

Dr. Richard McKenzie
University of California Irvine
By Ali Mohareri

During my MBA program at UC Irvine, my Economics Professor, Dr. Richard McKenzie, was very influential in helping me develop into the college business teacher that I am today. Dr. McKenzie, who has since retired from teaching, had some unconventional teaching methods which allowed students like myself to gain a deeper insight into the subject matter we studied in his course.

Dr. McKenzie also had a special habit of starting each of his days with an early visit to the same local Starbucks, where he read a couple of business newspapers like the Wall Street Journal and the Los Angeles Times. This practice allowed Dr. McKenzie to always offer students fresh, practical, real life business stories that tied directly to the course material and concepts.

In his microeconomics course, Dr. McKenzie offered students the opportunity to write research papers on some fascinating topics. A couple of his more memorable assigned topics were "Why does popcorn cost so much at movie theaters?" and "Why isn't the government stimulus plan working?" While responses to these topics at first glance appear somewhat self-evident, Dr. McKenzie taught us to think beyond the conventional wisdom and address these topics with unconventional methods of thinking.

So for example, conventional thinking would say that popcorn costs a lot at movie theaters because their owners know that guests have no other options for food besides snack bar offerings, thus they can charge a ridiculously high price. However, the reality is that the movie studios charge theater owners a lot of money for the rights to show their movies. In order to make enough profit to keep the doors open, the theater owners in return must charge a lot for their food to offset the high cost of movie acquisitions.

Since graduating from UC Irvine and Dr. McKenzie's course, I have emulated many of his practices like reading the daily business papers and discussing their stories with my students. In addition, I am providing my students some challenging research topics to write about while teaching them to think unconventionally about their solutions to the topics. The combination of these teaching methods has created a very engaged and interactive class for my students. And as a result, I see my students having a far more productive college classroom experience than they would under traditional methods of teaching.