

# Why You and Your Students will both Fall in Love with Decision Experiments in Class

## 让三尺讲堂孕育出大千世界： 如何在课堂里巧妙运用模拟决策实验

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**H**AVE you ever thought of using decision experiments, a student-centered, interactive way, to spice up your classroom? After many years of conducting experiments in my introductory and higher-level economics classes, I have found this approach to be highly conducive to enhancing student motivation and academic performance. In this short article I am going to illustrate a number of pedagogical advantages of using classroom decision experiments, as well as offer a few practical tips for faculty interested in incorporating these active learning elements into their classrooms.

如果你曾经为自己的教学内容太过抽象不够有趣而烦恼，你有没有设想过在你的课堂里通过“做实验”来提升学生的学习主动性和兴趣？当然，这类实验并不依靠化学反应或者生物显微镜，而是会把大千世界里的各种社会现象和经济激励模拟成可以在课堂里执行的简单决策。在参与实验的过程和之后对实验结果的分析中，学生将成为知识的生产者而不仅仅是接受者。多年在课堂里和学生一起模拟决策实验的经验告诉我，一方面课堂决策实验对于提高教学效果的益处良多，另一方面这种方法却少为人知。在这篇短文里，我会和大家分享课堂决策实验的众多优点，同时也会提供若干关于如何设计和执行实验并能使之和课堂教学有机结合的个人建议。



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**M**Y belief in teaching is that knowledge is to be discovered, rather than to be transferred. Even though I may have taught a certain subject countless times, I never consider myself an expert in it. Instead, I think of myself as just another novice like my own students who are coming across the materials for the very first time. Every time I walk into my classroom, I share the air of unease and eagerness with my students. “What are we going to learn in this new chapter? Is it directly related to the last chapter which I did not understand so well? What does this uninteresting and theoretical topic have to do with my future career and my life in general? How do these theories help us connect to the real world?”

Since the study of economics is often called “the dismal science” as it tries to explain human behaviors in a sometimes convoluted way, all of the above questions are legitimate concerns that an instructor must strive to answer if he wants to keep his students interested and motivated. They are also the same set of questions that I challenge myself to make clear to my students by the end of each lecture.

### **Why are behavioral and decision experiments such a valuable tool in the classroom?**

To me, the secret ingredient to successfully leading my students onto an exciting, self-guided journey of new knowledge discovery is the organic

integration of classroom-based behavioral or decision experiments (“BDE” henceforth) into my lectures. By allowing students to take greater responsibility in the knowledge discovery process, this student-centered, interactive approach has done great marvels in improving student learning outcomes in many of my economics classes.

A carefully designed classroom-based BDE has two defining features: First, students need to make active decisions on behalf of themselves as individuals, or on behalf of a group, in a real life decision environment distilled into a classroom setting. The structure and the parameters of the problem must be explained in simple terms and in a short amount of time. Second, the decisions entailed in the experiments must embody the essence of the theories and principles to be presented in the subsequent main lecture.

All sorts of economic environments can be studied using classroom experiments including bargaining, risky decision making, buying and selling in markets, cartel behavior, contributions to public goods, taxes, production with negative externalities, international trade, general macroeconomic equilibrium and many more.

Classroom decision experiments present a unique setting for students to experience the economic incentives and forces at work on a first-person basis. Unlike in experiments in natural sciences such as chemistry or biology, student