

Annual Progress Report

on Assessment of Student Learning for Undergraduate Programs (Rev 04/11)

The purpose of the Annual Progress Report (APR) of Student Learning Assessment is to provide a continuous improvement process through meaningful assessment of student. Results from assessment of student learning guide collective actions for curricular change, better learning opportunities for students, improvement of teaching, and more effective academic support services.

Introduction

Academic year: 2014-15

Department/Program: Economics

Degree program(s): B.A. and B.S.

Person(s) preparing report: Daniel Kuester and Kyle Ross

Date submitted: **November 1, 2015**

I. Student learning Outcomes

A) List all current SLOs for the Department/Program

Undergraduate majors in Economics will acquire knowledge in the following areas and demonstrate their mastery of:

1. Opportunity costs, the need to make choices because of scarcity; the fact that there is no such thing as a free lunch;
2. The use of models, formulas, graphs, algebra, etc., to describe economic phenomena and generate predictions;
3. Competitive markets as a means to efficient allocation and how the presence of externalities, market power, and imperfect information impede this process;
4. The distinction between real and nominal values, as well as costs, causes, and control of inflation;
5. Economic statistics (e.g., inflation, unemployment, GDP, economic growth, etc.);
6. Government involvement in the economy through taxes, transfer payments, provision of services, regulation, etc.;
7. The use of marginal analysis and the principle of diminishing returns;
8. The advantages of specialization and trade at both the personal and national levels;
9. The use of fiscal and monetary policy, deficits, interest rates, changes in the money supply, etc., to influence overall economic performance;
10. The determinants of economic growth;
11. The costs and causes of unemployment; public policies to ameliorate it;
12. The costs and causes of discrimination; public policies to ameliorate it.

- B) Identify the link between departmental outcomes and the five K-State Undergraduate Outcome. (knowledge | critical thinking | communication | diversity | academic & professional integrity). If this information is available in a matrix, provide it or the link to the online site where the matrix is available.

<http://www.k-state.edu/economics/pdfs/ugrad/slomatrix.pdf>

- C) Links to website where the Program SLOs, Assessment summary, and Alignment Matrix for the degree program are located (within two clicks of the Department/Program front page).

Available at <http://www.k-state.edu/economics/undergrad/slo.html>

II. Assessment Strategies for each SLO that was assessed for this annual report. (please describe):

- A) The measures used (at least one direct measure must be used for each student learning outcome).

We elected to evaluate five different outcomes this semester, outcomes three and nine were evaluated during the fall of 2014 and we evaluated outcomes two, five, and twelve during the spring of 2015. We frequently evaluate outcome nine because it is tremendously important to the discipline but we have not evaluated outcome two explicitly since we started collecting SLO data and we do not evaluate the other objectives we measured very often.

All measures were direct during the assessment of economics majors. All seniors in the capstone course, ECON 580, Senior Seminar, during the fall semester of 2014 and the spring semester of 2015 were examined. At the start of the semester, students received a list of the 12 knowledge-based SLOs and the information that their final examinations would include questions closely based on two of the SLOs. ECON 580 typically has an enrollment of fifteen to thirty students. In the spring 2015 semester, thirty students took the final exam and in the fall of 2014 semester twenty two students took the final.

We asked our question about this SLO after Dr. Thomas led a discussion about all of the SLO's with specific emphasis on concerns about income inequality and discrimination in labor markets. We hosted many guest speakers in ECON 580 to address current issues on inequality and discrimination and also the recovery of the U.S. economy from the "Great Recession". In addition to this we brought in other speakers who had a primary

We asked the following questions of our ECON 580 senior seminar students on their final during the fall of 2014.

Chapter 14 of the main text states that "The Great Crisis has made clear that the financial industry should be viewed in the same light as the nuclear energy and tobacco industries—industries whose production.. potentially impose large negative externalities on society at large." Explain the meaning of "negative externalities," discuss how the financial industry imposed such externalities, and discuss those implications for public policy.

This process was designed to evaluate objective three (obviously amongst others).

Objective three: "Competitive markets as a means to efficient allocation and how the presence of externalities, market power, and imperfect information impede this process;"

The second SLO question from the Fall of 2014 follows:

2. Government has two major tools for the purpose of stabilizing economic activity; monetary policy and fiscal policy. Since the Great Recession ended in June, 2009, monetary policy gets a high score for aiding the economy, while fiscal policy gets an “F”. Explain why you agree or disagree with this statement.

