

Unit Plan for Assessing and Improving Student Learning in Degree Programs

Unit: Economics

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Section 1: Past Assessment Results

The Department of Economics offers three degrees.

- Bachelor of Arts in Economics

In 2005, the Department of Economics transferred from the College of Business to the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Because the overwhelming majority of our undergraduate students are BA Economics majors in LAS, this administrative change has had only a positive impact on our undergraduate program, as we are now administered by the college in which most of our majors are enrolled. The BS degree in Economics in the College of Business has been discontinued; this action had a minimal impact on the department, as this major only attracted a very small number of majors. In 2006 the department added an additional full-time advisor

- Master of Science of Policy Economics

The MSPE program continues to be highly successful. It has grown significantly since its inception in 1984 and now enrolls more than 70 students each year. Students have benefited from classroom renovations and enhanced experiences, such as field trips to Chicago and New York, during the term of their program of study.

- Ph.D. in Economics

Since the previous assessment, the department has focused on admitting the highest caliber students possible, rather than admitting a predetermined number of students. The department has responded to the increasingly competitive admissions environment by increasing the number and dollar value of fellowships, all supported by funds generated by the department. The department has also created incentives to encourage students to identify and explore areas of research earlier in their studies. Further, the department has increased the financial support it provides to students to pursue professional opportunities by funding travel to conferences and/or the purchase of data, for example.

Section 2: Revised Assessment Plan

(A) Process

The Department of Economics evaluated the goals of our BA, MSPE, and Ph.D. programs as set forth in the department's outcome assessment plan in 1999. They represent appropriate and important goals for each degree program and are stated below.

(B) Student Outcomes

- BA in Economics: The goal of an undergraduate program in economics is to prepare students for entry-level jobs in a variety of organizations, and/or for continued graduate or professional education.

Outcome 1: Demonstrate a good working knowledge of the basic principles and terminology of microeconomics and macroeconomics

Outcome 2: Demonstrate the ability to read, evaluate and interpret general economic information.

Outcome 3: Demonstrate the ability to understand and use basic statistics.

The department anticipates that our students will gain additional competencies throughout their course of study in order to function effectively in the workplace. However, training in necessary skills and knowledge is shared with the entire campus and occurs across a broad spectrum of courses. This includes:

Outcome 4: Math proficiency through basic calculus.

Outcome 5: Basic computer literacy for students with business concentrations.

Outcome 6: Leadership and interpersonal skills.

Outcome 7: Ability to communicate effectively both in written and oral form.

- Master of Science in Policy Economics (MSPE): The MSPE program is designed for promising young administrators in government and private institutions, in both developing and advanced industrial countries, who need additional training in areas of economic analysis and quantitative techniques. The program strives for diverse geographical and gender representation in each class, with a focus on training students from developing and the "new emerging" countries. Expected outcomes are:
 - Outcome 1: Develop in-depth competency in the core areas of economics: microeconomic theory, macroeconomic theory, statistics, and applied econometrics.
 - Outcome 2: Develop additional competency in one area of specialization through elective coursework in economics. Popular fields of concentration include development, international trade and finance, monetary economics, public finance, and finance.
 - Outcome 3: Upon completion of their degree, students return to their previous positions with enhanced responsibilities and opportunities in light of their augmented training in economics and quantitative techniques.
 - Outcome 4: Provide appropriate preparation for interested students to pursue a doctorate in economics.
 - Outcome 5: Enrich the student experience through field trips, intensive advising, tutoring, computer training, and seminars featuring guest speakers.
- Ph.D. in Economics: The Ph.D. program provides preparation for an individual to teach and conduct research at a research university or with a government agency or central bank. Upon completion of their degree, the department anticipates that students should:
 - Outcome 1: Demonstrate in-depth competency in the theory and application of the core areas of economics, including microeconomics, macroeconomics, and econometrics.
 - Outcome 2: Demonstrate advanced understanding of at least two fields in economics. The fields offered by the department include development economics, econometrics, industrial organization, international economics, labor economics, macroeconomic theory, microeconomic theory, and public economics.
 - Outcome 3: Apply rigorous and advanced statistical analysis in their research.
 - Outcome 4: Propose, research, write, and defend their doctoral dissertation.
 - Outcome 5: Gain experience teaching undergraduate courses.

