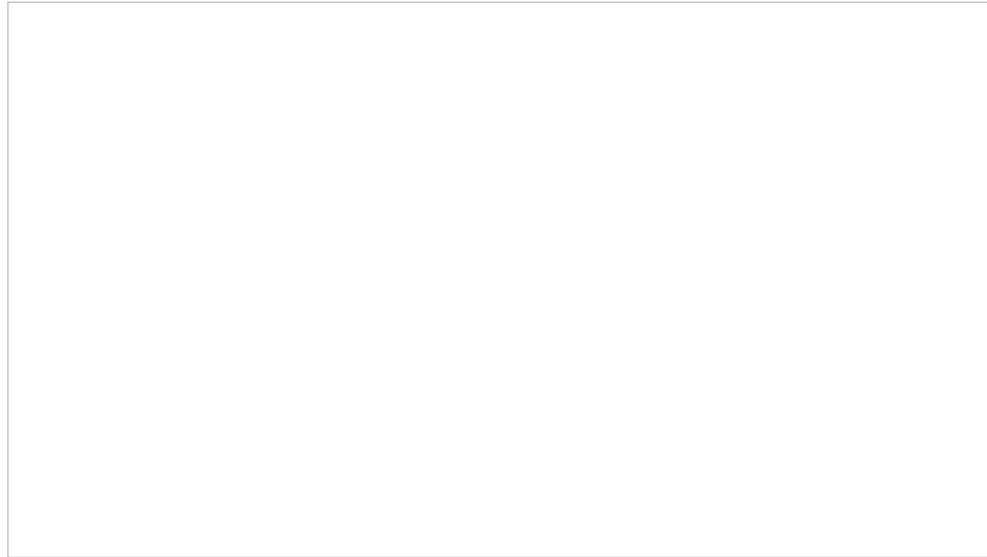


# Professor Steve Keen Lost \$75k of His Research Funding: Here's How He Got it Back

June 20, 2018 **Olivia Seitz**



*Creator Profiles are a new avenue for creators to highlight learnings and accomplishments in the Patreon creator community. Here, you'll read stories and business insights in the words of the creators themselves.*

*Today's article features [Professor Steve Keen](#). He's an "anti-economist" creating "realistic economics for the post-crash world." This article dives into how he built an impressive \$6,000+ Patreon page in only one year.*

Creator Stats at a Glance			
Category	Public intellectual/Anti-Economist	Commitment	75% of my time
Project Start Date	December 2005	Patreon Start Date	March 8, 2017
Revenue on Patreon	6800/month	Other Revenue	3000/month
# Patrons at Launch	290	# Patrons Now	930
Audience at Launch	Twitter: 40,000	Audience Now	51,000
Major Milestone	Growing to \$6,000+/mo on Patreon in one year.		

## Who I Am & What I Do

My name is Professor Steve Keen. I'm still a Professor of Economics at Kingston University London (but on ¼ pay), and I have been an academic since 1987. Before that, I was a school teacher, a computer programmer, computer journalist, conference organizer, and an education officer for an overseas aid organization.

Accepted economic theory abounds with logical and empirical fallacies, which is the major reason that mainstream economists didn't anticipate the 2008 financial crisis, and why Europe is such a mess under the Euro. **I'm pointing out the fallacies in mainstream economics and building a realistic alternative, both in terms of theory and of effective policies to avoid financial crises.**

The dominant theory of economics (Neoclassical Economics) is as misleading a description of a market economy as Ptolemy's model was of the Solar System. Like Ptolemy's model, it can give accurate predictions sometimes, but is completely wrong about how the economy actually functions. It seems convincing because it's neat and plausible, but it leaves out crucial aspects of capitalism such as banks, debt, and money. It pretends that the economy is either in or tending towards a state of equilibrium, when in reality it's careening from one disequilibrium state to another.

It's a large part of why the world is so f'ed up at the moment, because we've been following economic ideas which are superficially plausible, but seriously damaging to the health of our economies and the planet's ecosystems.

It's been my life's campaign to replace this fantasy model with a realistic, complex-systems approach to economics. I've been doing this since I was an undergraduate student at Sydney University in the early 1970s, though I didn't become an academic myself until 1987.

An image of Prof. Steve Keen speaking on Bloomberg earlier in 2018.

Universities should enable the development of new thought, but in economics, they act to preserve the mainstream approach since mainstream economists dominate the major universities and only hire people who think like they do.

