higher education, the extent to which this support should come from public or private sources, and the optimal level of efficiency and productivity in higher education. Johnstone even mentions—unfortunately all too briefly—an issue that this reviewer would put at the center of a contemporary discussion of the American education system:

“[T]he major remaining problem in higher education may not lie in excessive costs but in insufficient learning—a function of such features as redundant learning; aimless academic exploration; the unavailability of courses at the right time; excessive nonlearning time in the academic day, week, and year; insufficient use of self-paced learning; and insufficient realization of the potential of collegiate-level learning during the high school years.”

The remainder of the book is intended for the general public, yet there is much here to interest the economist. In addition to the wealth of information on past and current conditions on our campuses, American Higher Education tells us something about the attitudes of at least a segment of those intimately involved in collegiate decision-making. The fact that several of the authors in this volume have been university administrators, while others are members of university departments of higher education, provides a perspective that may be unfamiliar to the economist reader. An economist well trained in public choice theory will probably not be surprised, though, to find that a case for increased funding for higher education is a common thread running through many of these essays. The need for more funds is frequently defended as required to maintain or increase enrolments—to keep us on what Altbach calls “the path to universal higher education.” As an example, Zusman, discussing expected demographic changes in our population, is not deterred by a possible lack of English proficiency among an increasing proportion of young people, but instead argues that when “more non-native-English speakers enter college” this may mean “more support for English as a second language” at the college level.

The last two chapters are clearly defensive. John K. Wilson’s chapter on the “multicultural revolution” that has so roiled the academy is largely given over to a blistering rebuttal of critical studies of recent trends in higher education by the National Association of Scholars. (For an alternative viewpoint, the interested reader might want to consult the NAS’s quarterly, Academic Questions.)

The final chapter, “Race in Higher Education: The Continuing Crisis,” by Altbach, Kofi Lomotey and Shariba Rivers Kyle, is not well balanced. The authors criticize what they perceive as weak affirmative action policies in the Reagan, Bush, and even the Clinton administrations, and argue that “mean spirited” policies and statements emanating from Washington have contributed to a rash of racial incidents on campuses. On the other hand, the arguments of those who see negative effects of racial preferences on both black and white students are not considered.

Finally, my overall impression of the book is that is mistitled, since there is relatively little short-term forecasting and hardly any long-term predictions. (The very good chapter on technology and higher education by Gumport and Marc Chun is an exception here.) This lack may not diminish the intrinsic value of the book. The inaccuracy of most long-term predictions is notorious; moreover, these authors may have concluded that they lacked the forecasting background needed for such an ambitious endeavor. A different title would have been more informative, though, something like: “American Higher Education Facing the Twenty-first Century”.

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Teaching economics to undergraduates: Alternatives to chalk and talk

Although Economics of Education Review does not cover economic education (teaching economics), an exception may be made for this book, because someday a controlled study of the effectiveness of alternative teaching methods that are suggested in this volume may appear in the economics of education literature.

Several of the book’s chapters discuss alternatives to lectures (“chalk and talk”) such as group discussions or other cooperative learning, classroom experiments or simulations, writing assignments, etc. Other chapters suggest novel content, such as sports or literary examples, which could be used with any method of teaching, including lectures.

Experience with similar techniques prompts several observations. First, to work well, alternative methods take much preparation by both teacher and students, and students are not always ready to make the effort. In fact, when students see lectures as the norm, any deviation from that norm may not be taken seriously. On the other
Hand, I have found one alternative teaching method, the formal debate, to spur careful student preparation; lack of preparation invites instant rebuttal by the other team. My second observation is that the intended lessons often eluded at least some of the students, just as with lectures. Whether such exercises enhanced analytical thinking or deepened understanding remains an open question.

To its credit, this volume does not downplay high start-up costs for alternative techniques. Some of the contributing authors also discuss problems such as free riders in group-learning situations. Unfortunately, the suggested remedies for free riders seem likely to raise as many problems as they solve.

In this reviewer’s opinion, the most important chapter was W. Lee Hansen’s on integrating writing into economics. The idea is hardly unique, for writing is synonymous with learning in most disciplines. The chapter’s importance is that it points out the surprisingly small amount of writing in economics courses, even advanced courses, and suggests ways to remedy this perceived problem. For professors who question the value of long term papers, Hansen suggests numerous shorter writing assignments.

Articulating something in writing is often the best way to clarify an issue and expose a weak argument. In making a written case, one teaches oneself in ways that mere reading cannot possibly achieve, for writing is active while reading is passive. Even trying to rephrase someone else’s idea is likely to generate new thoughts. Writing an explanation is an important complement to problems and diagrams; a student who otherwise may simply be moving lines around or doing algebra, is forced to delve into the question of what is really going on.

Other chapters discussed resources that can be incorporated into economics courses, even conventional lecture courses. The chapter on use of the internet was very helpful. Lists of useful web sites alone made the chapter worthwhile. The chapter on the use of sports in economics provided a rich array of examples as did the chapter on the use of literature. However, this reader believes that using literature merely to illustrate economic concepts misses the best opportunities. For example, the book suggests eight pages of Dickens’ novel *Hard Times* that illustrate comparative advantage. This ignores the fact that Dickens’ entire novel is an attack on *homo economicus*, that self-centered being who substitutes cost-benefit calculations for the virtues of faith, hope, and love. Why not design a course on “Morals and Markets” to study the novel’s critique of the view of human nature inherent in the utility-maximizing model? Some of the work of Nobel winner Amartya Sen is devoted to just this issue.

This volume is exceptionally valuable. However, its suggestions ought not to be used uncritically. The professor considering any of the recommended techniques should choose selectively.