This process was designed to evaluate objective nine.

Objective nine: “The use of fiscal and monetary policy, deficits, interest rates, changes in the money supply, etc., to influence overall economic performance.”

We asked the following questions of our ECON 580 senior seminar students during the spring of 2015

1. Suppose that Nominal GDP in the United States has increased by 6% from 2014 to 2015 while the inflation rate was 2%. What would you predict about the increase or decrease in REAL GDP which took place during this year in the U.S.? Explain your answer

Also explain what the level of inflation was in Germany in the aftermath of World War I (say in 1922 and whether or not that was predictable and why? If it helps think about the second “Schrute Buck” video we showed in class!

The use of models and formulas and graphs, etc. to describe economic phenomenon and generate predictions is evaluated by this question which is objective two is analyzed by student performance on this question. We also use this question to evaluate objective five (understanding these statistics dealing with inflation, etc).

The second question from the Spring of 2015 follows

2. Dealing with discrimination.

Draw a typical PPF displaying increasing opportunity costs if Econland produces only “Guns” (capital intensive goods) and “Butter” (consumer intensive goods)

Show the effects on this PPF if our society practices widespread discrimination against a particular ethnic group. How does this change either the PPF itself or where our society operates in regards to the PPF.

Also explain why a true classical economist would think a program such as affirmative action to correct the problems of discrimination would be necessary.

This question was designed to evaluate objective twelve. “Costs and causes of discrimination, public policies to ameliorate it”. Of course this also helps explain the concept of opportunity costs (objective one)

B) Which and how many students were assessed and when.

Fifty two students were evaluated at the completion of their ECON 580 course. Economics 580 is the only undergraduate course we offer that is restricted to only economics majors so we have elected to evaluate the students that take this class even though this limits our sample size. As we introduced a course for undergraduate majors at the sophomore level we are discussing evaluating their understanding of these objectives in that class as well. We have decided to evaluate students during both the fall and spring semesters to increase the available data that we have but we did not feel it was appropriate to ask these questions in classes where non majors represent the majority of students in the class. In the past we only evaluated these students who took senior seminar in the fall.

C) Minimum (*and advanced if possible*) levels for expected student achievement for each SLO

A committee of two faculty members read the students' answers (and observed their comments during the fall semester) to the two questions and assigned scores based on judging each answer as “outstanding”, “satisfactory” or “unsatisfactory”. Overall, faculty scores were very consistent so it was decided to simply take the average of the two scores.

The committee then compared the number of (1) outstanding scores, (2) satisfactory scores, and (3) unsatisfactory scores to previous results. In order to be consistent with our scores from previous years the committee gave each outstanding score a score of 1.0, each satisfactory score a score of 2.0, and each unsatisfactory score a score of 3.0.

The department has previously established a benchmark of an average score below a 1.90 as the minimum level of expected student achievement on the average. Any student who scores an unsatisfactory score of a 3 on either question is not performing as well as we would like to see. Our department has determined that evaluating the average performance of all students is a strong indicator of how well our faculty are covering these objectives. We do not feel that a student necessarily is not capable of doing well with an economics major just because there is one specific objective where they do not meet standards. This is why we have decided to look at a more macro view of how our students are performing.

If the average student score on an SLO is below a 1.50 we have determined that this is an outstanding score (again on our scale LOWER scores are considered to be better than higher scores).

III. Results for Each SLO Assessed

- A) What percentage of students demonstrate a minimum or higher level of competency? (*if possible, what percentage of students achieved at an exceptional level?*)
- B) What does this tell you about student learning?

FALL 2014

For objective three eleven students scored “excellent” six scored “satisfactory” and five students scored “unsatisfactory”. This gave us an average score of 1.73 (38/22) which is acceptable and consistent with our goals and expectations (a score of 1.00 is “perfect” and an average score of 3.00 would be the worst score possible). We would like to see overall scores below 1.50 if possible though. This tells us that our graduating students have a fairly strong understanding of not only concerns about how public policy makers might deal with external costs but also an understanding about how to evaluate these concerns. The faculty have been informed that our majors do have a fairly strong understanding of this objective.

