

Augusta State University Literacy Center

The Economics of Tutoring

Civic Duty Volunteering Experience

Most of us would agree that we are currently in one of the longest economic recessions in American history, and no one knows if and when we will see the economy recover to its former boom. As more employers slash their workforce and unemployment numbers rise to double digits, more individuals turn their eyes toward continuing education as a way to prepare themselves for future job markets. While some individuals find the transition back into the classroom fairly easy, many others who have not set foot in a classroom for years require some assistance with the sometimes vigorous learning curves of today's public and higher education institutions. Working with the Augusta State University's Literacy center as a volunteer tutor enabled me to gain a small perspective of how the demand for free tutoring services has fluctuated not only due to large economic cycles but also due to seasonal demands within the educational institutions.

Over many years I have tutored students ranging from elementary school students to adults in college, and I have seen how the economic cycles have affected the demand for my services. My experience and conversations with students and other individuals at the ASU Literacy center was very much the same. Although there were no distinct fluctuations due to economic recessions amongst the younger students in public schools, many adults in continuing education programs and other college students seem to increase their demand for tutors during recessions. It is my guess that adults are willing to invest more in their education to improve their chances in the job markets during recessions. In the area of private tutors, the cost of tutoring sessions also increases as demand increases. However, this rise in tutoring fees also increases demand for free tutoring services, such as those provided by the ASU Literacy center. During economic

booms, demand for paid tutoring services decreases as does demand for free tutoring. However, the downward shift in demand for free tutoring services is less dramatic than for paid services. This may be due to the greater utilization of free services instead of paid tutoring. In both cases, I have seen little to no change in demand for younger students in grade school.

Economic cycles are not the only factors that change demand for tutors. The facilitator of the ASU Literacy center indicated that summertime supply for tutors sharply increases and demand decreases. This is due to most students leaving classes for summer break, which reduces the demand. However, particularly at ASU's facility, a certain education course offered during summer semesters requires students to participate as tutors. This combination of increased supply and decreased demand results in as many as a dozen tutors sitting around waiting to assist only a handful of students during the summer sessions. When the seasons change and many students return to class during the fall and spring semesters, demand for tutors jumps tremendously. On the same token, supply for tutors diminishes as those tutors return to class themselves. This leads to some students having to wait in line or some tutors assisting multiple students simultaneously at the free facilities such as the ASU Literacy center. The increase in demand is also reflected in the paid tutoring services for students of all ages.

My normative analysis is that everyone should invest heavily in their education, whether it is furthering and continuing education or simply staying in school. My opinion is that society cannot efficiently grow and prosper without a strong foundation of quality education. Therefore, quality tutors should always be in high demand. However, my positive analysis of tutoring services shows that both the supply and demand of tutors

are subject to fluctuation both seasonally and through economic cycles. Regardless of such fluctuations, because the demand for tutoring services never seems to reach zero for long, institutions that provide free tutoring services such as the ASU Literacy center will continue to be welcomed by the community for many generations to come.