans, race, sex, minorities, women, gender, female, single/welfare mothers, or any variations of these words.⁵ The key words were found by perusing each page of the entire textbook, including chapter summaries and discussion questions.

Table 1 shows the edition, the number of pages, the percentage of the total pages referring to REG, the percentage of REG pages including only race or only gender-related material, and the ranking of the quantity of REG each of the 12

TABLE 1
Number and Percentage of Pages Referring to REG in Introductory Textbooks

Textbook ¹	Edition	REG			Percentage ³			Rank
		Pages	S/N Pages ²	Percentage ³	Race	Gender	Both	
B/B	7	25	22.3	2.7	16.0	48.0	36.0	10 ¹
C/F	5	40	36.0	4.4	30.8	48.7	20.5	2
Col	3	36	35.4	4.1	22.2	52.8	25.0	4
G/S	8	26	19.9	2.7	7.7	61.5	30.8	11 ¹
L/C	12	28	31.4	3.3	7.1	46.4	46.4	8
Man	1	28	23.7	3.6	17.9	53.6	28.6	6
M/B	14	51	55.6	6.0	21.6	35.3	43.1	1
McE	4	28	22.9	3.4	3.6	57.1	39.3	7
Mil	10	16	14.3	2.0	18.8	56.3	25.0	12
Par	4	35	39.2	4.2	17.1	37.1	45.7	3
S/N	16	28	28.0	3.8	17.9	25.0	57.1	5
Sch	8	23	17.8	3.0	13.0	69.6	17.4	9
Average		30.3	29.3	3.6	16.0	49.4	34.5	

¹Extending the values to 2 decimal places breaks the tie. B/B 2.73, G/S 2.70.

²Pages standardized to Samuelson and Nordhaus edition.

³All percentages were calculated by taking the average of the total REG pages by the average of the total textbook pages. The answers are the same whether using original or S/N pages.

textbooks used in this study. Although using the percentage of the total pages provides comparable results across the different studies, the pages were standardized to facilitate the readers' interpretation of the cross-textbook page count.⁶ An average of 29.3 standardized pages (S/N pages) or 3.6 percent of the total pages included REG coverage. Nine of the textbooks contained more than 3 percent coverage of REG, with one having 6 percent.

A closer look at the page counts reveals about half of the pages with only gender-related material, and another 35 percent including both gender and race on their pages. Race alone accounts for 16 percent of the REG pages. This suggests an emphasis on integrating gender over race. Why there is less race coverage than gender coverage is unclear.⁷

Using the six textbooks common to the earlier studies, the results show approximately twice the coverage found in the textbooks from the 1987 study and more than 1.5 times that in the 1993 study. The average REG pages and percentage of REG pages for the 1987, 1993 and 1999 studies are shown in Table 2. The coverage for the subset of six textbooks in this study averaged 29 actual pages or 3.43 percent of the total pages. In comparison, the coverage in the 1987 Feiner and Morgan study had an average of 15.17 pages or 1.77 percent, and the 1993 Feiner study had an average of 17.50 pages or 2.03 percent of the total pages. In the 1987 and the 1993 studies, only two of the six textbooks had more than 2.0 percent of their pages with REG, ranging from 0.65 to 2.56 percent in the 1987 study and 0.84 to 3.75 in the 1993 study. In this study all of the textbooks had REG coverage of more than 2.0 percent, ranging from 2.05 to 6.01 percent of the total pages.

This study demonstrates that while there have not been large changes in the

TABLE 2
REG Pages and Percentages for All Three Studies

Textbook	1987 ¹		1993 ¹		1999 ¹	
	Pages	Percent ²	Pages	Percent ²	Pages	Percent ²
B/B	16	1.91	10	1.90	25	2.73
G/S	5	0.65	14	1.70	26	2.70
L/C	15	1.57	36	3.75	28	3.33
M/B	16	1.88	13	1.50	51	6.01
Mil	17	2.05	8	0.84	16	2.02
S/N	22	2.56	24	2.50	28	3.80
Average	15.17	1.77	17.50	2.03	29.00	3.43

¹Feiner and Morgan (1987),Feiner (1993), Current study (1999).

²All percentages were calculated by taking the average of the total REG pages by the average of the total textbook pages. The answers are the same whether using original or S/N pages.

proportion of REG pages in principles' textbooks, there have been significant gains, suggesting that the textbook market is responsive to changes in consumers' preferences. Can average page counts of 3.5 percent provide sufficient REG representation? A normative question, for which there are as many different answers as there are economists. The answer may depend more on knowing how females and minorities are represented, rather than how much. Nonetheless an increase in the number of REG pages demonstrates efforts by the textbook authors to be responsive to women and minorities.

NOTES

1. For more discussions on the curriculum not being REG friendly, see Blau, Ferber, and Winkler (1998), Dynan and Rouse (1997), Nelson (1996), Strassman and Polyani (1995), Bartlett (1996), Bartlett andFeiner (1992),Bartlett and Ferber (1998), Ferber (1984,1990,1995,1997),Lewis and Peterson (1997),Shah (1996), or Solow (1994).
2. Robin Bartlett and SusanFeiner conducted three separate NSF-sponsored workshops on "Improving Introductory Economics by Integrating the Latest Scholarship on Women and Minorities" in 1993, 1994, and 1995.
3. Bartlett (1996) describes how more diversity can be brought into introductory courses without the benefit of textbooks. Shah (1996) discusses the central role textbooks play for students.
4. To find the top-selling textbooks, I referred to a 1995 article by Nasar in the *New York Times* listing the top seven principles textbooks, two of which were not included inFeiner's 1993 study. Also, in 1999 two of the major publisher's marketing managers provided a list of the top-selling books with the caveat that any estimates are only their best guesses (this information is closely guarded). Only six ofFeiner's 16 textbooks were used because the other textbooks are neither in use nor updated.
5. This process may understate coverage in cases where authors used neutral language or examples, instead of gender-specific examples. It may also overstate actual coverage in cases where only one or two REG words were on a page. This not withstanding, the process helped maintain consistency in the page counts across the different textbooks. To ensure reliability each textbook's pages, names and tables, were counted at least twice by the author, with some time passing between counts, and were checked by student assistants.
6. Because textbooks do not have the same page length (some have two columns, others have one), the pages of the textbooks were standardized based on the number of words on three full pages (without graphs, tables, boxes, etc.), relative to number of words on three Samuelson/Nordhaus pages. For a complete description of the standardization process, see Walstad, Watts, and Bosshardt (1998). For specific details, contact the author.
7. It could result from textbooks devoting more space to predominately gender-related issues,such

as labor force participation and household production, than devoting space to race-related issues, such as unemployment and urban crowding. Other explanations might include larger number of female instructors demanding textbooks with more coverage of gender issues, or maybe there has been more published research on gender than on minorities. These are hypotheses that could be tested in a separate study.

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