

Assessment Plan for the Economics Program

Overview:

The economics program was recently transferred from the School of Business to the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Very few students enter the economics program with a major in economics. A few elect to declare a major or minor in economics during their first course in economics; however, most wait considerably longer to make such a declaration.

The process of developing an assessment plan began after a series of faculty discussions and it was decided to include students at all different levels of the program in developing a new mission statement. A student focus group, led by the Director of Lifelong Learning, emphasized the efficacy of a concise mission statement that included critical, analytical, and flexible thinking skills as the key elements.

The student focus group addressed the strengths of the program along with areas for improvement. They did not want to diminish the flexibility the program offered its graduates; however, they encouraged a guided research, experiential project, or internship at the conclusion of the program.

They expressed an interest in an honors section of Basic Economics as a supplement to a regular section with an opportunity to see the application of economics outside a normal classroom experience. They considered having honors economics section partially overlap a senior capstone course so both sets of student could work on the same project. Recognizing a variety of challenges, they developed a workable model where their grades would be determined independently along with faculty guidance or mentoring of this experience. They expressed a preference for the project to be completed over part of the semester in a less than three credit hour course.

The students gave considerable thought to methods of assessing the program and found it to be a challenging topic. The project could serve as a form of program assessment that transcends the individual.

Step 1:

Development of a Mission

Based on the input of students and faculty a new mission statement was developed, circulated, and approved by the Economics Curriculum Committee; it is:

The mission of the economics program is to develop an understanding of fundamental economic concepts along with the analytical, critical, and flexible thinking skills to apply knowledge in an articulate manner.

Step 2:

Based on the mission a new assessment plan is being developed to identify and measure student outcomes. Some curriculum changes will facilitate and require evolution of the assessment plan. For example, we hope to assess the added value from the program by comparing and contrasting student performance upon entry and completion of the program. The inability to identify students who will complete the program before they begin does not preclude assessment of the value added; it just makes it more challenging. Recall, very few students declare a major or minor in economics before they have taken at least one course in economics.

Although the majority of students in honors economics will likely continue academic careers in other disciplines or programs of study (e.g., pre-medicine), they potentially form a surrogate reference group for assessment. Honors students tend to have some similar attributes as students who major in economics in terms of their motivation and effort in economics classes; however, differences are expected in ACT scores.

Hopefully, comparing these two groups (i.e., honors economics students and seniors in a capstone economics course) working on the same project, will enable us to assess the value added by the program without having to wait several years for data. Ideally, we would like to track each individual student, and since that is not realistic or feasible, this approach may provide useful assessment of the overall curriculum along with strategies for improving it.

After curriculum changes are developed to incorporate the recommendations of the student focus group (e.g., experiential or research project demonstrating economic analysis and honors economics), the following student outcomes may be able to feature program assessment beyond the individual outcomes identified below.

Student Outcomes for Economics

Outcomes expected:	Method(s) of Assessing:
<p>Find, organize, and analyze economic data: The student should be able to locate appropriate economic data, effectively organize, and analyze it.</p>	<p>Assignments or papers submitted in economics classes are the primary means of assessment of these expectations.</p>
<p>Demonstrate the use of quantitative techniques: The student will be able to create and use tables, graphs, and equations in analyzing economic information.</p>	<p>Students in EC 101, EC 305, and EC 306 create spreadsheets, analyze graphs, and use equations on exams or assignments.</p> <p>Scores on the mathematics segment of the CAAP (or other approved demonstrations of competence)</p> <p>Completion of courses in mathematics beyond College Algebra is another indicator of achievement.</p>
<p>Effectively Articulate Knowledge and/or Analysis: The student will be able to compose a clear and effective essay.</p>	<p>Scores on the writing segment of the CAAP (or other demonstrations of competence) are one indicator.</p> <p>Essay tests and short papers are another means of assessment.</p>
<p>Effective preparation for post baccalaureate opportunities: Students will be able to complete graduate work in economics or other fields of study or pursue career interests.</p>	<p>Completion of an advanced degree would be indicator.</p> <p>Acceptance or placement in employment related to the major is another as indicated by the survey of recent graduates.</p>

Step 3:

Continuously improve the assessment plan and the curriculum. This includes the collective wisdom of the faculty, students, and alumni.