

## **Outsource the Economists**

Outsourcing used to be for textile workers and call center employees. But no more, now even jobs further up the food chain, like computer programming and radiology, are under pressure from abroad. Perhaps we should consider outsourcing university economists. After all, according to most practitioners of the dismal science, domestic job losses are a small price to pay for higher productivity and lower prices.

The average salary for a post-secondary economics teacher in Rhode Island is \$102,000 yearly, number one in the country. In addition to wages, tenured university professors also enjoy handsome benefits including pensions and sabbaticals, not to mention goodies like faculty dining lounges and travel stipends. It's an expensive proposition keeping an economics department going.

An obvious cost cutting measure would be to export some economists' jobs to India. There is a ready pool of Indian Ph.D.s who could fill the shoes of the cashiered locals, and the price is certainly right. The average salary for an Associate Professor of Economics at the University of Delhi, one of India's top schools, is around \$15,000 yearly. The faculty there are no weaklings either, holding doctorates from places like Yale, Berkeley, and the London School of Economics.

A natural objection to this scheme is the decrease in student face time that would result were professors 10,000 miles away. This loss, however, would be less than one might think. Most senior faculty spend the bulk of their time on research and advising graduate students. These duties could be performed from Delhi or Mumbai, as US Ph.D. students could convene with their Indian advisors by means of video conference, instant messaging, and that old standby, the telephone.

At many US universities, lower division lecture courses are fobbed off on post-docs, adjuncts, and grad students. A wise department would keep at least some of these lowly paid part-time and contract folks on staff stateside to teach the masses. It might also make sense to retain a few tenured profs domestically - perhaps a department chair, and some names useful in attracting grant money. The bulk of tenured faculty could, however, be successfully outsourced and their job functions filled quite handsomely in Asia. The new arrangement would provide local universities with increased flexibility and lower payroll costs, and the money saved could be used for marketing, branding, and whatever else is needed to make Rhode Island's universities more competitive.

Tenured professors whose positions have been eliminated would find themselves freed up to labor in new ways. Perhaps they would return to their former full-time university employer on a limited basis, supplementing this with similar work for other schools, or with corporate or government gigs. Off shoring would also provide opportunity for Indian economists who would see their incomes rise as they took on US work.

Where might one expect opposition to this plan? Oh, from the usual sources: hidebound unions, and poor sports unwilling to transition to a more dynamic economic model. But perhaps I underestimate the economists; after all, such nay-saying should be expected only from those

unfamiliar with economic laws such as they have been laid down, or from workers with little confidence in the bonanza of the new global economy, and their own ability to succeed in it.

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