Universities have also been turned into bullshit job factories (to use David Graeber's term) by politicians and bureaucrats in the last 30 years. Funding for non-mainstream economics is also virtually non-existent because the gatekeepers who decide who gets funded are almost all Neoclassical (mainstream) economists.

**So, I've turned to the public to get the funding I need to keep developing realistic economics.** Patreon is enabling me to continue campaigning for the reform of economics, and to earn a living at the same time. Without it, I would have to return to Australia (where I can access my retirement savings) and do this as a hobby, rather than pursue it as the lifetime passion it is.

I was going to launch a Patreon campaign to raise development funds for my Open Source system dynamics program, Minsky, but a UK government policy change slashed funding for low-ranked universities like Kingston, and **I was given the option of either teaching four times as much or going on 1/4 salary.** I took the latter option and converted my draft Patreon project from supporting [Minsky](#) to (at least initially) supporting myself.

The Patreon is mainly just run by me, but I also work with a superb radio journalist [Phil Dobbie](#). Phil comes up with topics for two podcasts a week with me, which my \$10/mo+ Patrons get. Phil receives 10% of my Patreon revenues in return. In addition, [Minsky](#) is programmed by my long-term research colleague and close friend [Dr. Russell Standish](#).

## Marketing & Revenue Strategies



The author with Nouriel Roubini, "another economic iconoclast."

## On My Target Audience & Patreon Reward Strategy

For tier pricing, I tried a 3:1 ratio between rewards: offer a basic reward for \$1 and a slightly more advanced one for \$3. That appears to work at both the \$3 and \$30 levels: about 20-30% of those who would otherwise donate at the lower level (\$1 and \$10) opt for the higher one.

Keen Patron	Keen Collaborator
\$10 or more per month · 401 patrons	\$30 or more per month · 63 patrons
As above plus <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A signed hardcopy of eCONcomics</li><li>• My twice-weekly podcasts with Phil Dobbie (see <a href="http://debunking.podbean.com/">http://debunking.podbean.com/</a>)</li></ul>	As above plus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A signed paperback of <b>Debunking Economics</b>; and Can we avoid another financial crisis?</li><li>• Signed paperback copies of all subsequent books as they become available.</li></ul>
<b>GET \$10 REWARD</b>	<b>GET \$30 REWARD</b>

A head-to-head comparison of the \$10 and \$30 tiers.

I think my most successful reward is the \$10/month tier because it gives access to the podcasts I do with Phil Dobbie. Phil is a great journalist and has an innate interest in this area, so our conversations are lively and informative.

**The only surprise I've had with rewards is that there were about as many patrons opting for \$10/mo as for \$1/mo and \$3/mo combined.** I had thought that most of my income would come from current University students of economics who could only afford \$1/mo or at most \$3/mo. Instead, it has come from people who are able to afford \$10/mo or \$30/mo and are therefore clearly employed.

My audience has a lot of engineers who know enough mathematics to know that the stuff done by mainstream economists is generally rubbish. There are also many young students who are part of the Rethinking Economics movement. Many middle-rank executives and business owners also support me.

Demographically, my supporters tend to be male, and middle to high (but not extreme) income earners. They are from all around the world, though the bulk are in Anglo-Saxon countries. I think a lot of my supporters would like to be challenging the mainstream as I have, and their support to me is a vicarious means of doing that.



Copies of Prof Keen's book "Debunking Economics," prepped to send to \$30/mo tier patrons.

Part of my reward fulfillment proceeds naturally from my work. My University job involves writing and delivering lectures on economics to first-year undergrads and Masters students at Kingston. I record these lectures and post them to YouTube, and they also go up on Patreon, of course.

I used to write a blog for Forbes magazine, but that was badly paid, and I was approached by Russia Today with a much better offer. I now write [two OpEds a month](#) for them, which I post first as Patron only blogs, with a 60-day lag till they're public (P.S. So far, Vladimir hasn't edited anything I have written). My OpEds are blog posts that generate a lot of discussion with my Patrons (see this post titled "[MMT's ignorance of economic thought](#)" for an example).

## How I Built My Audience

When I realised that a global financial crisis was imminent (in December of 2005), I established a blog called [Steve Keen's Debtwatch](#). I don't maintain it anymore, but it was my major vehicle from 2005 till about 2012. Patreon has taken over that role now.

I posted my non-orthodox lectures on economics to YouTube, where I gradually built up an audience of about 10,000 subscribers and gathered about 2,000 views per lecture.