(C) Measures and Methods Used to Measure Outcomes

- BA in Economics: The primary means to accomplish outcomes #1 and #2 is through successful completion of the following required courses in the economics curriculum: Econ 102 (Principles of Microeconomics); Econ 103 (Principles of Macroeconomics); Econ 302 (Inter Microeconomic Theory); and Econ 303 (Inter Macroeconomic Theory). Each of these courses incorporates class assignments and examinations to assess content knowledge as well as students' ability to analyze problems and think critically.

The third outcome is accomplished by completing the statistical sequence, which is comprised of Econ 202 (Economic Statistics I) and Econ 203 (Economic Statistics II). In addition to midterm and final exams, students are assigned problem sets which require an understanding of the economic concepts involved as well as application of the statistical principles learned. Econ 203 includes extensive problem solving using Excel, thus leading to computer proficiency.

Additional competencies are acquired through a combination of department and college requirements. The major requires completion of a math sequence which insures mastery of math through basic calculus. The Economics Undergraduate Advising Office supports the Economics Club and encourages all majors to participate in club and other extracurricular activities to develop leadership skills through officer positions. Campus General Education requirements require students to complete rhetoric and composition classes.

- MSPE Program: Students in the MSPE program are required to complete core courses in the foundation areas of economics. Papers, homework, and exams all provide assessments of student performance and knowledge acquisition. Extensive advising is provided to students to help them select elective coursework that meets their needs and interests. Advising is also provided to identify students who might be good candidates for doctoral study. These candidates' actual performance in the MSPE program is compared to the performance to current doctoral students in an effort to guide their expectations.

The MSPE program uses extensive interviews and exit surveys to assess student outcomes. Student placement is tracked, as is overall student satisfaction. Close contact with alumni is maintained to help evaluate the longer term impact of training.

- Ph.D. Program: All doctoral students are required to complete nine core courses to establish a thorough foundation in the core areas of economics. Students write exams, papers, and homework to assess performance in individual courses. After completing the core, overall performance is evaluated by the department to determine each student's eligibility to continue for the doctoral degree. Performance in field courses is evaluated by performance in the courses themselves. Two fields require an exam: development requires an oral exam and macroeconomics requires a written exam.

Graduate students in the Economics Ph.D. program recently developed and conducted a survey of their colleagues. They gathered feedback on topics such as research seminars, math requirements, and student office space.

Students receive frequent and intensive feedback from faculty on their dissertation research. Students are encouraged to present their papers at conferences, whereby they receive additional input and suggestions for their research.

Finally, nearly all doctoral students in Economics at Illinois receive teaching assistantships during their studies. ICES scores are used to evaluate performance. Students are strongly encouraged to participate in the campus's Teaching Certificate Program.

Section 3: Plans for Using Results

(A) Plans

The Department of Economics strives to provide value-added programs that meet the needs of our majors. In order to assess student satisfaction and help identify areas for improvement, we plan to:

- Evaluate the departmental core questions which are generated through the ICES reports and then develop a method to review student responses to improve the classroom experience.
- Reinstate administration of an exit survey which reflects some of the key questions in the area of student satisfaction. Students will complete this survey as they sign up for graduation in our Undergraduate Advising Office. Current results will be compared results from previous years to measure improvement.
- Continue to survey and interview MSPE students to gain their input and continue to meet their needs.
- Evaluate results of the recent PhD student survey. The department intends to be responsive to student suggestions and evaluate policy suggestions with a goal of improving student training and satisfaction. It also intends to continue to administer the survey in future years.

(B) Timeline for Implementation

Ph.D. and MSPE surveys have been administered. The department expects to continue to administer these surveys in future years. Through consultation with relevant committees and program directors, the department expects to implement both long- and short-term policies and actions to address student needs and interests. Undergraduate exit surveys are expected to be administered in next spring with recommendations being evaluated and implemented beginning the following academic year.