

# The \$hort Run

## Student News & Views from the Humboldt State Economics Department

### Feature Article

#### Get More Than a Degree from the Economics Department

Jeff Grabinski



I am a senior Economics major who will graduate in May with more than just a degree. I plan to attend graduate school to earn my PhD. in Economics. Dr. Hackett, Dr. Wilson, and Dr. Eschker supported and encouraged me as I worked to achieve my goals. All of them have written letters of recommendation for all of my prospective graduate schools.

I chose to complete my Bachelor's degree in Economics at Humboldt State because of the many opportunities that the department offered which I might not have gotten at a larger or more prestigious university. I had the grades to go to a UC or a top tier private school, but HSU's Economics Department had something I valued more than just a degree.

The department is small, which has provided me access to faculty from the first day I arrived on campus. I have been able to talk with them almost on demand about issues that I had or for informal discussions of ideas. That kind of access opened even more doors for me as I used my time at HSU to prepare for graduate school. I have been fortunate to work closely with Dr. Eschker as a research assistant. This has been a tremendous opportunity for me, since Dr. Eschker not only has me do some of the tedious work, but also has used me as a sounding board for further research ideas and to cultivate my own topics for research. As a prospective PhD. candidate, being able to get my hands dirty working on academic research is invaluable. This role has also allowed to me to attend dinners with visiting scholars giving talks about their research on our campus.

For my capstone project I was given free rein to develop and implement two discussion panels, one looking at the issues related to rising tuition costs and one on online education. This opportunity arose from an informal discussion I had with Dr. Wilson about the rising cost issue; she suggested I think about it as a capstone project. Dr. Hackett was more than accommodating in helping me bring my idea to reality, and supported myself and my colleague, Elica Aramesh, extensively.

My conversations with Dr. Wilson also provided me with the opportunity to write an academic book review for scholarly publication. Getting published as an undergraduate is a big deal, even if it's just a book review. Talking to my professors and letting them know my goals and aspirations was key to me discovering this opportunity.

I have also been fortunate to be an instructional student assistant, teaching the supplemental course for our Econ 310 course. I am using this opportunity to determine how well suited I am for the role of instructor since that is my ultimate goal. This is another experience that I would not have been afforded at a larger university.

Our department has a lot to offer motivated students looking to get more than a degree from their college experience. I have used my time to get ready for graduate school, but most of these activities could be helpful to graduates entering the job market as well. If you are looking to get more than a degree let your advisor and your faculty know, they can do a lot to help you achieve your goals!

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#### ***TSR* Staff**

Editor – Jane Anderson

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## Interview With Visiting Professor Will Fisher



### Would you tell me a bit about your background?

I received a B.S. from Portland State University and majored in Economics, and Supply and Logistics Management. After graduating I worked for a large corporation for two years and realized that cubicle life was not for me, to put it as diplomatically as possible, so I applied for Ph.D. programs in Economics. The education at PSU was very pluralistic and many of the economics classes were taught by heterodox economists which prompted me to apply to heterodox doctoral programs. I spent four years at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, a heterodox school, and will ultimately be receiving an Interdisciplinary Ph.D. from that institution. Over the last two years I lived in Missoula Montana, where I wrote much of my dissertation, and probably fly fished too much, if that's possible.

### What brought you to HSU and how are you liking it?

The short answer is there was a job. However, I must say when the job was listed I was extremely excited about the possibility of teaching here. It was first on my list. I really wanted to live in an area that suited my love of the outdoors and was close to my family, who live in the Portland area. Northern California is great if you like the outdoors, so long as you are willing to get wet. I'm relishing the opportunity to chase wild steelhead in some of the best rivers in the lower 48 states. As for the University, I really like teaching at HSU. The students are engaged and everyone I've met here has been fantastic. All-in-all I could not have asked for a better place to begin my career in academia.

### What prompted you to study economics?

I started studying economics as a requirement for my business degree but then had some amazing teachers that helped me make some sense out of the chaos that is the world. I was encouraged to ask big questions like "why is it that our society has people who are ready, willing and able to work, who want to produce for society, but society does not allow them to work?" Specifically, learning about the Great Depression in an American Economic History course, to borrow a phrase from Kant, "awoke me from my dogmatic slumber." The fact that the unemployment rate was officially 25%, machines were idle, food was being allowed to rot and yet nothing "real" was different than before the crash. The system was broken, at least for a time, and I wanted to know why. This absolutely fascinated me. The rest, as they say, is history.

### Do you have any advice for potential economics majors?

First, read your syllabus. Professors put most of the information you need to know about the course, like grade weights, on the syllabus. In my experience, it frustrates Professors to have 100 students per semester ask you "how much is homework worth?" to which we all say "it's on the syllabus!"

Second, and on a serious note, you can do a lot with economics both as a career and regarding other areas of study that you are interested in. Not only are there very interesting subjects like Micro, Macro, Money and Banking, International Trade Theory, etc. that most people think about when they think of economics, but if you want you can study Ecological Economics, Feminist Economics, Black Political Economy, Radical Political Economy and Race Class and Gender. There is no issue that people are concerned with, at least that I can think of off the top of my head, that does not have an economic element. So keep an open mind about the discipline.

### Any myths concerning the study of economics you'd like to debunk?

Just because someone is an economist does not mean that they know what the price of gold is or what it is going to be. The same goes for the stock market. Whenever I mention to people I am getting a Ph.D. in economics often the first question they ask is "should I buy gold?" or "should I invest in the stock market?" To which I say "I haven't the faintest idea."