There is a lot of scepticism of conventional economics in the public: mainstream economists seem to be describing a fantasy world rather than the actual economy that we live in. Economists rubbish anyone who challenges them, but frankly they are indeed defending an elaborate fantasy view of how the economy operates, and there have been many deep criticisms of economic theory which they have simply ignored. **I explain those logical, empirical, and mathematical flaws in mainstream economics in ways that a non-technical audience could understand. That gave me a loyal following, but I never thought of them as a fan base until Patreon came along.**

In writing Debtwatch, I published critical comments every month on the Reserve Bank of Australia's interest rate decision. **This led to lots of coverage by Australia's media outlets**, in particular the ABC (Australian Broadcasting Commission, the equivalent of the UK's BBC but with far better journalists). That made me a public figure in Australia.

News outlets have deteriorated since then, as their failure to adapt to the Internet has undermined funding. These days they do little more than rewrite press releases. That's why state-funded media outlets (like Russia Today, Al Jazeera, Press 24, the BBC) dominate news coverage. I recommend that people read a lot of them and make their minds up from a range of sources. Non-Anglo-Saxon outlets like RT, Al Jazeera, and Press TV are far more likely to publish non-mainstream views than Anglo-Saxon establishment outlets like the BBC.

## Patreon Launch

My launch plan was to capitalize on my public profile as a professional critic of conventional economic theory and policy. But given the time constraints under which I operate, the only marketing channel I worked on was Twitter. I had hoped to access my YouTube subscriber base,

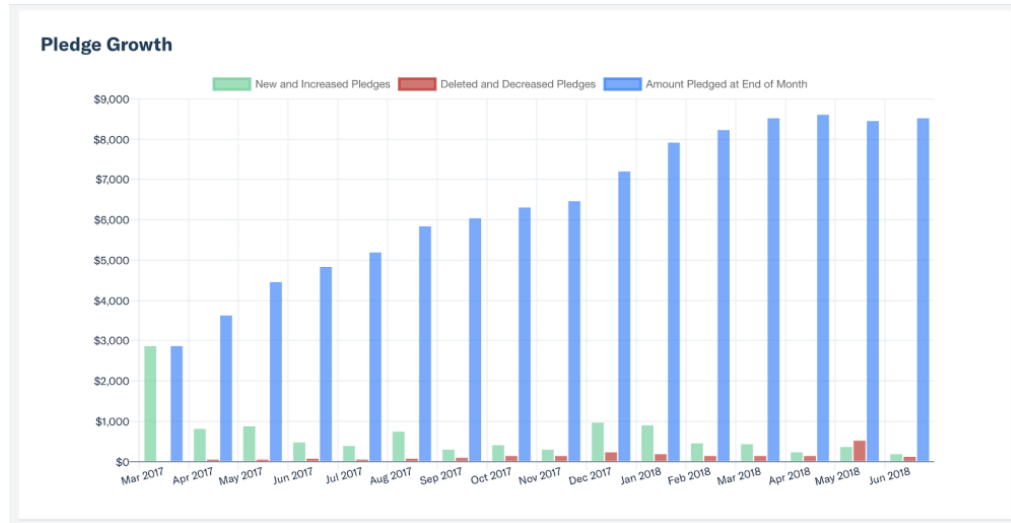


but the fact that YouTube hides email addresses from you (for all but a handful of recent signups) made that impossible. That's a potential audience of 13,500 people that I can only access a fraction of by those who actually watch each of my talks (which is about 2,000 people on average).

I did have a professional video shot by my friends at [Renegade Inc.](#), which I'm sure helped. In addition, I have a broad community of supporters—groups like Rethinking Economics—and word of mouth there surely helped.

If I could do anything differently, I would have put more energy into promotions. But I am already so busy that that is just a pipe dream. I might add things for which I didn't have time when I launched: using MailChimp, for example, to mail my huge list of email correspondents to market my campaign.

