

AN ECONOMICS LESSON

*I Was Paid \$5,000 to
Teach a College Class.*

Who Got a Good Deal?

The decision

What I got

About \$5,000
+ what I got out of
teaching

vs.

What I gave up

Time, leave, and a few
costs that are easy to
overlook

A choice. Some alternatives. A few hidden costs. That's microeconomics.

Rounded estimates from memory, not records

Counting only classroom hours

15 weeks × 2 meetings × 1.5 hours = 45 hours

\$5,000 ÷ 45 hours ≈

\$111 an hour

Rounded estimates from memory, not records

The hours students don't see

Activity	Hours
Classroom teaching	45
Extra commuting	30
Preparation and office hours (overlapping, counted once)	30
Running total	105

Rounded estimates from memory, not records

Then the exams

Activity	Hours
Running total so far	105
Proctoring the final	3
Grading the midterm	5
Grading the final and course grades	6
One more trip to campus	1
Total	at least 120

Not counted: paperwork, copies, email

Rounded estimates from memory, not records

Counting the rest of the work

Classroom hours only

~~\$11~~

per hour

All counted hours: $\$5,000 \div 120$

\$41.67

per hour

Add small tasks, subtract Metro fares and parking: **roughly \$40 an hour**, before taxes.

Rounded estimates from memory, not records

A benchmark

\$150,000 a year ÷ 2,000 hours =

\$75 an hour

Teaching paid about \$40. Was that a bad deal?

Illustrative salary, not my actual pay

What else could I do with those evenings?

Other part-time work

Not for my regular employer: teaching was after work

Consulting

More pay, but can be less pleasant

Keep the evenings

Family. Dinner without rushing. Reading. Doing nothing.

OPPORTUNITY COST

The value of the best alternative you give up.

If paid work at about **\$75 an hour** was really available, I gave up money to teach. The rest of the deal mattered to me.

Beyond the paycheck

- Staying current with textbooks
- Practice explaining ideas clearly
- Seeing how students think: what they understood, what they questioned, where an explanation fell apart

None of it showed up on the paycheck. It still counted.

Costs that are easy to overlook

Vacation for the final

Leave not used for a trip or a day off. Unused leave is paid out if I leave the job.

Metro fares and parking

Small, but real. How much weight do they deserve?

At the time, I thought the arrangement was worth it.

PART TWO

The university's side

Illustrative assumptions — not the university's actual figures

Tuition allocated to one class

Suppose tuition is \$60,000 a year.

Courses a year	Per course	× 20 students
8 (four a semester)	\$7,500	\$150,000
10 (five a semester)	\$6,000	\$120,000

Illustrative assumptions — not the university's actual figures

Allocated tuition is not actual revenue.

We divided annual tuition across courses. That doesn't show what the university actually received from this class.

The companion page explains the difference.

Illustrative assumptions — not the university's actual figures

What's left after two costs

Item	Amount
Allocated tuition	\$120,000 to \$150,000
Teaching payment	-\$5,000
Classroom allowance (assumed)	-\$5,000
Remaining before other costs	\$110,000 to \$140,000

Illustrative assumptions — not the university's actual figures

Is that profit?

No. The university has other costs.

Libraries · Technology · Student services · Administration ·
Maintenance

Illustrative assumptions — not the university's actual figures

Less than 5%

My pay as a share of the illustrative tuition figure

That gap is where the questions begin.

Illustrative assumptions — not the university's actual figures

For comparison: an assistant professor

\$120,000 salary ÷ 4 courses =

\$30,000 per course

Whole salary ÷ teaching load

- The salary also covers research, advising, and other duties
- It leaves out benefits

Illustrative assumptions — not the university's actual figures

Why would anyone take \$5,000?

My impression: DC had plenty of educated people interested in teaching part time. I was one of them.

Personal impression, not a verified finding

A voluntary deal can benefit both sides. That doesn't tell us how the wage was set.

What are students paying for?

Instruction

Resources

A path through a degree

The credential

Reputation

Community

The people they meet

What are those worth? To whom? What do they cost to provide?

A list of costs doesn't set the price

Students'
alternatives

Competition
among schools

What students
are willing and
able to pay

One subtraction doesn't explain the price of college. It shows where to start digging.

YOUR TURN

What did I leave out?

Don't just name it. Estimate it. How much does it change the answer?

The TA offer

Offer A: \$2,000 a semester

One-hour review session + one office hour each week. Room at the edge of campus.

Offer B: \$20 an hour

Same job?

Count the work I didn't mention: Prepare? Sit through my lectures? Travel time? Midnight email?

Which offer is better? What would you need to ask me first?

What is this course worth to the students taking it?

What is the degree worth?

Related questions, with different answers.

Worth it compared with what?

Before you decide

1. Write down your assumptions.
2. Do the math.
3. Identify what you still need to know.

Full math, definitions, and AI tutor prompts

Companion materials: [link in the description](#)

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Who Got a Good Deal?

Vincent Maistre

Companion page: [link in the video description](#)