International Review of Economics Education 50 (2025) 100325

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

International Review of Economics Education

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/iree

Whose history of which economic thought?

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ARTICLE INFO

JEL classification:
A2 Economic Education and Teaching of Economics
B0 History of Economic Thought (General)

Keywords:
History of economic thought
History of economics
Higher education
Decolonization
Pedagogical approaches
Curricula

ABSTRACT

In many countries, the teaching of the history of economic thought (HET) is on the decline. This is happening despite the fact that calls from students around the world for the reform of economics education have explicitly identified the provision of HET as a priority, and, in the UK, the lead quality assurance agency has described HET as "fundamental" to the understanding of economics. This contradiction provides the motivation for examining the value of HET for students in order to strengthen the case for the expansion of its provision. We reflect on some of the challenges delivering a compulsory HET module at a post-92 UK higher-education institution[3]. How to challenge the white European male bias in the discipline to make the curricula more inclusive and therefore of potentially more interest and relevance to students? Which teaching approaches can provide lasting insights and ignite a passion for the subject in developing young economists? We find that while the impact of our reforms has been ambiguous for engagement and learning outcomes, student surveys reveal a notable appreciation of efforts to address gender and racial bias, and working-class students especially report more impact of the module, changing the way they think about economics.

1. Introduction: The status quo contradiction

While important national differences remain, a general decline in interest among academic economists in the history of economic thought (HET) has been noted repeatedly over the past three decades (Lodewijks, 2003; Kates, 2015; Duarte and Giraud, 2016; Backhouse and Forder, 2020). Kates (2015, 147) argues that there have been a number of reasons for this, including "… some combination of indifference, the opportunity cost of time, the lack of career possibilities in studying HET, the increasingly mathematical nature of academic economics, and the wish to suppress alternative theories." This helps to explain why HET is often either not

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[3] In the UK, a 'post-92 university' refers to a former polytechnic that was given university status through the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 (or a university that has been granted university status since 1992). While difficult to generalize, the post-92 institutions tend to receive less research funding, focus more on teaching, and serve a more diverse student population.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iree.2025.100325
Received 8 March 2025; Received in revised form 21 July 2025; Accepted 22 July 2025
Available online 23 July 2025

taught at all or taught only as an option in undergraduate economics programs, not only in the UK,[4] but in many countries around the world.[5] While it is not the purpose of this article to enter into the debate over the value of HET, suffice it to say that we believe, particularly in the wake of the Great Financial Crisis (GFC) of 2008–10, academic arguments advocating for more resources dedicated towards both historical research and the teaching of HET in economics curricula (Shiller, 2010; Roncaglia, 2014; Aspromourgos, 2017; Repapis, 2018; Dow, 2020) have gained greater traction.

In the wake of the GFC, economics students from a number of countries came together to voice their dissatisfaction with the fact that they felt that their studies had left them ill-prepared to analyse either the causes of the crisis or proposed policy responses. In the UK, this took the form of the Post-Crash Economics Society (PCES), founded at the University of Manchester in 2012 (Post-Crash Economics Society, 2018). PCES joined what would become a global student movement for reform of the economics curriculum known as *Rethinking Economics*, itself drawing inspiration from a number of similar campaigns which had taken place in previous decades around the world (Rethinking Economics, 2024). Amongst the student activists, the call for the compulsory inclusion of HET in the undergraduate economics curriculum became a *sine qua non*: "… because theories cannot be fully understood independently of the historical context in which they were formulated, students should be systematically exposed to the history of economic thought and to the classical literature on economics as well as to economic history." (International Student Initiative for Pluralism in Economics, 2014). Indeed, HET is 'building block 4' in the recent textbook *Economy Studies* which emerged out of the same movement (de Muijnck and Tieleman, 2021).

The first of two significant institutional responses to the students' calls for reform of economics education was the emergence of the CORE (Curriculum Open-Access Resources in Economics) initiative in late 2012, led by Professors Wendy Carlin and Sam Bowles, intended to, in its own words, 'transform economics education'.[6]. To date, however, CORE has focused on an ambitious program of overhauling macro- and microeconomic textbooks, rather than comprehensive reform of the delivery of economics programs. The other institutional response in the UK came in the explicit recognition of the value of HET in the latest Economics Subject Benchmark Statement from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA): "The core and applied content, or standalone content, [should] include economic history and history of economic thought, as these provide the context within which Economics is studied. They are in a sense fundamental to the understanding of the basis of Economics, establishing, respectively, the historical and policy contexts of the applied economic and social issues studied in the degree and the process through which the lenses currently used to study a phenomenon were developed." (2023, 12)

This state of affairs – declining prioritization by academic economists and university departments in the face of calls from students and the lead quality assurance agency for precisely the opposite – means that assessments of the impact of HET on student learning are relatively more important to the future of the sub-discipline as compared to evaluations of those other sub-disciplinary subjects which are traditionally considered to be core to the economics canon. Despite the importance of the issue, neither researchers in economics education, nor in the history of economic thought itself, have shown much interest in evaluating the *teaching* of HET, as a few selected examples show. In 2019 the *Journal of Economics Education* had four survey articles looking back at 50 years of the journal – covering economics instruction, research and a future agenda – without a single mention of HET (Walstad, 2019); there have been no articles written on HET in *JEE* in the last decade; in an *International Journal of Economics Education* special issue on pluralism in 2009, it was argued that HET "…is a prerequisite for understanding the controversy between the schools of thought extant within the discipline today" (Denis, 2009, 21), and yet in the years since little has changed in its pages.

There has similarly been little interest in the academic HET community in examining teaching practice. In 2001, HET scholars discussed the health of the sub-discipline resulting in the publication of a special issue of the *History of Political Economy* (HOPE) a year later. A number of criteria were considered by which that health could be judged. Special issue editor Weintraub (2002, 3) noted that curious by its absence was an assessment of what he termed the 'historical health' of the discipline: "historian's craft could perhaps have produced an account of the health of the subdiscipline with chapters like 'Changes in the Undergraduate Economics Curriculum in England and Scotland; 1945–90' … however, "historians of economics are generally unaccustomed to doing such historical work, so

[4] Backhouse (2002b, 83–84) conducted a survey of 45 UK universities teaching economics, finding that HET was taught (at any level) in 21 of these (47 %). He found that top economics departments (those scoring highly on the UK Research Assessment Exercise) were both less likely to teach HET and more likely to say that HET teaching was declining. We were unable to find a contemporary update of the survey. Rethinking Economics conducted a survey of 20 undergraduate economics programs in 2024 (Cathcart and Nelson, 2024); 5 of which included compulsory HET, a further 7 included HET as an optional module, and another 5 had economic history as an optional module though not HET.

