Because economic geography is viewed as a field with too many different aspects for one person to master, teaching an introductory course in the subject poses the challenge of selecting an organizing theme. One specific approach, organized around higher level generalizations and theories, is the use of location theory. Coupling location theory with the trend toward problem solving can result in the theme of the locational analysis of welfare economics. Welfare economics, which is the evaluating and ranking of economic alternatives open to society, is a topic in need of research but available to classroom consideration in part because of its interest to students. Examples of use of this theme range from the simple question of where ice cream vendors should stand on the beach for the greatest benefit to their customers to the location of a factory for the greatest benefit to the immediate population and to society as a whole. In the footnotes economic geography texts and materials, some of which use the locational theory approach, are cited. (JH)
INTRODUCTORY ECONOMIC GEOGRAPHY: PROBLEM-SOLVING OR A TEACHING PROBLEM?

James O. Wheeler*

University of Georgia

Economic geography has long occupied a prominent position within the discipline of geography. In the classic James and Jones volume, American Geography: Inventory and Prospect, published twenty years ago, six of the twenty-one chapters dealing with the sub-disciplines of geography treat the field of economic geography. 1 More recently, the basic position of economic geography in the undergraduate major program in college geography has been documented by the Hart report, entitled Undergraduate Major Programs in American Geography. 2 The annual Schwendeman directory demonstrates the continuing large enrollments in introductory courses in economic geography. 3 Textbook publishers have recognized the sizable market in economic geography by the publication of nearly thirty college textbooks in this field since 1960. 4 In Introductory Geography: Viewpoints and Themes, three chapters, or almost forty-five percent of the total pages, deal directly with the topic of economic geography, and if one were to include Kohn's related discussion of the work of the "Iowa School," an even larger share would be devoted to this field. 5 In short, the importance of economic geography in the undergraduate curriculum is undisputed and everywhere recognized.

The challenge is therefore obvious to all who teach introductory economic geography: How does one select an organizing theme and structure a course around it? The approach followed in James and Jones has not

*Dr. Wheeler is Professor of Geography, University of Georgia, Athens.
proven helpful. Economic geography was viewed as "a group of fields" involving "so many different aspects . . . and so many different procedures in the analysis of the different aspects that no one person could become equally competent in all of them." These groups of fields share in common only that they each deal with the way people make a living in different places. Distinct literature developed in such daughter fields as manufacturing, transportation, agricultural, resource, marketing, and recreational geography. As a result, classes in introductory economic geography attempted to survey each of these fields, usually with emphasis on covering the most important types of economic activities around the world, such as major industries, significant agricultural crops, and leading mineral products. Textbooks followed, or lead as the case may be, much the same approach.

In 1967 Robert McNee, in his famous "hevea braziliensis" paper, called for an end to the endless detail so commonly cluttering introductory geography courses. Rather than courses designed to survey mountainous facts, he suggested teaching the conceptional structure of the discipline and illustrated this conceptional structure for the production system of economic geography. In this way, the considerable gap between the research frontiers in economic geography and the introductory economic geography course may be meaningfully reduced. Likewise, Edward Taaffe, also writing in 1967, argued against the teaching of massive detail and against the mystical goal of complete coverage in introductory economic geography courses. Instead of teaching a compendium of unrelated material following the commodity by commodity, occupation by occupation, or region by region approach, Taaffe forcefully articulated the pedagogic advantages of developing a course around higher level generalizations and theories, specifically
location theory, as illustrated, for example, in the report entitled The Science of Geography.9

By utilizing location theory as a central theme, one could present locational generalizations and spatial concepts which could be applied to a wide variety of specific spatial patterns. It is not the patterns so much that need to be memorized, as with the world distribution of mica or zinc, as it is the ideas and concepts which need to be absorbed as a basis for application to particular kinds of economic activities. We may then organize the field, after Haggett, around the locational concepts expressed as nodal, linear, surface, and hierarchial patterns and processes, rather than the traditional subject matter divisions.10 Such a change in emphasis has been reflected in some, though not all, recently published textbooks in economic geography, the most notable example being the book by Lloyd and Dicken, Location in Space: A Theoretical Approach to Economic Geography.11

Recent Changes

With the recent focus in geography on the human condition and contemporary social issues, the field of economic geography finds itself undergoing further change. Related to this altered focus is the greater concern with behavioral dimensions of spatial patterns and processes, as emphasized by the Hurst text, A Geography of Economic Behavior.12 These recent changes in the field have led to critical re-evaluations of approaches to economic geography, perhaps most alarmingly expressed by Tietze in an editorial in Geoforum: 'We stand before a methodological vacuum in research on the quality of life in economic geography.'13 Also to the point, Bell, in his attempt at social forecasting, contends that today "the two major axes of stratification in Western society are property and knowledge. Alongside them is a political system that increasingly
manages the two." Economic geography has long emphasized the property component of the economy, commonly viewing property in terms of production units. The concern with the economic aspects of knowledge in a spatial framework has been largely ignored, as has, for the most part, the impact of political systems on economic activity.

A perspective on this issue is provided by Chisholm in his review article in Progress in Geography. To summarize, Chisholm observed that location theory, as the core of economic geography, has focused on the firm and is thus related to micro-economics. Such location theory has tended to be normative, and there has been increased reaction against unrealistic elements associated with theories of the location of firms. Chisholm then asked "whether the micro-economics of the firm is an appropriate point from which to start looking for a normative location theory?" As an alternative, he turned to welfare economics as having relevance for location theory. Although the field of welfare economics provides little for direct transfer and would lead to macro-location theory (implying a regional or national level of economic analysis), the theory would be from "a planner's view of society and not the view of individual actors in that society."