Also, to all of you students out there, when your professors (myself included) tell you that the way you get a market demand curve is by summing up all the individual's demand curves, we are lying. You cannot do that without making some extremely unrealistic assumptions. Food for thought. You all can try to figure that puzzle out.

## Interview With HSU's Economics Alum Jeremiah Joyner

### Would you tell me a bit about yourself and family?

I am 40 years old and graduated from HSU in December of 1997. I grew up in Pensacola, FL and relocated to Humboldt County in 1995. I have been married for almost 13 years and have 2 children, 10 and 6. We currently live in Cutten, but are in the process of building a house in Arcata and will be moving there by the end of summer.

### How did you come to attend HSU and decide to major in Economics?

I came to HSU in 1995 as a wildlife biology major. I was transferring as a junior and was just ready to relocate out of the southeast. HSU had one of the better wildlife programs and tuition was very reasonable for an out of state transfer. After one semester in the wildlife program I knew it was not for me. I don't remember exactly how it happened but I was put in touch with Steve Hackett. I talked to Steve for quite a while and decided to take a couple of Economics classes. It was an immediate connection. I changed my major and never regretted it.

### Would you describe what your experience has been like at HSU?

My experience at HSU was great. I mostly attribute that to meeting Steve Hackett and making the switch to Economics. A college experience is largely defined by how you grow as a person. Before I made the switch I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. Economics was fascinating to me. The social science aspect of it was really what hooked me. What motivates people, individually and collectively, to do what they do. Life is just one big cost - benefit analysis. Most people don't consider that economics, but that is all it is. I credit HSU and Steve Hackett for giving me that.

### What was your experience like directly after graduating, and in what ways did your economics degree help you in your endeavors?

Immediately after graduating I went to Toronto. A good friend of mine (Brandon Dwyer, also an HSU Economics grad) was from Canada, and was moving back to go into the family business. His dad had a seat on the Toronto Exchange and he was going to be a trader. He called me in January and suggested I come to Toronto and apply for a work visa. To make a long story short I went to Toronto and spent a month trying to get a visa with no success. After spending a very cold month in Toronto I was very eager to get back to Humboldt County. When I got back to Humboldt I wasn't sure what I was going to do, but I had been bitten by the trading bug. I applied at the various brokerage houses around Eureka and eventually landed with Merrill Lynch. I spent the next seven years as a stock broker for Merrill Lynch and Six Rivers Bank. While I loved trading, and still do, I did not like selling myself as a trader. After seven years I went to work for State Fund as an insurance underwriter. That was four mostly uneventful years before I made the switch to Caltrans. I am employed as a real estate appraiser, and have found my niche. I have been there five years and just continue to learn and improve as an appraiser. It is an occupation where there are many grey areas and is always bringing up new and interesting problems to solve.

### Any advice to current and graduating economics majors you'd like to impart?

Unless you plan on getting an advanced degree and returning to academia as a professor, Economics will not be what you do for a living. I believe this is important and should be emphasized more. However, Economics will stay with you for the rest of your life. It will effect how you think about situations and ultimately how you make decisions. I look for the stimulus in everything. If there is an event that on the surface doesn't make sense, look for pay off. It is always there and never disappoints. View your degree in Economics as a guiding influence in life, not necessarily a means to a great life. With this perspective you will find it to be invaluable.





## Interview with Economics Alum Mary Jo Wilbur

Economics alum Mary Jo Wilbur graduated in fall 2013. She created a library housed in the economics department for her legacy project. Students are given the opportunity to “give back” as part of their capstone experience, a class majors take before graduating in which they create a portfolio of work and prepare for the transition into their chosen career.

### How simple is it to check out a book?

To check out a book at the econ library you just look through our selection of books and pick the one you like, then you check it out like the old library checkout system. Your name and student/faculty email is written on the card and the card is placed in a box on the econ desk. You then have 30 days to enjoy your book!

### How did you organize the library?

I put together the library for my senior capstone project. I am really into books. I have a vast library of over 15,000 books which includes many economics books. I thought it would be really great to share some of these books with other students and that is how the econ library idea initially formed. I presented my idea to Beth Wilson and she gave me a \$200 budget to purchase more books. The books are organized into different genres including: environmental econ, globalization, business/finance, economic history and a generalized category.

### Any books in particular you'd like to recommend?

All the books are really good! The library can be very useful for studying particular subjects in depth. In the offered econ classes professors often touch on subjects that students might wish to know more about but the class does not go into depth because of time constraints. Topics such as econometrics and books by past economic thinkers are represented in the library.

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## Visiting Professor Will Fisher shares the “best” economic joke he’s ever heard:

A physicist, a chemist and an economist are stranded on a desert island and all they have is a large can of beans. The physicist says, “I’ve got an idea how we can open that can of beans. If I climb up that palm tree to a height of 50 feet and drop this rock on the edge of the can, the force of the rock will split the can open and we can eat the beans.” The chemist says, “that’s a good idea but I have a better one. If we place the can at the edge of the ocean the saltwater will react with the metal, corroding it to the point where we can simply pop the top off the can and eat the beans.” The economists says, “both of these seem like good ideas but I’m afraid that you all are making this problem far too difficult. Why don’t we just assume a can opener?”