[5] A special issue on the state of HET of the journal *History of Political Economy* in 2002 highlighted declining interest of academics in HET in Italy (Marcuzzo and Rosselli, 2002, 107); the disappearance or downgrading of HET in many Dutch universities (Jolink and Blaug, 2002, 151); and less room in the curriculum and declining interest in Australia and New Zealand (Lodewijks, 2002, 158–59). In the US, while embedded in the teaching of liberal arts colleges (Bateman, 2002), HET is disappearing from graduate studies (Gayer, 2002). These broadly negative assessments however were not universal. They were contrasted by the situation in France, where only 2 of 38 economics programs did *not* offer compulsory courses in HET at least once over the four maîtrise years (Deleplace, 2002, 111), Germany, where the outlook was "not bad"(Schefold, 2002, 134), and a "renewal" of interest in HET in Spain and Portugal, although still a minority of economics programs made it compulsory (Cardoso, 2002, 141).

[6] The degree to which the CORE curriculum addresses the issues raised by the students is a contested one. See, for example, Michell (2023) and Mearman et al. (2018).

that complex, self-reflexive studies are difficult at best, and self-serving at worst, usually confirming a position defined in advance of evidence." Nearly twenty years later, in a 50-year anniversary review of the discipline, once again in the pages of *HOPE*, Giraud (2019) makes no mention of teaching *per se*. Indeed, as far as we can find, one has to go back to 2006 to find the last published article on teaching HET in a HET journal (Cardoso, 2006).[7]

While there are a healthy number of textbooks surveying HET for teaching purposes coming out on a regular basis,[8] very few that we are aware of explicitly discuss the teaching of HET. Three recent contributions which do so have met with mixed reception from the academic HET community. Backhouse & Tribe's *The History of Economics: A Course for Students and Teachers* (2017) contains 24 lectures moving from 17th century Europe to the present, with learning aims, a helpful bibliography, key chronology and questions for discussion. Reviews in HET journals have praised its pointedly classical scholarship, and function as a resource primarily to support teachers over its use as a central text for students (King, 2018; Cohen, 2020). Tavasci & Ventimiglia's *Teaching the history of economic thought: Integrating historical perspectives into modern economics* (2018) brings together eight chapters from different authors focusing on how a historical perspective can be used to support the teaching of other economic sub-disciplines including microeconomics, financial economics and money & banking, as well as HET itself. The collection has been complimented for providing practical and engaging examples of teaching with historical perspectives, if some concern raised both about the lack of space devoted to historical context (Brent, 2022) and a missed opportunity to incorporate 'frontier issues' such as the contribution of female economists (Guizzo, 2018). Incorporating some of these 'frontier issues' is Deane & Van Waeyenberge's *Recharting the History of Economic Thought* (2020), also a collected volume, with fifteen chapters organized around classical topics such as equilibrium and growth, but also topics less-traveled such as gender and the environment. Each chapter offers discussion questions, further reading suggestions and extensive references. The collection comes in for criticism for using history of thought to legitimize alternative perspectives (Colander, 2021), and advancing imprecise presentations of the orthodoxy (Kuchař 2021). Mata (2022) uses his review to note that the volume highlights the failure of historians of economics to directly address the concerns of the *Rethinking Economics* generation, but criticizes the volume's sacrificing of depth and nuance of historical treatment.

Given this context, it is no small accomplishment to secure a place for HET amongst the core modules of an UG economics program. At our university, a post-92 institution which educates a predominantly working-class, majority Asian and Black student population, HET was made a core single-term second-year module as part of a revalidation process, effective since 2014, which officially entrenched our commitment to pluralism in the teaching of economics. But it would be a mistake to think that the inclusion of HET is by default responding to the needs of our student community. Extensive research has shown that economics has a class, gender and race problem, consistently more upper-class, male and white than almost any other academic discipline (Lundberg and Stearns, 2019; Cohen, 2022; Kvangraven and Kesar, 2023; Stansbury and Schultz, 2023). However, our experience is that HET risks reinforcing rather than overturning these biases, especially where it is taught only as exegesis of a series of 'dead, white, European men' (or WEM-HET as we call it). This perception is reinforced by Small's (2023, 277) archival research of HET syllabi from the 1970s through 2020 which finds that very few courses "managed to truly diversify their syllabi in ways that incorporate economic thinkers beyond White men." Recent scholarship in HET has begun to probe the lack of attention to issues of race[9] and gender.[10] Without careful attention to these issues, do we risk further alienating young, female, and Black and Asian economists from economics?

[7] We are indebted to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out two articles on teaching HET published in 2023, though both outside of journals of economic education or HET. Small (2023) uses archival evidence to demonstrate the lack of diversity in HET teaching, and provides alternative content suggestions to address the identified shortcoming. Strenio (2023) provides examples of assignments to encourage critical examination of a more diverse range of 'great thinkers' to be integrated into core macro- and microeconomics courses.

[8] A list of the most commonly used HET textbooks in the UK would include those by distinguished authors such as Backhouse (2002a; 2023), Barber (2009), Blaug (2009), Hunt & Lautzenheiser (2011) and Roncaglia (2017).

[9] An indicative - but by no means exhaustive - list of HET scholars' work on race includes: Peart & Levy's early overview (2001) of the role of racism across a number of strands of economic thinking; Bateman (2003) on the role of racial issues in the development of American economics; Colander et al.'s *Race, Liberalism and Economics* (2004) with contributions from key authors on the issue, including William Darity, a pioneer in work on stratification economics (2005); Leonard's seminal book *Illiberal Reformers* (2016) which spawned considerable debate both within economics/HET as well as outside of them, as the issue of racial inequality grabbed global headlines with the *Black Lives Matter* movement, especially after the murder of George Floyd in 2020; important recent contributions include Peart and Levy's updated presentation to the 2021 American Economics Association annual conference (2021), a JHET summary of pieces on race in HET (2021), Chassonnery-Zaïgouche (2020) on the missing narratives of race in HET, and Jenkins & Leroy's *Histories of Racial Capitalism* (2021).

