

Assessment Report for GSU Educational Programs

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Program Mission and Student Learning Goals

Economics is the study of how best to allocate scarce resources. Economics is an academic discipline that is central to the offerings of all major universities. As at most universities, economics plays an essential role in the general education required of all undergraduates, extending well beyond our undergraduate majors to essential courses in the core curriculum required of all GSU students, especially those majoring in business. At the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies at Georgia State University, it is the fundamental mission of the Department of Economics to contribute to the advancement of knowledge in our discipline, to share that knowledge with our students, and to disseminate that knowledge with policymakers and leaders in the public, nonprofit, and business communities, here and abroad. The Department of Economics is committed to the broad goals of Georgia State University and the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies. We intend to contribute to these goals by continuing our efforts to better serve the needs of our undergraduate majors, our graduate students, and GSU students more broadly, by engaging in such activities as improving our curricula, introducing innovative course features, and creating new degree programs. Finally, we will continue to expand our service and outreach activities, to the profession, to the local business, nonprofit, and public sectors, to the State of Georgia, and to foreign countries and international agencies. The goals of the Department of Economics' undergraduate program include teaching students the "economic way of thinking", and helping them appreciate and understand the global economy in which we live today. We wish to send out students that are prepared for the competitive job market with skills that are valued by employers.

Student Learning Outcomes/Objectives (SLOs)

SLO1: Economics Basic Theories: To demonstrate knowledge of basic theories, concepts, and analytical methods of microeconomics and macroeconomics.

SLO2: Apply to specific fields: To be able to apply theories, concepts, and analytical methods of microeconomics and macroeconomics to specific fields of economics.

SLO3: Benefits and costs: To be able to identify the relevant benefits and costs to consider when comparing policy choices.

SLO4: Communication: To be able to communicate, using appropriate writing and oral conventions, basic economic theories, concepts, analytical methods, and policy choices. NOTE: We are embedding in this SLO, the our CTW goals: to assess and evaluate concepts in economics as they relate to the real world and to be able to recognize (1) how economic theory relates to policy and (2) how many classical assumptions in economics do not apply in reality yet can still be a useful point of departure.

Program Learning Opportunities (optional in 2013-2014)

We will think about this for the future when it might be required.

Assessment Methods and Targets

NOTE applicable to A, B, & C: To measure the success of Economics majors in the undergraduate program in learning core economic concepts, the Department of Economics developed a Tracking Exam (TE) consisting of two parts: one for Principles of Microeconomics (MicroTE) and one for Principles of Macroeconomics (MacroTE). The TE is administered in ECON 4999: Senior Capstone Course in Economic Policy, which is required for all undergraduate economics majors. The TE counts for 5% of the final course grade in ECON 4999. The exam is

administered twice - once during the first week of classes and again at the end of the semester - and the higher of the two scores is the one that counts toward the course grade. We would like to see the average on the questions selected to assess each of the learning outcomes be at least 65%. While this may seem like a low target to an outsider, we believe it is appropriate because these questions are not necessarily emphasized in the ECON 4999 course. These are really questions that assess skills learned in the introductory (ECON 2105 and 2106) courses, and it may be quite some time since the students took those courses by the time they take the ECON 4999 course. We hesitate to ask questions beyond the introductory level because of the way our program is set up - students have a good bit of flexibility in selecting their upper level economics courses, and therefore, students in the ECON 4999 course will likely have taken different 4000 level courses. The only courses we can be sure they've all had are the introductory and intermediate courses.

- A. Ten questions were selected this fall and spring to measure learning outcome 1. See the attached document titled *ECON undergrad program SLO1 results 2013-2014* for the questions that were used for SLO1.
- B. Ten questions were selected this fall and spring to measure learning outcome 2. See the attached document titled *ECON undergrad program SLO2 results 2013-2014* for the questions that were used for SLO2.
- C. Eight questions were selected this fall and spring to measure learning outcome 3. See the attached document titled *ECON undergrad program SLO3 results 2013-2014* for the questions that were used for SLO3.
- D. To measure the success of Economics majors in the undergraduate program in communication skills, we use the data collected for CTW assessments. For this assessment cycle, that included a book review in ECON 4999: Senior Capstone Course in Economic Policy, which is required for all undergraduate economics majors. Students submit two drafts and a final book report. We give them feedback on each draft. Our fairly detailed comments (feedback) are issues we expect them to fix before the next submission cycle. The grading is based on a rubric (the same one we have used for the past several years). We maintain a copy of the comments we give on each draft. We rate the drafts and the final report based on the rubric (on a scale of 1 – 4). The other CTW course is ECON 3900: Macroeconomics, an intermediate course which is also required for all undergraduate economics majors. For this course, students submit several short policy papers/problem sets with two drafts. The grading is based on a rubric, which is used to assign a percentage score out of 100.

Assessment Findings

NOTE applicable to A, B, & C: We only have tracking exam assessment data from one section (30 students) of ECON 4999 in Spring 2014 to report this assessment cycle.

- A. See the attached document titled *ECON undergrad program SLO1 results 2013-2014* for the questions and results for SLO1. Our overall target for SLO1 was met because the average percentage of correct answers is 67.8%. Six of the ten assessment questions have a 65% or better percentage correct.
- B. See the attached document titled *ECON undergrad program SLO2 results 2013-2014* for the questions and results for SLO2. Our overall target for SLO2 was not met because the average percentage of correct answers is only 61%. Five of the ten assessment questions have a 65% or better percentage correct.
- C. See the attached document titled *ECON undergrad program SLO3 results 2013-2014* for the questions and results for SLO3. Our overall target for SLO3 was not met because the average percentage of correct answers is only 54.3%. Three of the eight assessment questions have a 65% or better percentage correct.
- D. See the attached documents titled *CTW Report 2013-2014 ECON 4999*, *CTW Report 2013-2014 ECON 3900* for the results for SLO4 (and our CTW learning outcome). Rubrics for the two courses are also included in the document repository. Our targets and findings for the assessment in ECON 4999 course are listed in the report document. All stated targets for ECON 4999 were met. Targets for ECON 3900 are not explicitly stated in the report document, but we see the median score on the final draft of the CTW assignment results reported is

above 80% in most cases, and overall there is improvement in the scores from the draft to the final (with greater improvement when the median scores are lower).