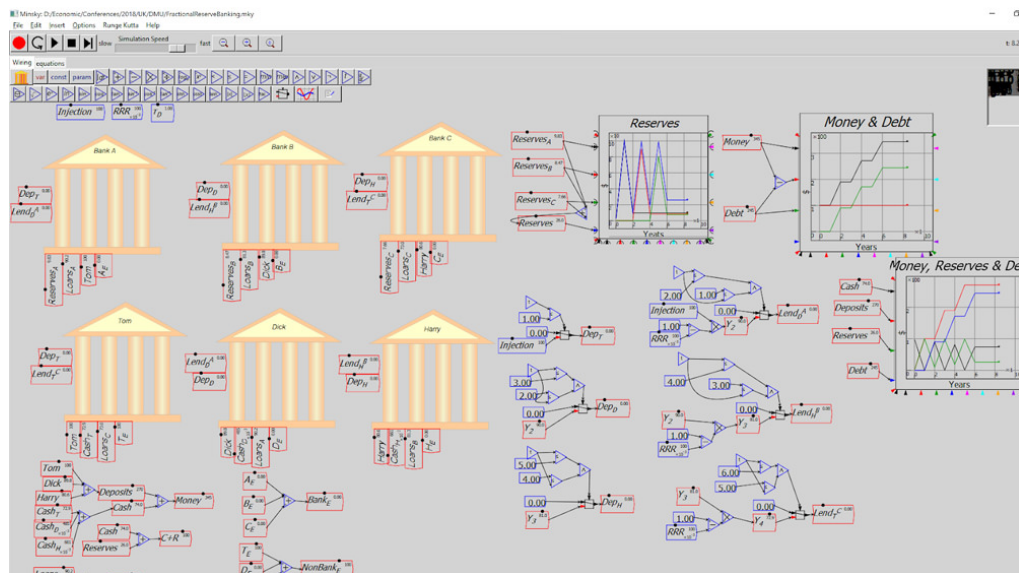
## Patreon Revenue



Prof Steve Keen's income and patron count have been rising steadily since early 2017. Taken from the internal Patreon dashboard.

My full-time salary as a professor was about \$100,000 USD a year, and Patreon now generates about 70% of this. I had hoped to also raise another \$5,000/month to be able to fund continuous development of the Open Source system dynamics program, [Minsky](#), that I invented as well, but that appears a long way off at present. I'm still getting 1/4 of my Professorial salary (about \$25,000 a year), but that will terminate in July 2019. I earn about \$10,000 a year from writing OpEds that are published by Russia Today.

Going full-time for my Patreon would require doubling my current revenue to about \$14,000/mo. Minus the costs involved, that would enable me to work full-time and to fund continuous development of Minsky.



A preview of Prof Steve Keen's open source Minsky project

## Personal Development

### What a Day-in-the-Life Looks Like

Far too often, it starts with me flying somewhere to give a speech. I get regular invites to speak to student and business groups about what's wrong with mainstream economics, and how it might be fixed. My next flight is tomorrow to London to speak to the Institute of Actuaries; then to Ecuador for a week of speaking engagements in mid-June.



