

OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT POLICIES & PROCEDURES
Department of Economics

A. Assessment Philosophy

The ultimate purpose of Student Outcomes Assessment is to enhance the educational experience of current and future students. Our Student Outcomes Assessment program is designed to generate information that will give us a clearer picture of our students' strengths and weaknesses as well as post-graduation success. That, in turn, allows us to identify areas where improvements to our program might be necessary or desirable. Once implemented, the changes can be examined for effectiveness through future outcomes assessment measurements.

B. Student Outcomes and Competencies

Students who earn a BA in economics should have a solid grasp of economic theory and be able to predict the consequences of national and international economic events. In addition, our graduates should have strong written and oral communication skills and well developed abstract reasoning skills. To help achieve these results, The Department of Economics has established five outcomes for its graduates:

OUTCOME 1 Graduates shall have a good understanding of economic theory.

- Competency 1.1 Understand the economic theories concerning the behavior of consumers and of firms.
- Competency 1.2 Understand the strengths and weaknesses of the market system.
- Competency 1.3 Understand the determination of national income, output and employment.

OUTCOME 2 Graduates shall be able to predict the consequences of economic events

- Competency 2.1 Be able to predict the economic consequences of public policy actions.
- Competency 2.2 Be able to predict the economic consequences of events in the private sector.

OUTCOME 3 Graduates shall develop the ability to engage in abstract reasoning

- Competency 3.1 Be able to engage in deductive and inductive reasoning.

- Competency 3.2 Be able to make reasonable abstractions so as to better focus economic problems.
- Competency 3.3 Be able to synthesize and interpret economic information.

OUTCOME 4 Graduates shall be able to communicate effectively.

- Competency 4.1 Be able to write clearly
- Competency 4.2 Be able to speak clearly.

OUTCOME 5 Graduates shall have a global economic perspective.

- Competency 5.1 Understand global economic relationships.
- Competency 5.2 Understand the domestic effects of changes in the international economy.

C. Frequency of assessment

Students are assessed in the Spring semester of their senior year. Most of our students do not begin their college careers as economics majors. In addition, there is no rigid sequence in which economics courses must be taken. Principles of Macroeconomics and Principles of Microeconomics are the only prerequisites for almost all of the advanced courses in economics. As a result, any earlier assessment would find that some students have large gaps in their backgrounds. The only consistent and meaningful way to assess all of our students is to do so at the end of their career. In addition, a satisfaction/opinion survey is administered to graduating seniors and also periodically to alumni.

D. Assessment method 1: Directed Research in Economics

It is our thinking the best way to gauge our students' abilities is to closely observe them "doing economics." To that end, the department has a course specifically for the purpose of Student Outcomes Assessment. The course, entitled "Directed Research in Economics" is a senior-level capstone course required for all of our majors. While this class forms the foundation of our Outcomes Assessment Program, within the course, outcomes are measured in a variety of ways. In the Directed Research course, there are four ways to evaluate our students' competencies:

1. Each student writes a research paper.

A research paper is at the core of the course. Students choose their own research topic and develop a research question. They research the question, analyze what they find, and write a term paper. In the paper every student is expected to demonstrate most of the competencies listed in part B above. Not every paper will demonstrate every competency because

topics vary. For example, a paper with a microeconomic focus is not expected to demonstrate knowledge of how national income is determined. But precisely because topics do vary, the set of topics chosen by the class will collectively touch on every competency. All topics are approved by the class professor before research begins.

All students are required to turn in a minimum of two formal drafts of the paper although it is common for the professor to see more. The first is read and critiqued in great detail by the professor. The students react to the critique and use it to produce a next, or occasionally final, draft. The papers allow the professor to gauge the extent to which the students have mastered the competencies listed above. While considerable guidance is provided, the burden of demonstrating competencies through a well researched and written paper lies principally with the students.

As an added incentive to maximize the quality of papers, at the end of the semester the best papers are published in *Major Themes in Economics*. *Major Themes* is published in both print and online forms.

2. Each student presents a research paper.

Students make two formal presentations in the course. The first is a presentation of their research question and the sources they have found during their preliminary research. The second is a presentation of their final results. In both presentations students are expected to answer questions about their work. Like the papers, the presentations demonstrate many of the competencies we are looking for, but special emphasis is given to competency 4.2 (speak clearly). The oral presentations are made to the whole class. The students in the audience are expected to ask questions and make comments. As they do so, the professor can also gauge the competency of the questioner.

3. Students critique other students' papers and presentations.

During the term, the class is divided into small "writing groups." The members of each group read and critique each others' papers. They are instructed to critique both the style and the substance of the paper. This gives them an opportunity to help each other meet the competencies demonstrated by the papers. While not a specific competency, it is recognized students are consumers as well as producers of economic information. As such, it is useful to be able to critically analyze the work of others.

4. End-of-program exams are administered.

Two class days are used to administer exams to the class. The students are not expected to study for these exams. Our intent is to measure how much students have learned throughout the course of their program of study.

The first test is an essay test which also allows students to demonstrate their writing ability as well content knowledge. The test focuses on outcomes 1, 3 and 5. It not only provides an additional source of information, but can fill in any gaps not covered by the papers.

Students also may take a multiple choice test called the Test of Understanding College Economics (TUCE) developed by the National Council on Economic Education. The TUCE covers a near exhaustive variety of topics in both macroeconomics and microeconomics. The test is a nationally normed test and has considerable data accompanying it which provides a basis for a comparison between our students and those from around the country.

Both exams are administered to students when class size allows. Occasionally, with large classes, only one test is used. The choice of the appropriate test rests with the course professor.

Summary Table

The following table shows which outcomes can be evaluated by each activity:

Outcome	Paper	Presentations	Student Participation	End-of-program exams
1. Understand economic theory	X	X	X	X
2. Predict consequences	X	X		X
3. Reasoning	X	X	X	X
4. Communications	X	X	X	
5. Global perspective	X	X	X	X

5. Students are Evaluated.

From all sources of information, the Directed Research in Economics professor evaluates each student on each outcome using a 1 to 5 scale. While this measure is subjective, it is done every year by the same person, the professor in the Directed Research in Economics class. Since the department has made the conscious decision to have the course taught by the same person every year, the possibility for inter-temporal inconsistent evaluations is minimized.

E. Assessment Method 2: Graduate Survey

At the end of every term, all graduating students are given a survey designed to measure the degree of satisfaction with the Economics major. The survey covers courses taken, various activities available to economics majors and open ended questions asking about strengths weakness and potential improvements. The department head receives and studies all returned surveys although all faculty have access to them.

F. Assessment Method 3: Alumni Survey

Periodically, a subset of the alumni is surveyed about their opinions of the economics program. The sample is typically alumni who graduated in the previous five and ten period. The survey questions focus on career path, salaries and their recollection of the economics program and its strengths and weaknesses. Again, it is the responsibility of the department head to receive and study all returned surveys and of course, they are available to all faculty.

G. Method of evaluating and interpreting results

The information provided by the three assessment methods comprising the Outcomes Assessment Program are shared with the entire faculty at the first department meeting of the fall semester. The information is discussed and any weaknesses in student competencies or satisfaction set in motion actions to improve future student outcomes. If weaknesses can be traced to particular courses, faculty teaching those courses are asked to examine their course content and recommend changes for improvement. If the weaknesses appear to be program wide or structural, all faculty are asked to devise ways to improve on those weaknesses. While faculty are responsible for suggesting changes, it is the responsibility of the department head to see the changes are fully implemented and incorporated into specific courses or the entire program, where necessary.