[10] A similarly indicative list of HET scholars' work on gender includes: Groundbreaking early work by Pujol (1992) on feminism and anti-feminism in the development of neoclassical thought, Bodkin (1999) and Dimand et al. (2004) on gender in classical economics, and a special issue of *HOPE* on feminist theory in HET introduced by Weintraub (1993), with contributions from Nelson, Strassman, Folbre and Seiz. Madden & Dimand's pivotal collected volume (2018) highlights the overlooked work of women economists including sections focused on regions beyond Europe and the USA. Important recent monographs include Kuiper (2022), examining women's writing on key economic themes such as production, distribution and consumption; May (2022) on the overlooked history of women in American economics 19th century to the postwar period; and Rostek's (2023) work on women English economists in the Romantic period. Discussion of how gender bias is constructed and reconstructed throughout the history of economic ideas is central to work by Folbre (2010) and Cohen (2022), while the feminist challenge to neoclassical economics and the rise of feminist economics features in research from Woolley (1993) to, more recently, Becchio (2021) and Espinel & Betancourt (2022). Chassonnery-Zaïgouche et al. (2022) introduce the 2022 *HOPE* special issue on Women and Economics, nearly 30 years after the first such special issue.

2. Reforming HET

In 2019, we inherited a HET module which had been taught by two different staff members since its introduction in 2014.[11] As a single term module, core to the second-year of both the Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Sciences economics programs, it had been designed in two parts: six sessions ordered chronologically according to the main schools of thought and four sessions on 'applied' HET topics, examining how the different schools of thought have influenced analysis and policy on unemployment, crisis, austerity and the role of the state (plus an introductory and wrap-up week gives 12 sessions in total). Since academic year 2021–22 we have offered five applied topics as seen through the prism of major schools of economic thought: (1) labor and employment, (2) race and class, (3) sex and gender, (4) environment (with a focus on climate breakdown), and (5) crisis and austerity (see Appendix 1: Module details).

The attempt to combine HET as classically taught chronologically with a more applied approach made sense in theory as a middle-ground providing both an introductory survey of the seminal literature in the canon anchoring each in its historical milieu, as well as an opportunity for students to grapple with the contemporary real-world relevance of these ideas. However, the risk is that rather than the best of both worlds, we are left pleasing no one: with very limited time, did we risk superficially treating both approaches? Accepting the two-part approach in theory also did nothing to reduce the practical difficulties of what to keep in and what to leave out.

The second issue which was immediately evident was the dominance of what we called WEM-HET. It is easy to understand why this was the case. The sub-discipline has historically been dominated by WEM scholars and their research on WEM economists since Adam Smith. This has begun to change in recent years (see footnotes 7 and 8), but the seminal texts of the sub-discipline, both the original contributors and the HET analyses thereupon, remain decidedly WEM (Medema et al. 2002; Chassonnery-Zaïgouche et al. 2018; Small, 2023) as do most of the recent textbooks (Maas and Chassonnery-Zaigouche, 2018). While the purpose of this article is not to defend the case for *why* decolonization is important, we would echo Choat et al.'s (2024, 1506) summary of the literature pointing to the intellectual value of decolonization, the need to reflect student diversity in the curriculum, and the moral obligation to challenge pre-existing notions of history and power. In their call to make economics higher education teaching truly inclusive, Birdi et al. (2023, 11) highlight the importance of paying greater attention to decolonsing curricula.

Without giving justice to the growing debate over what is a highly contested concept in higher education, let alone more broadly, we highlight Kvangraven & Kesar's (2023) identification of the features of a genuine decolonized approach to economic pedagogy: the need to embed economy within society; a rejection of claims to either objective neutrality or universality; emphasis on diversity and pluralism in the curriculum; explicit acknowledgment of a variety of power inequalities, including but not limited to race, class, sex, and gender; and pedagogy which recognizes and attempts to address structural inequalities that impact our students. We felt that the first two criteria were central to our existing pluralist approach to HET, and that we had made progress on improving diversity. Where work remained was on centering power inequalities throughout the curriculum, and addressing through module design the inequalities that our students face. The innovative nature of our efforts is highlighted by Choat et al.'s (2024) audit of UK economics programs which found that only 1 of 90 economics programs and 5 out of 492 modules made 'some' reference to race, racism and colonialism.

In terms of curriculum, we made two significant changes. First, we condensed the sessions on European HET so that we could add an initial session on International HET. Of course, this risks 'ghettoizing' non-European HET. In recognition of the above complexity, we are trying, where possible, to introduce non-European perspectives both on traditional European HET and on the applied topics. We use the international HET session to highlight the important contributions which both pre-date and run contemporaneously with the major developments in European HET in other parts of the world. Second, we re-organized and expanded the applied section of the module. We now have a session on race and class, and another on sex and gender. This has involved an investment in learning on our part, as teaching the HET of race, class, sex and gender is very different from the economics of the same topics.

Underpinning this re-organization has been an ongoing attempt to re-visit the learning resources of the module. In terms of choice of textbook, we felt Deane & Van Waeyenberge's *Recharting the History of Economic Thought* (2020) offered three advantages over the more commonly-used textbooks: first, it takes an entirely applied approach including coverage of atypical topics; second, it reflects a pluralist analysis, which we view as a strength; and, finally, the authorship is more demographically diverse (if still European dominated). To the criticism that the collection lacks historical depth and nuance, we feel that this risks making perfect the enemy of good at the undergraduate level where time is short and attention spans even shorter. In addition to the core textbook, we have attempted to diversify the supplementary readings in terms of race, class, sex/gender, though there is still room for improvement on this front.