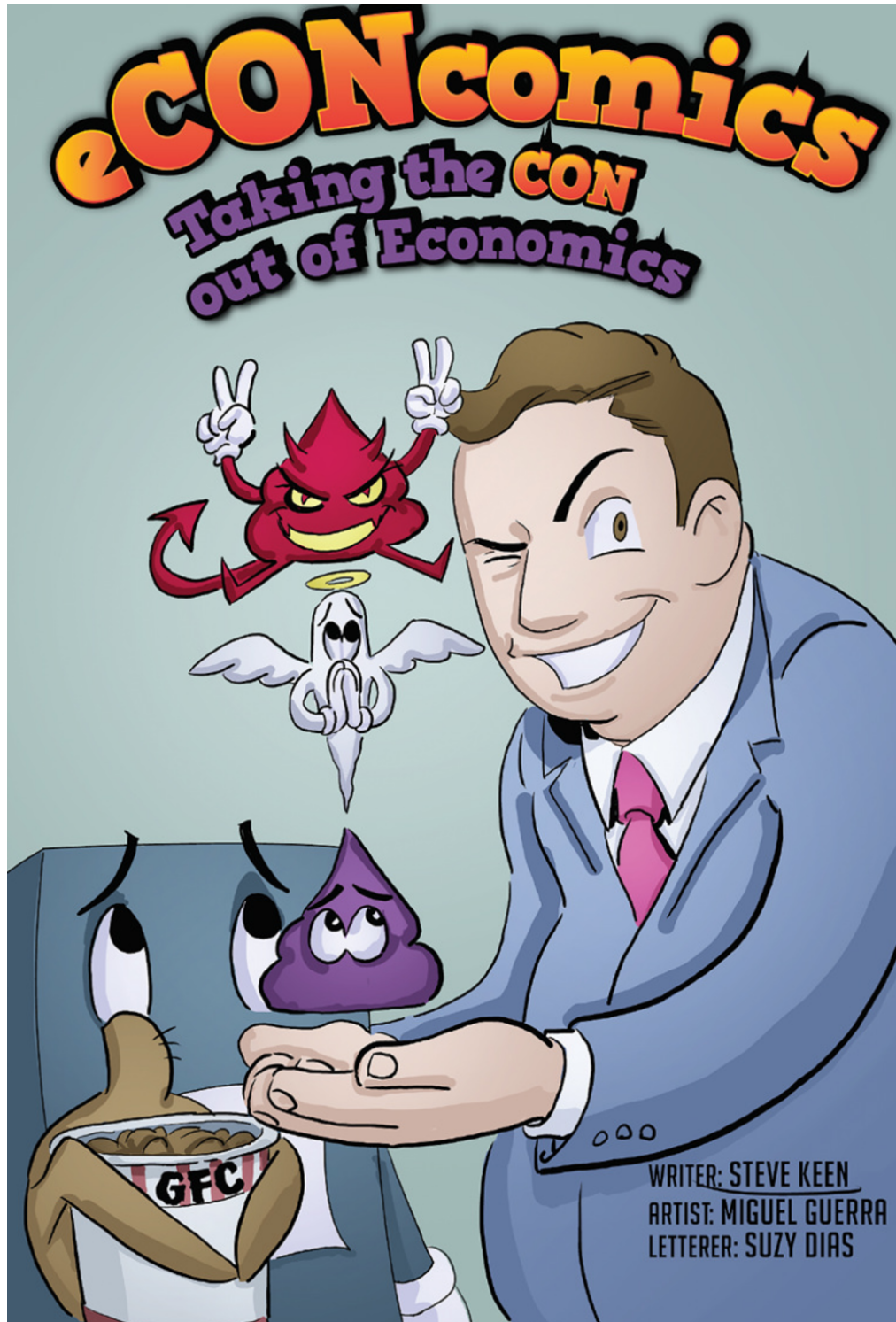
Prof. Steve Keen speaking at a conference in Madrid in 2017.

When that's not the case, I start the day with Twitter, read and reply to comments on my Patreon page (where there are a lot of highly intelligent people from whom I learn a lot; it's far from a one-way street), then I start working on whatever overdue economics research task has the highest priority at the moment. Too frequently that's another Powerpoint presentation for the next conference I'm speaking at. I hope to do fewer talks in future to free up time for more fundamental research work, now that Patreon is funding me effectively.

My five current tasks are:

- Revising a set of papers on the role of energy in production. It's insane, but economic theory to date has taken no account of the role of energy, when without energy we wouldn't exist, let alone have an economy;
- Writing up an explanation of what causes house price bubbles;

- Writing a cartoon book on money, with the working title of “Funny Money.” It will be illustrated by the brilliant [Miguel Guerra](#). We’ve already produced a short book of comic satires called eCONcomics: Taking the CON out of Economics;
- Writing the third edition of my book Debunking Economics, both to update the treatment of money I gave in the second edition and to incorporate new work on ecology and the role of energy in economics;
- Writing a “magnum opus” to provide an alternative approach to Neoclassical economics. It will start with the role of energy; properly incorporate banks, money, and debt in macroeconomics; and use a complex systems (rather than equilibrium) approach to dynamics.



The cover of Prof Steve Keen's & Miguel Guerra's short book of comic satires, "eCONomics."



I spend the most time writing presentations to give at conferences or lectures to give to my students at Kingston. Also, Twitter. **I have to admit that Twitter addictive, and I need to reduce my usage. But it's also the venue that gave me most of my public profile.** Next in line are my regular blogs for both Patreon and RT (I've just finished one on the Italian crisis), and then my long-term research projects. Once I finish at Kingston University in July next year, I hope to reverse my ranking and devote my time mainly to my long-term research goals.

## Want to Learn More About Prof. Steve Keen?

You can visit these links to learn more about Prof. Steve Keen.

- Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/ProfSteveKeen>
- Twitter: [@ProfSteveKeen](https://twitter.com/ProfSteveKeen)
- Youtube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/profstevekeen>
- Books:
  - [Debunking Economics](#)
  - [Can We Avoid Another Financial Crisis?](#)

If you have any follow up questions, feel free to reach out to Prof. Keen on Twitter.