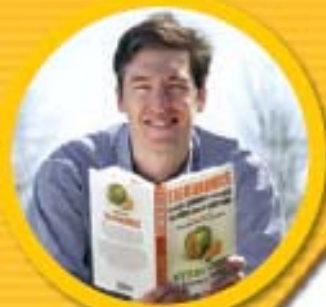


## People and Perspectives

ECONOMIST  
(1967– )



### Steven Levitt

#### • Rogue Economist

- Professor of Economics, University of Chicago
- Editor, *Journal of Political Economy*, and Associate Editor, *Quarterly Journal of Economics*
- Author of dozens of articles in scholarly journals

Economics is sometimes called “the dismal science,” but it becomes anything but dismal when filtered through the mind of University of Chicago professor Steven Levitt. The topics that this Harvard-educated economist writes about include teachers who fix test results, sumo wrestlers who throw matches, and drug dealers who live with their mothers. In the process he has become a lightning rod for controversy.

In Levitt’s view, economics is a science with excellent tools for gaining answers but a serious shortage of interesting questions. His particular gift is the ability to ask such questions. When asked why he investigates such problems as cheating sumo wrestlers, he replied, “Because it’s fun. The kind of problems I like are problems which look hard but are easy. Finding cheaters often has that characteristic.”

A popular approach to his research was published in 2005 in a book entitled *Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything*, which Levitt cowrote with Stephen J. Dubner. The book refers to

Levitt as a “rogue” economist, meaning he tackles economic issues in an unconventional way. As he explains,

“When the book calls me a rogue, we mean it in the ‘mischievously playful’ sense. . . . The rogue I have in mind is someone who strays from the subjects deemed appropriate for an economist, fails to treat economics with the necessary sense of seriousness. . . .”

#### Checking for Understanding

1. **Explaining** According to Levitt, what is the main problem with studying economics?
2. **Analyzing** What is meant by the term “rogue economist,” and why does Levitt consider himself one?