A further reform which we introduced to the learning resources was to include a 'classic text': each week we ask the students to read a renowned piece of writing in economics (often an excerpt for length reasons), a 'synthetic' piece assessing the subject (a chapter from *Recharting* or other HET textbooks or a suitable journal article, as appropriate), and a 'supplementary' reading which introduces more depth to the topic, often a journal article or book chapter. Where possible, we have attempted to include diversity in our choice of 'classic' text; for example, students are asked to read a selection from W.E.B. Dubois' *The Gift of Black Folk* (1924) in the week on the HET of race. Of course, the inclusion of 'classic' texts in the section on European HET risks reinforcing WEM dominance, however, it is our belief that it is preferable for our students to encounter the original material, and be guided in the works' historical context and authors' values and beliefs, rather than purely accepting the interpretation of such works through the eyes of a (likely WEM) HET scholar. This has allowed us, for example, to have challenging discussions about the import of Alfred Marshall's sexism, classism and

[11] See Appendix 1 for module aims, learning outcomes, assessment and reading list.

racism (Marshall, 1890; Folbre, 2010, 235–36) or John Maynard Keynes' alleged antisemitism, support for eugenics (Weintraub, 2012) and active role in imperialism (Patnaik and Patnaik, 2021).

Finally, we have tried to diversify learning resource medium by including links to podcasts, videos and films that cover, either directly or indirectly, the authors and topics that we are discussing. While such resources often replicate the WEM dominance of the traditional HET textbook (the *Economics in Ten* podcast, hosted by two White European men, is predominantly organized around discussion of WEM HET, though it, too, has recently tried to overcome this predilection (Clift and Simpson, 2024)), there are also spaces where a diversity of voices on new issues to HET can be heard (we ask students to listen to episodes of *Ceteris never Paribus: The HET podcast*, including an episode that discusses the construction of knowledge between South Asia and Europe (Bach, 2024)). Lectures are scheduled the week before the relevant tutorial discussion to allow students sufficient time to absorb and synthesize the lecture along with the weekly readings. This arrangement was put in place following feedback we received after our first experience teaching the module. In the lectures we attempt to draw out common cross-cutting themes, and put emphasis on understanding of how material context influences the authors we are examining (and the HET scholar alike). Additional resources are provided at the end of each lecture for those students wishing to pursue a topic in more depth, and to provide support towards their assessment.

For each week's tutorial, we provide a small number of questions to stimulate tutorial discussion, but leave space open for discussion to be directed by student interest. From the outset, a conscious attempt is made to reinforce the idea that the issues we are discussing are all contested ones, and that we are all grappling with their significance and constantly learning. The intent is to create a space where there are no 'dumb questions' and students can be comfortable in respectfully challenging one another's (and our) ideas.

When we inherited the module it was assessed through two pieces of summative assessment, a shorter and a longer essay. In keeping with university moves towards reduced assessment as well as greater use of formative assessment, we have moved to a single longer summative essay, supported by the submission of a formative draft (see Appendix 1: Module details). This has also allowed us to introduce student co-creation (Cook-Sather, 2020), wherein students are allowed to construct their own essay question, getting approval and feedback on their proposed topic at the formative stage.[12]

3. How is it going?

The biggest challenge, which is by no means unique to this module, has been with engagement.[13] This is both in terms of attendance, but also levels of preparation of those who do attend. From a median attendance of nearly 60 % of tutorials pre-Covid, this has fallen through the Covid period to below half and as low as one-third more recently (with some signs of an improvement in the most recent academic year). This is indicative of broader trends in engagement in the programs. While there is no way to formally document the levels of preparedness, it is normal that only a handful of students will have properly engaged with the learning materials in advance of the tutorial, with another handful who have superficially engaged. Naturally, this leads to tutorial discussions which, despite being lively and of high quality, are dominated by a minority of the engaged students. This does not go unremarked upon by the students themselves, with one commenting in a module evaluation: "On many occasions have I felt annoyed/bad for [lecturer] when attendance is low." As only one measure to address this, we plan to place more emphasis on first-name engagement from the first week, the use of quiz-style engagement checks, and other measures detailed below.

A big part of the lack of preparedness appears to be student resistance to reading. Clearly, like more general attendance problems, this is a larger issue that can not be addressed within any individual module. We have attempted to both select appropriately challenging material in terms of depth and length, as well as speak to students 'from where they are' or what social position they occupy (see Appendix 1: Module details). This has had many qualitative success stories, such as the student from a South Asian background, who commented in class that they "…had never thought of India as a source of economic thought prior to the module"; or female students showing strong engagement during the week on sex and gender. Asked to name a favorite reading, one female student responded: "Reading anything about sex and gender and its relation to HET." Research into techniques to improve reading motivation suggests encouraging students to write about the personal relevance of topics to their life (Gurung et al. 2023).

There is a challenge in integrating the latest HET research in that it is often written at a post-doctorate level to appeal to the small community of professional HET scholars. We plan to build upon the links we have made with HET scholars challenging the *status quo* to bring their latest insights into our lectures, and readings where possible, in an accessible manner. Clearly there is a gap in the provision of undergraduate level survey materials that provide students with the foundational conceptual tools necessary to engage with the more nuanced and specific detail of research publications.

Student performance fell during the Covid period, but appears to have recovered in more recent academic years. We found it encouraging that for the first time in the most recent year, more students chose to craft essay questions which focused on race, class, sex and gender and the environment compared to other more conventional topics. The White-BAME performance gap fell from 6.8 % (2019–20) to 0.8 % (2020–21) and then rose to 3.4 % in 2021–22 (the latest year for which data is available). This statistic should, however, be treated with caution. Small numbers, and reliance on the difference in raw average scores across aggregated categories of ethnicity rather than finer value-added scores, can easily be misleading.

[12] New concerns about the misuse of AI mean that we are regularly revisiting this assessment structure.

[13] Engagement was inevitably affected by the changing delivery format associated with the COVID-19 suppression policies and sicknesses/absences in 2020–21 and to a lesser extent in 2021–2022. Subsequently, both across our university and the sector more broadly, there has been a recognized problem of how to make the university campus 'sticky' again, that is, to encourage students to consistently attend, engage and participate in extra-curricular activities (Hari Rajan et al. 2024).

Students have voiced their appreciation of the flexibility that assessment co-creation has allowed. One example of this is that of a student of Tunisian heritage who wrote a paper on Ibn Khaldun, drawing on family and friends and using Arabic language resources. However, the flipside, again explicitly voiced by some students is that they dis-engage with anything other than what is needed to fulfill the requirements of assessment. This instrumental approach to learning is illustrated by the feedback of one student: "Once I knew what I wanted to write the other content seemed irrelevant." Perhaps showing students the clear correlation between engagement and student outcomes early on in the module, might help to persuade those students to see the short-sightedness of this approach, though this too risks reinforcing a form of instrumentalism.