Analysis of Assessment Results

The results are similar to what we have seen in past years. Overall, we are generally pleased with the assessment results, even though there is room for improvement. Perhaps part of the problem is the assessment instrument we used for the tracking exams. We are changing the assessment instrument for the tracking exams in the next assessment cycle (see the Use of Assessment Findings section below for more details). Also, we will work on establishing more clear targets for the learning outcomes in the future, especially for ECON 3900.

Sharing and Discussion of Assessment Findings (optional in 2013-2014)

As usual, the Economics Undergraduate Program Committee (UPC) discussed the assessment targets and findings, as well as assessment instruments. There has also been consultation and discussion with the chair of the department and staff in the AYSPS-OAA.

Use of Assessment Findings for Program Improvement

Several changes have occurred recently, both at the front-end and the back-end of our undergraduate curriculum. A summary is provided below.

Principles courses changes: We decided to redesign our principles of economics courses (ECON 2105: macro; ECON: micro) starting in fall 2014. Two faculty were designated as coordinators of each course (ECON 2105: Grace O; ECON 2106: Shelby Frost), and were charged with redesigning each course suitable for stronger standardization across all sections – more than we have ever done in the past. As part of this process, we adopted a new textbook and online homework management system, requiring all instructors to use them, and strongly recommending that they follow a similar grading system (GTAs and PTIs were required to adopt the template courses; full-time faculty had the option to deviate from the template, but many opted to adopt it). A major part of the redesign (upon recommendation of the UPC) was to use a “less is more” approach to teaching principles. We decided to have fewer topics covered in each course so that students could really concentrate on the basic core concepts, with the hope that students will worry less about rote calculations and learn more about basic economic intuition. Another change coming soon is the new assessment instruments we will start using in fall 2014: we have selected an appropriate subset of questions from the *Test of Understanding in College Economics* (TUCE), a nationally-normed instrument consisting of 30 macro questions and 30 micro questions. For more info on the TUCE, see <http://www.councilforeconed.org/resource/test-understanding-in-college-economics/>. We think this will be a more meaning instrument for the future, providing external validity and reliability, as well as giving us an opportunity to compare our students to others across the nation who took the same exam. This new plan for principles is probably the most significant program change we have made in recent years, and it was in part driven by previous cycles’ assessment results.

Capstone Course changes: In the past, the ECON 4999 course was team taught by two instructors (one focusing more on micro topics, one more on macro topics), and they each taught all the students enrolled in the two sections offered. Essentially, the courses were identical, except the order in which the topics were presented. We have redesigned the course. Now several different sections will be offered each semester, each with a different theme (e.g., poverty, urban/housing econ, behavioral econ). We piloted a section of ECON 4999 with the poverty theme in fall 2013. In fall 2014, all sections offered are taught with a different theme (poverty, urban/housing econ, behavioral econ). The courses still have core elements the same (e.g., CTW assignments are still included – although they also vary in nature across sections, the tracking exam is still administered – although, we now use the same subset of TUCE questions as we now use in the principles courses), but the applications of the core economic concepts are different for each section. We think this will make it more appealing to the students who can self-select into the section with the theme that most interests them. And we believe it will increase the number of

instructors who are interested in teaching the course because they can teach about topics in their area of expertise. We have a CTW coordinator for the course (currently Glenwood Ross), who will oversee the CTW components of the course and gather assessment data to report to the Undergraduate Assessment Coordinator for the department (currently Shelby Frost).

Other curriculum changes: We have also created a CTW coordinator for ECON 3900 (currently Grace O), who will oversee the CTW components of that course and gather assessment data to report to the Undergraduate Assessment Coordinator for the department (currently Shelby Frost). In the past, we did not coordinate the assessment data from that course particularly well, in part because there was high turnover in the course instructors. We believe this is a step in the right direction to more standardize what is taught across the various sections of the course. This aligns with our overall goal of improving the undergraduate experience in economics. We are still working on a full review of the undergraduate program curriculum. In addition to formal curriculum changes, we also aim to increase the opportunities for students to interact with, and get advice from, our faculty in order to help them succeed in our program and reach their future goals. We have created new recommended course lists to better guide students in their choices, depending on their goals after graduation (for example, suggesting more math courses for students planning to attend graduate school). We held an economics undergraduate orientation in fall 2014, and plan to engage students in the program with events like this in the future. We are also considering new models of how to assign students to faculty mentors. We are still working on much of this, but the discussions have been deep and meaningful. We plan to perform some more formal research on the curriculum changes we are making to ensure that future curriculum changes are evidence based.

Supporting Documents

All files referred to in this report are uploaded separately into SLOAP as PDF files. Relevant files for this report: *ECON undergrad program SLO1 results 2013-2014*, *ECON undergrad program SLO2 results 2013-2014*, *ECON undergrad program SLO3 results 2013-2014*, *CTW Report 2013-2014 ECON 4999*, *CTW Report 2013-2014 ECON 3900*, *ECON 4999 CTW assignment and rubric*, and *CTW 3900 Rubric*.