

An open letter to Greg Mankiw

The following letter was sent to Greg Mankiw by the organisers of today's Economics 10 walkout.

Wednesday, November 2, 2011

Dear Professor Mankiw,

Today, we are walking out of your class, Economics 10, in order to express our discontent with the bias inherent in this introductory economics course. We are deeply concerned about the way that this bias affects students, the University, and our greater society.

As Harvard undergraduates, we enrolled in Economics 10 hoping to gain a broad and introductory foundation of economic theory that would assist us in our various intellectual pursuits and diverse disciplines, which range from Economics, to Government, to Environmental Sciences and Public Policy, and beyond. Instead, we found a course that espouses a specific – and limited – view of economics that we believe perpetuates problematic and inefficient systems of economic inequality in our society today.

A legitimate academic study of economics must include a critical discussion of both the benefits and flaws of different economic simplifying models. As your class does not include primary sources and rarely features articles from academic journals, we have very little access to alternative approaches to economics. There is no justification for presenting Adam Smith's economic theories as more fundamental or basic than, for example, Keynesian theory.

Care in presenting an unbiased perspective on economics is particularly important for an introductory course for 700 students that nominally provides a sound foundation for further study in economics. Many Harvard students do not have the ability to opt out of Economics 10. This class is required for Economics and Environmental Science and Public Policy concentrators, while Social Studies concentrators must take an introductory economics course – and the only other eligible class, Professor Steven Margolin's class, Critical Perspectives on Economics, is only offered every other year (and not this year). Many other students simply desire an analytic understanding of economics as part of a quality liberal arts education. Furthermore, Economics 10 makes it difficult for subsequent economics courses to teach effectively as it offers only one

heavily skewed perspective rather than a solid grounding on which other courses can expand. Students should not be expected to avoid this class – or the whole discipline of economics – as a method of expressing discontent.

Harvard graduates play major roles in the financial institutions and in shaping public policy around the world. If Harvard fails to equip its students with a broad and critical understanding of economics, their actions are likely to harm the global financial system. The last five years of economic turmoil have been proof enough of this.

We are walking out today to join a Boston-wide march protesting the corporatisation of higher education as part of the global Occupy movement. Since the biased nature of Economics 10 contributes to and symbolises the increasing economic inequality in America, we are walking out of your class today both to protest your inadequate discussion of basic economic theory and to lend our support to a movement that is changing American discourse on economic injustice. Professor Mankiw, we ask that you take our concerns and our walk-out seriously.

Sincerely,
Concerned students of Economics 10

Originally published in the *Harvard Political Review*, 2 November 2011. Courtesy of *Harvard Political Review*.