Increasingly complex terrains of competing responsibilities and needs that our students navigate deserve a separate mention. Many have to work to support their education, support their families in (child)care duties, commute long distances due to accommodation and transportation affordability constraints, the need to work longer hours to hold on to jobs, and more. All these factors that are widely documented nationwide (Office for Students, 2023; Palomeque Recio, 2022) and regularly and frequently are subject of in-class conversations and those with students' personal tutors affect the ability of learners to meaningfully engage even if they are keen on concrete subjects and themes. Growing numbers of Extenuating Circumstances claims, that is student requests for an extension of submission deadlines, in recent years further evidence this challenge.

Looking forward, we hope to introduce greater student co-creation in the module design, not just the construction of assessment. Students will be asked to choose which applied topics they would like the module to focus on. Plans are to gradually build the scaffolding provided to support a menu of possible topics (whether directly covered in lectures or not), allowing us to diversify into themes from the history of economics more broadly understood, such as the history of econometrics or use of national accounts, topics that might directly inform final-year dissertations, for example. This reflects the finding (Sanders-McDonagh and Davis, 2018) that co-creation in module design can strengthen student engagement levels and reach greater levels of depth in learning.

Consistent with our focus on decolonizing pedagogy and not just content, we know that educational research finds that "BME students may face difficulty with academic writing, professional writing and argumentation at university level…" (Sanders-McDonagh and Davis, 2018). Our results do not indicate that this is necessarily the case, however our strategy to address any potential disadvantage of students lacking 'academic capital' is to encourage the formation of work groups around assessment topics of shared interest. It is hoped that this may also have benefits for engagement and reading motivation. We will also pilot the use of audio feedback on the formative draft, with evidence suggesting that this is particularly helpful to students who lack the skills to interpret feedback and its implications for future work (Wolstencroft and de Main, 2021).

4. Survey findings

Before discussion of the student survey findings, some caveats are needed which should suggest caution in the interpretation of the results. Participation was voluntary, with students notified of the survey both in class lectures/tutorials, and via email notices. We received 33 responses out of two second-year cohorts (2021–22 and 2022–23); this is just over a fifth of the total number of students enrolled. The results are biased towards more engaged students; respondents were asked to rate their level of engagement, with 40 % saying 'high', 52 % 'average' and only 8 % 'low'. The results are also biased towards female respondents; 52 % of respondents are female (as against approximately 40 % in the programs more generally).[14]

First, we asked the students to rate the module delivery along a number of general dimensions. On the ability of the module content to raise understanding of HET outside of Western Europe / North America, BAME[16] students, while still giving a positive assessment overall, were more critical than their White peers: 75 % of white students rated the content as excellent or good, while only 53 % of BAME students did so (see Fig. 1). Similarly, on the integration of scholarship/views from women and men, female[17] students were much less positive in their appraisal than their male colleagues: 35 % of females rated the content as excellent or good, while 75 % of males did so (see Fig. 2). Responses on the contribution of assessment to understanding were broadly similar across sex, race and class. This confirms our expectation that groups marginalized from conventional economic discourse (and equally HET discourse) are more likely to notice (and be more critical) when they are not reflected in the curriculum.

Next we asked students to rate their enjoyment of specific components of the module, from 'loved it' to 'hated it'. In addition to the earlier caveats regarding the small size of the survey sample, this question introduces a further complication in that different topics were covered by the different module co-leaders.[18] Topics that female students liked significantly more than male students included race & class, sex & gender and crisis & austerity. Fig. 3 shows responses on sex & gender which 76 % of female students rated as excellent / good, while only 44 % of male students did so. The only topic that male students liked more than female students was the state. The only topic which BAME students liked more than White students was labor & unemployment (Fig. 4 – 68 % BAME students rated excellent or good, while 58 % of White students did so). This contrasts with all other topics for which White students rated the

[14] See Appendix 2 for a summary of survey participants.

[16] While the authors find this term problematic, given the small size of the sample, the category serves to split the respondents into White (those who identified their ethnic group, following ONS standard classification, as English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British, Irish, or 'any other White background') and BAME (all other ethnic groups). There was a 'prefer not to say' option offered.

[17] Respondents were asked to self-identify both sex (as typically assigned at birth) and gender (a social construct). For the purposes of discussion here we have limited the discussion to the division on the dimension of sex. As it turned out, numbers of female/male (sex) matched numbers of women/men (gender).

[18] Subjective teaching evaluations have been shown to exhibit systematic gender bias (Mengel et al. 2019).

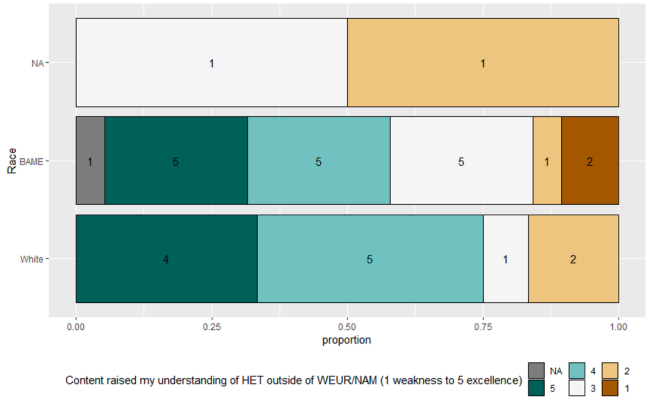

Fig. 1. Content raised understanding of non-WEM HET, by race[151]

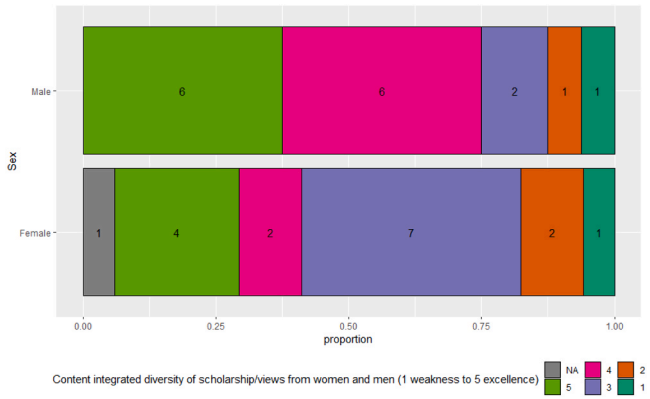

Fig. 2. Content integrated scholarship of women, by sex.