For objective nine, ten students scored “excellent”, eight students scored “satisfactory” and only four students scored “unsatisfactory”. This gave us an average score of 1.55 (38/22) which is something we consider to be an acceptable score. (a score of 1.00 is “perfect” and an average score of 3.00 would be the worst score possible) We are distributing this report to our faculty to inform them that many but not all of our students have a complete grasp of understanding objective nine which is about, the use of fiscal and monetary policy, deficits, interest rates, changes in the money supply, etc., to influence overall economic performance;

SPRING 2015

For objective twelve we had fourteen students scored “excellent” eleven scored “satisfactory” and five students scored “unsatisfactory”. This gave us an average score of 1.5 (45/30) which is consistent with our goals and expectations (a score of 1.00 is “perfect” and an average score of 3.00 would be the worst score possible). Again, this is consistent with a very strong overall score. We typically label any score at a 1.5 or below as “excellent” This tells us that our graduating students have a fairly strong understanding of not only concerns about discrimination in the workplace and elsewhere but also have a good understanding about how to evaluate these concerns. The faculty have been informed that our majors do have a fairly strong understanding of this objective.

For objectives two and five, fourteen students scored “excellent” nine scored “satisfactory” but seven students scored “unsatisfactory”. This gave us an average score of 1.77 (53/30) which is consistent with an acceptable overall score of below a 1.90 (A score of 1.00 is “perfect” and an average score of 3.00 would be the worst score possible). This tells us that our graduating students have a fairly decent grasp of the concept of understanding economic statistics particularly as it relates to inflation but there is some room for improvement as over twenty percent of the students examined had a poor understanding of how to critically evaluate these statistics.

The faculty have been informed and we will go over this report in detail so they are aware of our relative strengths and weaknesses as a department in terms of instruction. We are also sending this report to our graduate list serve so our GTA’s are aware of where we are succeeding and where we hope to improve. (Although again we reached our stated goal in each criteria but we hope to receive all “excellent” scores in the future).

We are also distributing this report to our faculty to inform them that they are doing an excellent job of teaching some skills for our majors and a good job at teaching other skills.

Well over half of our overall students surveyed had “excellent” answers to at least one of the two questions. About forty percent of our students had “excellent” responses to both questions and over another thirty percent of our students had “excellent” responses to one of the two questions.

IV. Faculty Review of the Assessment Results

A) Describe the process by which program faculty reviewed the results and decided on the actions and/or revisions that were indicated by those results.

Faculty members and GTAs are being encouraged to provide activities and uphold standards which will help improve students' performances on these SLOs (as well as others on our list) in the years to come. Copies of our SLO’s have been given out to all faculty and this report will be made available to all faculty and GTA’s.

The faculty have had lengthy discussions about the relevance of each of our SLO’s and it was determined that we do have an appropriate list of standards. This year’s SLO report was emailed to faculty for added suggestions before it was finally submitted.

There have been a few points of contention off of previous reports. The evaluators did not understand that a low score is considered to be better than a high score even though that is clearly stated in the report. There was discussion about changing our standards and method of scoring but it was determined that we should more clearly state our measures in the report.

There was also concerns raised about the discussion of diversity (and the belief that there was a lack of this discussion) in the economics core curriculum. The faculty determined that this is something that is discussed in the core courses of 110, 520 and 580 in addition to many 500 and 600 electives so it was determined that we should add this information to our formal statement about SLO’s and add the sentence that “These learning objectives are also covered in many classes that are 500 and 600 level electives.” We felt that our discussion of overall concerns about equity and income distribution in addition to discussing concerns about discrimination in ECON 580 was an appropriate way to deal with this concern.

V. Revisions of Assessment Plan

A) What changes, if any, were implemented, based on the findings of the assessments?

It was determined that to better determine (and hopefully reflect) the exposure that our students are receiving about diverse opinions and cultures that we add a question to the exit interview that we conduct with our ECON 580 students where we ask them a question similar to.

“Do you feel that our economics courses have exposed you to a diverse set of views and beliefs about economic theories? If so is there one class that you would recommend to a student who wanted to learn about different points of view about economics.

