

2020

DAVID SCHENKER

Student Essay Competition

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS
University of Pittsburgh

Essay Instructions

Economists are often called upon to make analyses regarding the costs or benefits to society as a whole of proposed actions by economic agents (e.g. individuals, firms, or governments). The concept of social or public interest, as opposed to individual interest, is seldom sharp or well-defined. Individual notions of the social interest are determined by underlying values. For instance, physicians might view universal health care as a social necessity while economists might view the policy as socially inefficient and therefore undesirable.

The purpose of this essay is to undertake an **analysis of a particular United States policy issue, paying particular attention to how proposed solutions would impact society**. The prize will be awarded to the eligible student who writes the paper that best explores the issue and the way it illustrates different dimensions of the **concept of public interest**. Papers will be read by a committee of faculty and students. Emphasis will be placed on **originality of thought, including a clear statement of the student's own assessment of the issue**. The Department of Economics reserves the right to disqualify from the competition any paper that does not meet the requirements specified in these instructions; and further reserves the right not to provide the award should no paper be judged to have sufficient intellectual and stylistic quality.

The paper should:

1. Analyze a specific public policy issue concerning United States policy from the perspective of the public interest.
2. State what economic principles are used in the analysis and explanation of the issue and its possible solutions.
3. State what value judgments are relevant to evaluate this issue and possible solutions and how these values are used in the analysis and explanation.
4. Identify empirical evidence that does or could support or enlighten your analysis of this issue and possible solutions.
5. You may draw on published or unpublished research of others, but be sure to include your own assessment as well.

Deadline

All essays must be submitted by Monday, May 4th, 2020 to econadv@pitt.edu

Please email econadv@pitt.edu with questions.

Eligibility

Any undergraduate student at the University of Pittsburgh is eligible to compete for the David Schenker Student Prize.

\$2000
Prize

Paper Format

The essays should not exceed fifteen (15) pages of double spaced text in Arial size 12 font. The paper submission **must also include:**

1. **A separate title page with paper title, name, email address, Peoplesoft number, and address of student, and an abstract.** The purpose of the abstract is to convey to the reader in the simplest, most informative way what you did in the paper. For this essay competition your abstract should include a sentence or two on how you define the **public interest** (which will be fleshed out in your paper) and how the **economic analysis** in your paper relates to the **public interest**.
2. A separate bibliography or list of references at the end of the paper;
3. Diagrams can be included as part of the paper on separate pages without counting toward the page limit.
4. **A second copy of your paper without your name or any identifying information.**

The title page and bibliography pages **do not** count toward the fifteen page limit.

Examples

A list of sample subject areas and problems is given below (the list should not be considered exhaustive or exclusionary):

- **The economics of commodity taxes** (from taxes on specific items to general sales taxes or a value-added tax on all items): who gains from the taxation, who loses, and what is the aggregative outcome?
- **The economics of health care and insurance:** Which sector should supply health care services (public or private sector or both)? Who should pay for health care (individuals, employers, the public sector, private third party insurer)? Should we have a mixed system? If so, what would the nature and tent of the roles of the various participants?
- **The economics of transportation:** Should we have public or private road systems? What about airports and airlines; train stations and railroads; barge lines, locks and canals? Why? How should the financing of transportation modes be accomplished? To what extent and why should any of these industries be regulated?
- **The economics of tax-free finance:** Should the public sector provide for the tax-free finance of office buildings, airports, bus terminals, sports facilities, and general urban or rural development projects? Who are the gainers and who are the losers in such arrangements? Why? How?
- **The economics of welfare and/or workfare:** Who should receive welfare? What kinds of goods and services or forms of income should be included in welfare programs? Is workfare an ethical approach to assisting people in need? Is outright giving of aid always ethical or in the best interest of the recipients? What are the indirect or side effects of financing welfare through income taxes? Payroll taxes: Sales taxes? Lotteries?
- **The economics of legislative budgetary processes:** What are the economics incentives that operate in the Congressional (U.S.) Budgetary process? Does the congressional budgetary process promote economic efficiency? Equity? Why and how does it do either, both, or neither?