



Core Curriculum Assessment Report 2011_12

Department Economics

Representative Randy Beard

Course Name / number ECON2030

1. AGSC Content Area of Alignment: Area IV: History, Social and Behavior Sciences

2. SLO(s) being assessed: Student will..

SLO 8: Students will be informed and engaged citizens of the U.S. and the world.

3. Assessment Method(s):

[Explain how assessment for the measures associated with this SLO - not grading for the course as a whole - was conducted. You may cut/paste rubrics for inclusion here, identify faculty reviewing committees, or identify specific kinds of test questions important to your method. Is this the method you initially planned to use? Provide a separate paragraph for each method].

Assessment was conducted using common questions included in multiple choice exams for sections of ECON2020 and ECON2030. The questions were developed by a committee composed of department faculty, including all affected instructors, and other interested persons. Questions differed between ECON2020 and ECON2030. Four questions were used in both cases. The assessment questions were designed to evaluate the abilities of students to apply basic economic principles to problems of global/international significance. Competence in basic economics applied to international economic relations was felt by the department committee to be a necessary skill for informed participation as envisioned in SLO8.

4. Findings: What assessment data did each assessment method produce?

A total of 897 students, taking classes from six different instructors, answered the questions used in ECON 2020, Principles of Microeconomics. A sample of 440 students did so for ECON 2030, Principles of Macroeconomics, covering three sections of the course for Spring 2012. Frequencies of correct answers were compiled for each question for each section. While differences in the frequencies of correct answers across instructors may be useful information for pedagogical purposes, the assessment reported here aggregates the results across all sections/instructors because our focus is purely on assessment of our performance in the context of SLO8. Proportions of correct answers are: ECON 2020 Principles of Microeconomics1. 82.22. 86.83. 54.54. 86.2group average 77.4ECON 2030 Principles of Macroeconomics1. 56.42. 93.93. 51.34. 84.3group average 71.5We also noted particularly low or unexplained scores or unusual variation in scores across sections. In most cases, investigation revealed these results were due to omission of some particular information from some courses.

5. How did you (or will you) use the findings for improvement?

[What questions / issues / concerns did your data raise for the faculty teaching the course? What discussion did the faculty have about the findings? What future actions to improve student attainment of this outcome will the department / program take as a result of this analysis?]

While we intend to use some results to assist several instructors in specification of their syllabi and course content, our focus here is solely on the use of the aggregate results for curriculum improvement. We compared our frequencies of correct responses this time with our previous results. (The questions we use are highly similar, but are adjusted a bit each time to change their appearances.) We noted at least some modest success in several areas we previously identified as requiring tweaking. First, we had a significant improvement in students' abilities to identify important public figures associated with economic policy, viz. Ben Bernanke. Connecting our lectures to news items associated with the ongoing financial crises in Europe and the U.S. appears to be at least somewhat effective in this regard. The kids also find it interesting. Second, feedback from our previous assessments did appear to lead to some improvement in the students' grasp of basic principles such as comparative advantage. We have identified this as perhaps the most important economic concept in global trade and international economic relations, at least in the long run, so this is a worthwhile



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outcome. While relative improvements are desirable, we remain somewhat disenchanted with student performance in a few areas identified by our questions, and critical to effective national and global citizenship. First, we remain dismayed at how many students seem to think that increases in the legal minimum wage is a desirable means to address either income inequality or youth unemployment. As economists we suspect that this myopia results from the constant repetition of this idea in the media among political actors and ideologues. We intend to discuss this further. We are also not satisfied with students' basic understanding of national income accounting, and the roles of international trade in these accounts. Those teaching macroeconomics will discuss this problem.

6. Additional Comments:

[What else would you like the Committee to know about your assessment of this course or plans for the future?]

We have fulfilled our earlier commitment to expand the assessment process fully to ECON 2030, Principles of Macroeconomics. This course is a natural component of our effort to promote SLO8: it is, in fact, easier to focus on engaged citizen themes in ECON 2030 than in ECON 2020. However, we have not yet settled on an entirely satisfactory set of assessment questions. This is a very challenging problem because the department tries to allow individual instructors as much freedom in curriculum design as is consistent with our overall programmatic needs. In Microeconomics, on the other hand, there is almost no disagreement on what material should always be included in any principles-level course. We will have further discussions to refine the questions for macroeconomic applications.

7. Committee Comments

Mean of rubric score = 3.41 (out of 4) Methods seem clear enough. /Methods are clear but not tied directly to goals. Hard to understand the rationale all the way through/Tell me what the specifics of the four essay questions. I'm never going to agree that asking multiple choice questions is sufficient for SLO 8. I understand that there are a lot of students in the class, so it's not necessarily the department's fault. That said, the gist of SLO 8 is analysis and description, and I just don't think that can be covered with multiple choice questions -- especially ones that don't measure against something else (like an early semester pre-test). Again, the fault here is systemic, not with the class -- but we need some original thinking here to figure out ways to really measure this. / There is large variation in the percent correct so a group average is meaningless. It would be nice to know that these four questions represented. The answers to the questions they ask show improvement from the last set, but also areas of concern. These seem like perfectly logical conclusions to draw/Clear and logical conclusions. It is difficult to see how the findings were used to change teaching strategies.