Do you feel that you have a good understanding about how economic issues affect individuals from various cultures differently? Do you feel that you have been able to better understand normative views others may have about economics? Do you feel that you have an understanding of the causes and concerns about various types of discrimination? If so is there one class that you would recommend to a student who wanted to learn about these concerns?”

At this time we are not sure about how we can evaluate this on a numerical scale but we do plan on sharing these results with the faculty and we will determine if we need to change our approach about these issues from a departmental perspective.

We evaluated this survey for the first time in May of 2012 and the responses we received from our graduating seniors were overwhelmingly positive. We had similar results in May of 2013, 14 and 15. Overall our students appear to be pleased with the breadth of topics we discuss in our economics coursework including those current issues dealing with sensitive topics.

B) Revisions of your Assessment Plan or SLOs (if applicable)

We are generally comfortable with our objectives and evaluation techniques. We have stressed the importance to faculty of emphasizing these goals with our students.

Because of previous concerns raised it was determined that in the future we will evaluate the SLO's during each semester that ECON 580 is taught. We started doing this during the fall of 2011.

We recently changed our SLO objectives page slightly and that revised version of the SLO's is available at our website.

VI. Future Plans

A) Briefly describe the long-range plan to assess all of the outcomes if assessing over a sequence of years.

We are pleased that we finally were able to evaluate objective twelve. We plan to assess all of the other eleven objectives at least once over each ten semester period. This will enable us to evaluate all of our objectives while still requiring the students to prepare to understand each objective (they will not be able to know in advance which objective is being examined). There are certain objectives that we will continue to evaluate on a more regular basis.

Kansas State University
Department of Economics

Student Learning Outcomes – Bachelor of Science and Arts Degrees

CIP Code: 450601

Approved: December 1, 2003

Last updated: October, 2011

Course Requirements:

All students graduating with either a B.S. or a B.A. degree in economics at Kansas State University must take 10 courses in the Department of Economics as a part of their graduation requirements; the 5 specified courses are referred to as the “core courses”:

ECON 110	Principles of Macroeconomics
ECON 120	Principles of Microeconomics
ECON 510	Intermediate Macroeconomics
ECON 520	Intermediate Microeconomics
ECON 580	Senior Seminar in Economics

Plus

5 economics courses at the 500, 600 or 700 levels

Grading and Assessment

- a) Students must receive a grade of C or better in both 510 and 520.
- b) Students must receive a grade of C or better in all courses at the 500 level or higher or earn a GPA of 2.5 in all economics courses used to satisfy the degree requirement.
- c) Courses taken A/pass/F may not be used to meet these requirements.

Meeting these criteria is taken as *prima facie* evidence that students have satisfactorily demonstrated their proficiency in the 6 learning outcomes envisioned by the University. These learning objectives are also covered in many classes that are 500 and 600 level electives.

Learning Outcome:

Core course(s) where acquired and measured:

A. Knowledge

Undergraduate majors in Economics will acquire knowledge in the following areas and demonstrate mastery of:

- | | |
|--|-------------------------|
| 1. Opportunity costs; the need to make choices because of scarcity; the fact that “there is no such thing as a free lunch” | 110, 120, 510, 520, 580 |
|--|-------------------------|

2. the use of models, formulas, graphs, algebra, etc., to describe economic phenomena and generate predictions	110, 120, 510, 520, 580
3. competitive markets as a means to efficient allocation and how the presence of externalities, market power and imperfect information impede this process	110, 120, 520
4. the distinction between real and nominal values, as well as costs, causes, and control of inflation	110, 120, 510, 520, 580
5. economic statistics (e.g., inflation, unemployment, GDP, economic growth, etc.)	110, 510, 580
6. government's involvement in the economy through taxes, transfer payments, provision of services, regulation, etc.	110, 120, 510, 520, 580
7. the use of marginal analysis and the principle of diminishing returns	110, 120, 510, 520, 580
8. the advantages of specialization and trade at both the personal and national levels	110, 120, 520
9. the use of fiscal and monetary policy – deficits, interest rates, changes in the money supply, etc, – to influence overall economic performance	110, 510, 580
10. the determinants of economic growth	110, 120, 510, 520, 580
11. the costs and causes of unemployment; public policies to ameliorate (correct, improve) it	110, 120, 510, 520, 580
12. the costs and causes of discrimination; public policies to ameliorate it.	110, 120, 520, 580

ECON DEPT