

Fiscal Ship Classroom Guidelines

Students aren't always as excited about the federal budget as we are here at the Hutchins Center on Fiscal and Monetary Policy—and that's part of the reason that we built The Fiscal Ship. The game can be a great way to engage students and teach them about fiscal sustainability and the inherent tradeoffs that policymakers face.

Based on advice from some who have used the game in the classroom, we've developed a set of general guidelines for using the game in a classroom setting. Before using it in class, we suggest first playing the game yourself to get a feel for the mechanics, and also suggest taking a look at our [frequently asked questions](#) page to get a better understanding of how our game works and to be able to field common questions from students. Here are some guidelines that have worked:

1. Begin with a general overview of how the game works. This would include selecting governing goals, pointing out the debt target, explaining that some policies will work towards your goals and some will work against, point out the pro and con arguments, and do a quick run through of the game to demonstrate. Some have also found it useful to provide students with a printout (see next page) of all categories and policies in order to familiarize themselves with the options. There's also a short how-to video link [here](#).
2. Divide students into teams and assign them a set of governing goals to pursue while also reaching the debt target. We suggest the following goal combinations for teams:
 - a. The "centrists"
 - i. Strengthen national defense
 - ii. Invest in the future
 - iii. Rein in entitlements
 - b. The "conservatives"
 - i. Rein in entitlements
 - ii. Shrink government
 - iii. Tax cutter
 - c. The "progressives"
 - i. Reduce inequality
 - ii. Invest in the future
 - iii. Strengthen the social safety net
3. After 15-20 minutes of gameplay (or longer, if time permits) follow up with a few questions to stimulate a classroom discussion. A few examples:
 - a. How did the policy choices differ among the three teams?
 - b. How difficult was it to pursue your goals while also hitting the debt target?
 - c. Did the policy options have the impacts—either on your fiscal target or governing goals—that you expected? Did some choices have bigger or smaller impacts on the debt than you had anticipated?
 - d. What do you think the political obstacles would be to enacting your plan?
 - e. What do you think would be the impact on the American middle class of the choices you made?

POLICY OPTIONS ON THE FISCAL SHIP



ARTS & SCIENCES

- Boost National Science Foundation funding
- Cut National Institutes of Health funding
- Cut National Science Foundation funding
- End human space exploration
- Increase funding for arts and humanities
- Increase NASA budget
- Increase National Institutes of Health budget
- Reduce funding for arts and humanities

CHILDREN & FAMILIES

- Block grant and cut food stamps
- Expand Earned Income Tax Credit
- Expand housing aid for poor
- Expand the child tax credit
- Increase childcare subsidies
- Paid family leave
- Preschool for four-year-olds
- Tighten eligibility for food stamps

CORPORATE TAXES

- Cut corporate tax rate, close some loopholes
- Increase corporate tax rate
- Reduce taxes on international profits
- Set minimum tax on foreign profits

FOOD & AGRICULTURE

- Block grant and cut food stamps
- Double FDA funding
- Reduce farm subsidies
- Tax sugary drinks
- Tighten eligibility for food stamps

DEFENSE & FOREIGN AFFAIRS

- Build fewer submarines
- Cancel new aircraft carrier construction
- Cut active duty Army by half
- Cut foreign aid
- Expand U.S. Navy fleet
- Increase active duty Army
- Increase defense R&D spending
- Increase foreign aid
- Kill F-35 Joint Strike Fighter

EDUCATION

- Eliminate student loan subsidies
- Eliminate the Department of Education
- Free tuition at public colleges
- Limit Pell grants to neediest students
- Preschool for four-year-olds
- Slash interest rates on existing student debt
- Two years of community college tuition-free

ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

- Double the EPA's budget
- Eliminate renewable fuel subsidies
- Eliminate the EPA
- End tax breaks for fossil fuels
- Extend renewable energy tax credits
- Impose a carbon tax
- Increase the gas tax

TAXES ON INVESTMENTS

- Cut taxes on investment income
- End tax on capital gains, interest, dividends
- Impose new tax on financial transactions
- Increase tax on capital gains and dividends
- Tax carried interest as ordinary income

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MORE POLICIES**



POLICY OPTIONS ON THE FISCAL SHIP

HEALTH

Boost access to generic drugs
Boost Medicare Advantage competition
Bundle Medicare payments for post-acute care
Cap Medicaid payments to states
Cap Medicare spending
Convert Medicare to "premium support"
Cut National Institutes of Health funding
Increase Medicare premiums
Increase National Institutes of Health budget
Increase taxes on cigarettes
Means test Medicare
Raise Medicare eligibility age
Raise Medicare out-of-pocket costs
Reduce what Medicare pays for drugs
Reform malpractice laws
Repeal Cadillac tax on costly health plans
Repeal Obamacare's insurance expansions
Use income taxes to fund Medicare

INCOME & PAYROLL TAXES

Reduce income tax rates, consolidate brackets
Boost taxes on the super rich
Eliminate cap on wages subject to payroll tax
Implement a 15% flat income tax
Increase all income tax rates
Increase Medicare payroll tax
Increase Social Security payroll tax

Lower the inflation adjustment for taxes

Raise taxes on \$150,000+ folks

Raise taxes only on \$400,000+ folks

Use income taxes to fund Medicare

Use income taxes to fund Social Security

INFRASTRUCTURE & TRANSPORTATION

Cut infrastructure spending
Double subsidies for Amtrak
Eliminate funding for Amtrak
Increase infrastructure spending

LABOR & EMPLOYMENT

Expand unemployment benefits
Reduce federal employees' pensions
Reduce federal employment through attrition
Slow increases in government pay

LAW & ORDER

Cut spending on law enforcement
Enact immigration reform
Increase Homeland Security spending
Reduce Homeland Security spending
Spend more on law enforcement

OTHER TAXES

Eliminate the estate tax
Extend renewable energy tax credits
Impose a carbon tax
Impose a value-added tax
Increase taxes on cigarettes
Increase the estate tax
Increase the gas tax
Repeal Cadillac tax on costly health plans
Tax sugary drinks

SOCIAL SECURITY

Boost low-wage workers' Social Security
Boost Social Security benefits for very old
Cut Social Security COLA
Increase Social Security eligibility age
Lower the COLA for all spending programs
Reduce Social Security benefits
Use income taxes to fund Social Security

TAX CREDITS & DEDUCTIONS

End tax breaks for fossil fuels
Convert mortgage interest deduction to credit
Curtail charitable deduction
Eliminate renewable fuel subsidies
Eliminate state and local tax deductions
Expand Earned Income Tax Credit
Expand the child tax credit
Raise the standard deduction