**Economics as a Discourse Community**

**What is a Discourse Community?** A discourse community is loosely defined as a community with a shared set of values about information, sharing this information, shared knowledge, topics of knowledge, and conventions of communication. Just defining a discourse community as this works but is a little too broad and doesn’t give a full sense of what a discourse community really is. Discourse means “written or spoken communication” and community “becomes little more than a metaphor for...” (Harris 584) “a group of people who link in order to pursue objectives...and whose linguistic behaviors are functional”

**Guidelines You could follow.** Swales gives in his essay 6 characteristics of a discourse community that you could use to see if a community/group would qualify as a discourse community.

1. A discourse community has a broadly agreed set of common public goals.
2. A discourse community has mechanisms of intercommunication among its members.
3. A discourse community uses its participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback.
4. A discourse community utilizes and hence possesses one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims.
5. In addition to owning genres, a discourse community has acquired some specific lexis.
6. A discourse community has a threshold of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discoursal expertise.

**Where does Economics Fit In?**

So how does economics fit into these characteristics and make its way into being defined as a discourse community?

A discourse community has a broadly agreed set of common public goals.

Before the Great Depression and WWII economics was relatively quiet in America because there wasn’t much need for the study of economics. The popular belief back then was more of a “liassez faire” based economy which means that there wasn’t many if any government interference with the private economy. Over time economics has grew two branches which are microeconomics and macroeconomics. Microeconomics and its prefix suggests studies the smaller parts of economics (from the bottom up) like the individual persons and businesses. Macroeconomics like it’s prefix suggests studies the economy as a whole (from the top down) like in a community, state, or most often national. Although these are two different types of economics they overlap and are highly complementary to each other. These are shared common goals among economists although some argue on the amount of interference from the government as debated above.
A discourse community has mechanisms of intercommunication among its members.

Donald McCloskey, an economic historian and economist, says economists have two attitudes towards their discourse which are "official and unofficial". By this he means that in the official way economists view their discourse as related to the scientific method. They investigate theories by using these four steps. 1. Identify the Question-example price of cars and quantity of cars demanded. 2. Specify assumptions- A. Other things constant assumptions. B. Behavioral assumption-assume how people behave. 3. Form a Hypothesis- Price goes up, quantity demanded goes down. And 4. Test Hypothesis. McCloskey says that how they really act, the “unofficial” way. They take the scientific methodology but they throw inaccuracies in their formulas, results, and advice, due to past experiences, and politics. Whether they use the official or unofficial way the expression “That sounds good in theory but it doesn’t work in practice” plays a large role in economics because there’s truth to that statement.

A discourse community uses its participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback.

Economists communicate in a sociorhetorical way that is highly quantitative in that economist’s research questions, use hypothesize models to test the validity and argue about their findings. They communicate their findings through statistics, models, charts, graphs, tables, in journals and reports. Math and understanding it is important in economic discourse because of all the numbers they work with computing the consumer price index (CPI), consumer surplus, inflation, and interest rates.

A discourse community utilizes and hence possesses one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims.

Different genres in economic writing include empirical papers, and theoretical papers. Empirical papers tests a theory to see how well it represents reality. “The models that are tested are usually adaptations of models constructed by other researchers. In other words, when an economist conducts an empirical study, he or she normally does not construct the model from scratch.” Paul Dudenhefer an economics tutor at Duke said. Empirical papers are usually divided into these sections; introduction, data, model, estimation technique or methodology, findings, and conclusion. Theoretical papers are made of models that are “extensively developed, one that is internally logically consistent. Much like proofs in geometry, the conclusions of models in theoretical papers are ‘proved.’” (Paul Dudenhefer)

In addition to owning genres, a discourse community has acquired some specific lexis (or terminology).
Economics goal is to help a broad group of people but while explaining some of their research, findings, and during debates sometimes it might seem like they are speaking a foreign tongue. Economics has actually termed more than 200 words over its history with words like; scarcity, rational thinking people, externalities, inflation, business cycle, expansions, contractions, circular flow diagrams, production possibility frontiers, and absolute vs. comparative advantage, it’s explainable why you seem confused when listening to economics. But once you understand the terminology of economics it becomes easier to understand and communicate.

A discourse community has a threshold of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discoursal expertise.

To become an economist doesn’t happen overnight although some might wish that were true. To become an entry level economist and a novice, or beginner, you need at least a bachelor degree in economics or a closely related field. Just like most jobs are in economics you usually start off in a lower level position because you aren’t familiar with the tricks of the trade and language. As time goes on and you begin to build experience in economics and its discourse can then you begin to call yourself an “insider”. Insiders are the ones that head major companies, are hired by public and private firms and companies to advise them, or become a professor and teach economics.

**Summary**

With effectively understanding economic discourse given the six characteristics given by Harris and Swales one can understand the goals of economists and how they try to efficiently meet these goals given the vast area affected by the outcomes. If you have paid any attention to the current political issues or even paid attention your wallet the past few years you see how important, in today’s society, the health of our economy is. Because of this economists play the roles of villains, hero’s, scientists, and even doctors to our everyday lives, so understanding the communication of this “community” is vital to economists.