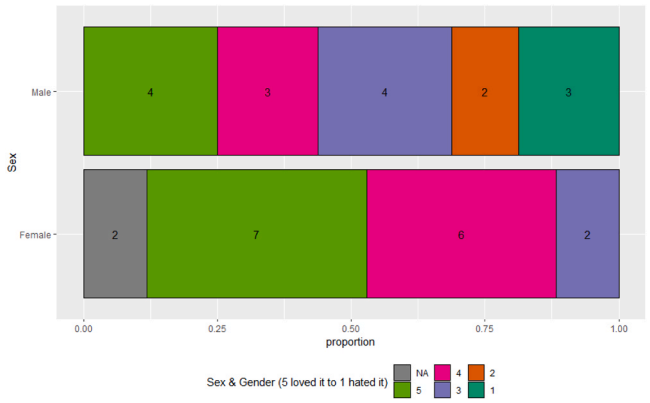

Fig. 3. Enjoyment of topic 'HET of sex & gender', by sex.

components more highly than BAME students (International (non-European) HET was rated almost identically).

The results on enjoyment of specific components viewed through the lens of class are interesting. Of conventional HET topics,[19] (self-identified) middle-class students liked all components better than working-class students, other than International (non-Western) HET: 76 % of working-class respondents loved/liked International HET, while 58 % of middle -class students did so (see Fig. 5). Of

[19] This includes: International HET, Classical Political Economy, Marxism, Marginalism-Neoclassicism, Keynesianism, Modern Economics

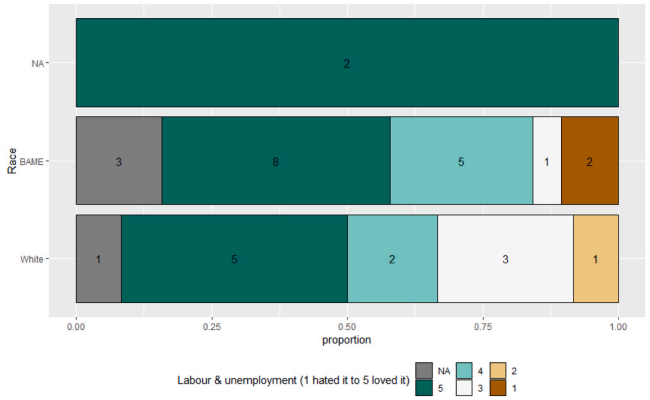

Fig. 4. Enjoyment of topic 'labor & unemployment', by race.

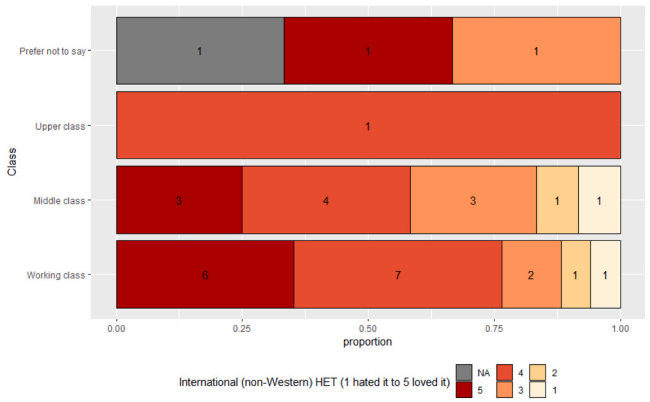

Fig. 5. Enjoyment of topic 'International (non-Western) HET', by class.

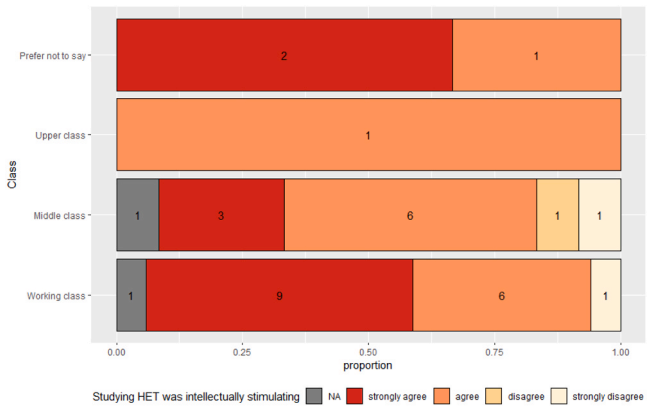

Figure 6. 'HET was intellectually stimulating', by class.

applied topics,[20] working-class students liked all components better than middle-class students, except the environment: 50 % of middle-class students loved/liked the topic against 41 % of working-class students.

Asked to rate the module learning resources (excerpts from original 'canonical' texts; HET chapters; journal articles) on the same scale from 'loved it' to 'hated it', male students rated all resources higher than female students, White students rated all resources

[20] This includes: race & class, sex & gender, the environment, labor & unemployment, crisis & austerity, the state.

higher than BAME students, while, against our expectations, working-class and middle-class students rated them similarly.

Finally, students were asked to indicate the impact of studying HET along a number of criteria, choosing from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Responses to the statement 'HET was enjoyable' were positive and distributed in a broadly similar fashion across the dimensions examined here. To the statement 'HET was intellectually stimulating', while responses were broadly similar disaggregated by sex or race, many more working-class students strongly agreed (nine compared to three middle class students, see Fig. 6). Similar distinctions along class lines were revealed in responses to the statements 'HET changed the way I think about economics' and 'HET had real world relevance'.

5. Conclusion

In terms of broad outcomes, the results of our efforts to decolonize HET have had little measurable impact. Student results, after a dip during the Covid period, appear largely unchanged in the most recent cohort; student satisfaction fluctuates, but remains broadly positive; and the race performance gap similarly fluctuates at a low level. The concrete positive indicators are the increased number of students choosing to write their assignments on one of the new applied topics (race & class, sex & gender, environment) and selective qualitative feedback. Engagement continues to be weak, though this is likely a symptom of a much broader trend (Hari Rajan et al. 2024).

