

COMPUTER MODELS IN UNDERGRADUATE ECONOMICS

Robert Jones
Department of Economics
Skidmore College
Saratoga Springs, New York 12866

The virtual explosion of computing facilities on college campuses during the last few years can hardly be gone unnoticed. Before, say, 1980, academic computing typically referred to the availability of computer terminals linked to a time-sharing mainframe computer which was used primarily by computer science students for writing programs or by advanced statistics students running canned statistical packages.

The availability of inexpensive microcomputers, particularly Apple's and IBM's, has not only led to a quantum leap in access to computing facilities but in the increased use of a variety of computer programs stretching well beyond the "traditional" programming and statistical package applications. In the field of Economics, computing frequently involves the use of computer models of a world that does not lend itself to the controlled experimentation and observation found in the natural sciences. Computers may be used to perform pedagogical tasks which are desirable but not practical nor possible in their absence. Computers may also be used merely as "high-tech" vehicles for performing tasks that could be done just as well, or perhaps even better, by other teaching-learning methods.

This period of rapid change calls for some reflection on some fundamental pedagogical questions as the computerization of the academic environment proceeds:

Do computer models add anything fundamentally different to the teaching-learning process? If so, what is the appropriate use of computer models?

This session's participants will deal with these questions in the context of undergraduate economics. The participants will present their views on the above questions and/or share their experiences with integrating computing into their courses in ways that they believe to be "appropriate".