

Author conversations

On making economics accessible

David Laibson

Harvard University

I say it to my students, 'I'm not that interested about how you perform during the semester. What I really care about is how you use this for the next 50 years of your life. That's what I'm excited about.'

I think a lot of people struggle in the Principles of Economics course because there's gratuitous mathematics that have been inserted into the course. Now, I don't do that. Daron, John, and I don't do that. We're trying to focus on the basic intuition and on examples in which the core ideas play out. And we find that when you strip away the unnecessary mathematics, there's a very natural and easy approach to the ideas. So, I don't get a lot of students saying 'I'm confused,' because we've eliminated the unnecessary ingredients that I think form a barrier to the student beginning this new exploration intellectually.

Now, mathematics is important. And it does come, I think, later in the trajectory of a major. But I don't think it belongs in that first-year course. Even at Harvard.

www.pearson.com