However, from the survey findings, a number of interesting observations have emerged. Female students notice and are more critical of the lack of gender diversity. They appreciate efforts to discuss sex & gender. This suggests a need to continue to improve the integration of female economists throughout the module. BAME students notice and are more critical over the lack of regional diversity and appreciate efforts to discuss International HET (if, counterintuitively, not race & class). This suggests a need to integrate more international HET throughout the module. A number of students have expressed a desire through qualitative feedback to include the history of Islamic economic thought in the module. Finally, working class students have shown a preference for applied topics relative to more traditionally organized discussions of HET. Should we, on this basis, consider moving to a curriculum of only applied topics? To date, we think that this risks negatively affecting students' grasp of the importance of the historical context in which schools of economic thought emerge, a key learning outcome. Certainly the most pleasantly surprising finding was that working-class students report more impact of the module, finding it intellectually stimulating, changing the way they think about economics, and having real-world relevance. This suggests that HET can have real value in the context of a university serving a diverse working-class student base.

Returning to the challenges laid out in the introduction, it is clear that there are no silver bullets to transforming the teaching of HET to undergraduate economics students. It will be difficult to operationalize reforms suggested by survey results given that the different sub-samples of the student population - relatively evenly split along sex, race and class lines - appear to have different preferences. There is no perfect mousetrap. However, the evaluation and sharing of reflective teaching practice can hopefully help to ensure that both the content and the pedagogy of HET is relevant and engaging for new generations of young economists. This surely can not but help in making the case, backed by student and quality assurance calls for the same, to retain HET on the economics curriculum where it already has a foothold, and argue for its inclusion where it has been pushed to the sidelines.

Ethics approval

Ethical approval for the research was received from the University of Greenwich University Research Ethics Board in June 2022 (21.4.7.23). All survey participants have given informed consent to participate in the research.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Jeff Powell: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Visualization. **Yuliya Yurchenko**: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Visualization

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors have no relevant competing interests to declare.

Acknowledgments

The authors received no support from any funding or grant-awarding bodies for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Appendix 1. Module Details

Aims: This module offers a critical historical and methodological introduction to the study of economics. The aim is to equip students with tools to exercise their own judgment as economists. In particular, the discussion of the nature and scope of economics, with examples from history, is important in order to give students a sense of the economics discipline, its historical and methodological evolution, and to adequately address current economic issues. This module provides students with an understanding of the

development of economics as a social science. It analyses various economic questions from a pluralist perspective, i.e. it will consider different approaches to key economic issues.

Learning Outcomes: On successful completion of this module a student will be able to:

1. Explain the historical and methodological development of economics from the 19th century to present day
2. Interpret and synthetize the contributions made by major authors in the history of economic thought
3. Explain the origins of some of the key concepts in contemporary economics
4. Evaluate key mainstream (neoclassical) and heterodox (non-neoclassical) economic theories and policies
5. Analyse contemporary economic questions from a pluralistic perspective
6. Master critical thinking and exercise judgment in economics by criticizing and defending intellectual positions

Assessment

Essay plan: Prepare a 1 page (approx. 500 words), bullet-point summary of how you plan to address the essay assignment. This should include:

- Specifying the question that you will answer (we will discuss this in tutorials)
- Basic structure that you will follow highlighting key points you wish to address
- Key bibliographic resources (books, journal articles, policy papers, databases, etc.) that you either have consulted or will consult as part of your research

Final essay

Write a 2,500-word (+/- 10 %) essay in which you take responsibility for the direction of your research (co-creation):

1. Choose a thematic focus from one of the applied HET topics or choose an applied topic of your own (if you wish to choose your own applied topic, special permission must be sought from the module leaders).
2. Critically contrast the historical evolution of the economic analysis of your chosen theme in two schools of thought (from: neo-classical, Austrian, monetarist, New Keynesian, Keynesian, Post-Keynesian, institutionalist, feminist, ecological or Marxian). Note that the HET in relation to your chosen theme is not the same as simply looking at your theme from two different economic frameworks! You will need, as a minimum, to demonstrate what you have learned in this module; top papers will go further.
3. How have these two analytical frameworks influenced relevant policies? (you may choose to focus on a specific geographic region if you wish; stronger papers will cite specific policies which have been influenced by the respective frameworks) What accounts for their relative success in policy circles?

Written feedback will be provided on the final essay, as well as a rubric breakdown of the overall grade by the individual marking criteria.

Session readings:

Week 0 (pre-session): Introduction to HET

Core reading: DOW, S.C. (2020) The methodological role of the history of economic thought, In Deleplace, G., Marcuzzo, M. C., and Paesani, P. (eds.), *New Perspectives on Political Economy and Its History*, London, Palgrave, pp. 21–38.

Additional reading: RONCAGLIA, A. (2017) *The Wealth of Ideas: A History of Economic Thought*. Ch. 1 HET and its role pp. 1–17

Week 1: The Colonization of Political Economy: From Khaldun to Smith

Primary text: KHALDUN, I. (1377) *Muqaddimah*. Chapter 5, Part 1 on profit

[If you can read it in its original Arabic, please do so!]

Core reading: CHANDRASEKARAN, B. (2015), In Barnett, V. (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of the History of Global Economic Thought*, ch. 29 India, pp. 323–36

Week 2: Classical Political Economy

Primary text: SMITH, A. (1910) *The Wealth of Nations*, London, Dent. Book I, chs. 6 and 7

Core readings: FOLEY, D. K. (2008) *Adam's Fallacy: A Guide to Economic Theology*, ch 1, pp. 1–44; DEANE et al., *Re-charting HET*, chs. 7, 9, Michell 'How is income distributed?' and Passarella 'How are goods and services valued in economics?'

Additional readings: BARBER, W. J. (2009) *A History of Economic Thought*, ch 1, "Adam Smith and the Framework of Classical Analysis" pp. 23–51; BACKHOUSE, R. E. (2002). *The Penguin History of Economics*. Ch 7, "Classical Political Economy, 1790–1870", pp 132–157.

Week 3: Marx and the critique of Classical Political Economy

Primary text: MARX, Karl. (1865) *Value, Price and Profit*. New York: International Co., Inc, Section 6 – 14.