An Approach To The Problem

With the increased emphasis in research in recent years on societal problems in all of the social and behavioral sciences, the possibility of developing locational analysis along the welfare economics approach in economic geography provides considerable challenge. While basically the success or failure in developing welfare locational theory depends on research by economic geographers over the next several years, the possibilities for classroom introduction of locational concepts from welfare
economics can be selectively and partially achieved at present. As indicated, the welfare approach is consistent with a problem-solving method of learning, since the fundamental issue addressed, in the normative sense, is where will economic activity locate to produce the greatest good for the society? This is a problem which, if properly introduced, will have interest and relevance for all students. Furthermore, delving into the realm of welfare location theory is not incompatible with treatment of traditional micro-location theory and may be in fact taught as an extension of the latter. Although spatial elements of welfare may be integrated with all topics covered in a course in economic geography, an immediately obvious place for such treatment is the material on regional and urban planning, so commonly tagged onto the end of the course and lacking continuity with what has gone before.

Theoretical welfare economics is that branch of economics which evaluates and ranks economic alternatives open to society. From an economic geography point of view, the concern is with evaluating alternative locational distributions of economic activity. The introduction of the spatial dimension adds formidable difficulties, since alternative economic spatial systems will have, geographically, quite uneven, and at present largely unknown, impacts on society. The processes of the distribution of welfare in society are far from perfectly understood from a strictly economic point of view, to say nothing of the contribution from economic geography. The remainder of this paper cites some examples from welfare locational analysis for classroom use.

We may start with the rather well-known problem of the ice-cream vendor on a beach, with the assumptions of a bounded linear market, evenly spaced purchasers, with consumer minimization of distance traveled to buy
ice-cream. Under free market competition, two ice-cream vendors would agglomerate at the center of the beach, each serving the consumers on either side. Under a social welfare solution, however, the two sellers would locate an equal distance apart such as, once again, to serve exactly one-half the market. This second solution provides social welfare to the consumers who do not, on the average, have to travel as far to buy ice-cream as under the market competitive system. Thus we have a simple example, already familiar to economic geography instructors, to illustrate an elementary social welfare locational strategy.

At a somewhat higher level of sophistication the student may be introduced to land rent and market area analysis, both from a social welfare perspective. These are adequately discussed by Chisholm. Land rent, a consequence of locational patterns of output for goods and services, may be examined among alternative locational patterns. For classroom purposes, generalized maps of land rent under clustered versus dispersed production patterns may be evaluated. Market area analysis under different pricing systems may be approached from the view of consumer benefits, leading to different kinds of optimal location than from the perspective of the firm.

On the topic of industrial location, discussion would center on the location of manufacturing units, not from the firm's maximum profit assumptions, but from the maximum social welfare theme. Minimizing locational costs reflects an efficient use of resources and is consistent with the social welfare approach. In addition, however, long-run considerations must be introduced. For example, agglomeration economies, efficient from a firm's point of view, may reduce the quality of living over a sizable area by the resulting high density of population. Industrial consumption
of a particular material may minimize a firm's short-term costs but raise the long-range social costs. The geographical distribution of U. S. defense contracts exerts a significant impact on the various regional economies of the country, and yet the award of these contracts is not based on this economic impact. The issue is most critical from a welfare location position.

Transportation reflects another topic which may be considered from a social welfare outlook. The distribution of welfare among the population is related to the availability and quality of transportation services. If availability of opportunity were a primary social objective, both the location of these opportunities and access to them would take on a particular pattern. In many states, a basic welfare criterion, or at least a political expenditure, has been to establish some maximum distance that a member of the population is located away from an institution of higher learning. The geometric layout of routes may take on high areal density or reflect heavy utilization of a few routes. Each alternative has different welfare outcomes.

Finally, the spatial pattern and processes of the metropolis, the foci of so much economic activity, may be studied from alternative locational strategies open to society. This immensely important topic thrusts economic geography squarely into the realm of planning and public policy discussions. The factors behind a firm's locational decision in an urban area may be optimal for the firm but induce costs to society in general, since the locational decision of one establishment widely influences other locations throughout the metropolitan system. Muller analyzes in detail some of the human consequences of metropolitan economic geography.20
Conclusions

Although locational analysis of welfare economics has not progressed very far at present, a definite trend appears to be in this direction for future research in economic geography, even though it has not been explicitly recognized as such by most geographers. To avoid the long time lag between research findings and textbook publication, it is here suggested that instructors introduce elements of welfare locational problems into their economic geography courses, even in the face of the current paucity of geographic research around this theme. Much of the material presented would of necessity be in part at a speculative level but could be framed into a problem-solving approach, testing the ingenuity of the instructor as well as the creative thinking of the students. The approach to introductory economic geography suggested here retains the theoretical perspective of the past fifteen years, extending its base to encompass alternative locational strategies, rather than reviving in new garb the dormant anti-theoretical and anti-quantitative views of the past, as certain recent writers would advocate. Surely the economic geography of the human condition, following welfare locational analysis, demands a theoretical foundation on which meaningful problem-solving may be built. The alternative is all too likely to be the teaching problem typically confronting the economic geography instructor today.
FOOTNOTES


3. Joseph R. Schwendeman, Sr., and Joseph R. Schwendeman, Jr., Directory of College Geography of the United States (Richmond, Kentucky: Eastern Kentucky University, annual).


7. Robert B. McNee, "Toward Stressing Structure in Geographic Instruction or Good-by to Hevea Braziliensis and All That," Introductory Geography: Viewpoints and Themes, op. cit., pp. 31-44.


15. Michael Chisholm, "In Search of a Basis for Location Theory: Microeconomics or Welfare Economics?" in Christopher Board, et al.,