Core reading: RONCAGLIA, A. (2009), *The Wealth of Ideas*, Ch. 9 Karl Marx.

Additional readings: DEANE et al., *Re-charting HET*, ch. 4 Newman, S. 'How are things produced?'

Week 4: From the marginalist revolution to the neoclassicals

Primary text: MARSHALL, A. (1890) Book III 'On Wants and Their Satisfaction', chs. 1–4, in *The Principles of Economics*. 1920.

Core reading: DEANE et al., *Re-charting HET*, chs. 2, 5 Miyamura, S. 'Are we all rational, optimizing agents?' and Robertson, M. 'How and why are things consumed?'

Additional readings: BARBER, W. J. (2009). *A History of Economic Thought* Part 3 "Introduction", ch 6 "Alfred Marshall and the

Framework of Neo-Classical Economics", ch 7 "Pre-1914 Variations on Neo-Classical Themes" pp. 168–221. MILONAKIS, D. & FINE, B (2009). *From Political Economy to Economics*, ch. 2 "Smith, Riccardo and the first rupture in economic thought" & ch. 6 "Marginalism and the Methodenstreit".

Week 5: Keynes, the Great Depression and the welfare state

Primary text: KEYNES, J. M. (1936) *General Theory* Ch.12 (additionally Ch.15 et passim)

Core reading: BARBER, W. J. (2009). *A History of Economic Thought* Part Four "Introduction", Ch 8 "The Economics of Keynes's General Theory" pp. 223–258.

Additional reading: SKIDELSKY, R. (2011). "The relevance of Keynes". *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, Vol. 35, Issue 1, pp.–13

Week 6: London HET walking tour

Weeks 7–11: HET Applied Topics from…

HET Applied: Race

Primary texts: RODNEY, W. (1973) 'Colonialism as a System for Underdeveloping Africa', in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* Ch. 6; DU BOIS, W.E.B. (1924) *The Gift of Black Folk: The Negroes in the Making of America*. Foreword [i]-[iv] Chapter 2. Black Labor

Core reading: PEART, S. and LEVY, D. M. (2021) 'Economists, Race, and Racism: The Long View' ASSA2021 AEA Annual Meeting, January

Additional readings: CHASSONERY-ZAIGOUCHE, C. (2020) Race in the History of Economics: The Missing Narratives?, *Œconomia*. (10–2), pp. 333–349.

HET Applied: Sex, gender and the intersectionality of oppression

Primary text: KOLLONTAI, A. (1909) 'The Social Basis of the Woman's Question'

Core reading: DEANE, K. et al. (2020) *Recharting HET*. Ch. 13, Bargawi, H. 'How does economics address gender?'

Additional readings: CHASSONERY-ZAIGOUCHE et al. (2022) Women and Economics: New Historical Perspectives, Center for the History of Political Economy at Duke University Working Paper Series

HET Applied: Class

Primary text: ENGELS, F. (1845) *Condition of the Working Class in England* pp. 28–41; 73–81.

Core reading: WRIGHT, E. O. (2009) Understanding Class, *New Left Review* 60

Additional reading: WOLFF, R. D. and RESNICK, S. A. (2012) *Contending Economic Theories: Neoclassical, Keynesian and Marxian*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press

Ch. 1 (General intro); Ch. 4 (Marxian concept of class); pp. 352–64 on distribution

HET Applied: Environment

Primary text: OSTROM, E. (1990) *Governing the Commons* ch. 6 'A Framework for Analysis of Self-Organizing and Self-Governing CPRs'

Core reading: DEANE, K. et al. (2020) Recharting HET. Ch. 14, Groom & Talevi 'How does economics address the environment?'

Additional reading: HICKEL, J. & KALLIS, G. (2020) 'Is Green Growth Possible?', New Political Economy, 25(4)

HET Applied: Labor, work and unemployment

Primary text: BRAVERMAN, H. (1974) *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*. Ch. 6, The Habituation of the Worker to the Capitalist Mode of Production, pp. 96–104

Core reading: WOLFF, R. D. and RESNICK, S. A. (2012) Contending Economic Theories: Neoclassical, Keynesian and Marxian, pp. 72–81 (neoclassical); pp.115–22 (Keynesian); pp. 195–203 (Marxian)

Additional readings: SPENCER, D. (2006) "Work for all those who want it? Why the neoclassical labor supply curve is an inappropriate foundation for the theory of employment and unemployment?". *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, Vol. 30, Issue 3, pp.459–472.

HET Applied: Crisis and austerity

Primary text: MINSKY, H. P. (1978) The Financial Instability Hypothesis: A Restatement, Thames Papers in Political Economy

Core reading: DEANE, K. et al. (2020) Recharting HET. Ch. 10, Bonizzi & Powell 'What causes economic crises? And what can we do about them?'

Additional readings: KONZELMANN, S. (2014). "The Political Economy of Austerity". *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, Vol. 38, Issue 4, pp.701–741; BLYTH, M. (2013) *Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea*, Ch. 5 The Intellectual History of a Dangerous Idea, 1942–2012, pp. 132–77

Week 12: Modern Economics

Primary text: HAYEK, F.A. (1945) The Use of Knowledge in Society, AER, 35(4), pp. 519–30.

Core reading: RONCAGLIA, A. (2009). The Wealth of Ideas Ch 17 "The Age of Fragmentation".

Additional readings: BACKHOUSE, R. (2002) The Penguin History of Economics Ch. 13 'Economists and Policy, pp. 295–308; ch. 14 'Expanding the discipline', pp. 309–328;

COLANDER, D. (2000). "The death of neoclassical economics". Journal of the History of Economic Thought, Vol.21, No.2, pp.127–143

Appendix 2. Summary of survey participants

Program	
BSc H Economics	25
BA H Business Economics	8
Sex	
Male	16
Female	17
Ethnicity	
English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	6
Any other White background	6
Arab	1
Bangladeshi	5
Pakistani	1
Any other Asian background	2
African	3
White and Black African	1
Caribbean	1
Any other Black/African/Caribbean background	2
Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic background	1
Any other ethnic group (not yet stated)	2
Prefer not to say	2
Class (self-identified)	
Working class	17
Middle class	12
Upper class	1
Prefer not to say	3

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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