**Economics BA/BS – Programmatic Learning Outcomes Assessment**

**Report for academic year 2016-2017: Pilot assessments.   
Draft version June 2017; discussed and approved by departmental UG committee 9/6/2017.**

The faculty of the Department of Economics, in a general meeting in March 2016, approved programmatic **Learning Outcomes** in three general categories:

1. Knowledge Base;
2. Scientific Inquiry, Critical Thinking and Quantitative Reasoning; and
3. Communication Skills and Professional Development.

Successful performance in each of these categories ensures that a graduating major understands deeply the key concepts of the discipline; can apply those concepts, along with quantitative tools, to phenomena in the world in order to draw conclusions about theory and policy; and can communicate their understanding and insights in a professional and persuasive way.

This report summarizes the (1) pilot assessment in the Fall of 2016, (2) the assessment procedure applied in this assessment cycle (Spring 2017), (3) the currently used LOAs, and (4) the assessment outcomes; and (5) proposes revisions to the procedures in light of outcomes, experience and further information on assessment procedures.

**1 – Pilot assessment, Fall 2016:**

The pilot assessment during Fall of 2016 was conducted to gain first experience with identification of artefacts that are relevant with regard to the department’s learning outcomes. The pilot assessment focused on core courses (Econ 2010, 2020 and Econ 4020) as well as one focus area course (Econ 5470). The artefacts chosen covered all LOs (1.1.-3.2., see list in section 3 below as well as Table 3.1).

**2 - Assessment procedure:**

The assessment during Spring 2017 is the first after piloting assessments in the previous semester, and is the first to be run through a newly created Canvas “course.”

The UG committee (Chair, UG director, three faculty members) will be invited as TAs in the course, and instructors of to-be-assessed courses as students. In following semesters, as assessed courses as well as committee members rotate, participants in the course are enrolled as necessary.

In general, we will assess all four core theory courses and one course from each focus area. The latter three will rotate, so as to cover a variety of instructors and courses. Instructors will receive requests to electronically submit three selected artefacts on specific LOAs around midterm and finals time. For each artefact, these three selected pieces of student work should represent “excellent, good and bad” work. Handwritten student work should be scanned and appropriately labeled. The UG committee submits a report based on review of these to the chair by June 30. (To identify relevant artefacts, please label files, for example, as “*ECON 4020 LO 1.1 excellent*”or “*ECON 4020 LO 2.1-2.3 poor*” if the artefact pertains to several LOAs. See the LOAs outlined below for detailed information.)

The Canvas course provides space for discussion and feedback on LOAs as well as related procedures.

Courses assessed in Spring 2017 are listed in the following table:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  | **Spring 2017** |  |
|  |  |  | **Taught by** | **Assessed** |
| 1 | Core | **2010** | Bannister | x |
| 2 | Core | **2020** | Rada | x |
| 3 | Core | **4010** | Dugar | x |
| 4 | Core | **4020** | Mendieta-Munoz | x |
| 5 | FA/Metrics | **4650** | Sjoberg | x |
| 6 | Doc/Keynes | **5050** |  |  |
| 7 | Doc/Doctrines | **5060** | Nukulkit | x |
| 8 | Doc/Marxian | **5080** | Cantekin |  |
| 9 | His/ME | **5400** | Baraghoshi |  |
| 10 | His/EU | **5410** |  |  |
| 11 | His/China | **5420** |  |  |
| 12 | His/Asia | **5430** | Li | x |
| 13 | His/LA | **5460** | Guerrero |  |
| 14 | His/US | **5470** | Philips |  |

**Table 2-1**

These courses are taught by instructors with different levels of experience. We will aim to cover all ranks in all years.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Fall | Spring | Fall |
|  | 2016 | 2017 | 2017 |
| Instructor |  | 1 |  |
| Lecturer | 2 | 1 |  |
| Assistant | 1 | 2 |  |
| Associate |  | 3 |  |
| Full | 1 |  |  |

**Table 2-2**

**3 - Expected Learning Outcomes**

1. **Knowledge base**:

Students should demonstrate fundamental knowledge and comprehension of the major concepts, theoretical perspectives, historical trends, and empirical findings to discuss how economic principles apply to socio-economic problems. Students completing *Principles* courses should demonstrate breadth of their knowledge and application of economic ideas to simple problems; students completing a baccalaureate degree should show depth in their knowledge and application of economic concepts and frameworks to problems of greater complexity.

* 1. *Describe key concepts, principles, and overarching themes in economics.*

***Artefacts to be collected from Econ 2010, Econ 2020, Econ 4010, Econ 4020***

* 1. *Differentiate fields and describe relevant applications.*

***Artefacts to be collected from Econ 2010, Econ 2020, Econ 4010, Econ 4020***

* 1. *Define and distinguish schools of thought.*

***Artefacts to be collected from Econ 2010, Econ 2020, Econ 4010, Econ 4020, History FA courses, Doctrines FA courses***

1. **Scientific inquiry, critical thinking and quantitative reasoning**:

The skills in this domain involve the development of scientific reasoning and problem solving, including effective research methods. Students completing *Principles* courses should learn basic skills and concepts in describing economic phenomena, evaluating economic policy and critically examining societal interactions; students completing a baccalaureate degree should argue on these matters based on theory, formal models and empirical evidence.

* 1. *Use scientific reasoning to interpret economic phenomena.*

***Artefacts to be collected from Econ 2010, Econ 2020, Econ 4010, Econ 4020, Econ 4650***

* 1. *Demonstrate literacy in basic quantitative methods.*

***Artefacts to be collected from Econ 2010, Econ 2020, Econ 4010, Econ 4020, Econ 4650***

* 1. ***Critically evaluate economic theories and their policy implications.***

***Artefacts to be collected from Econ 2010, Econ 2020, Econ 4010, Econ 4020, History FA courses***

1. **Communication skills and professional development**

Students should demonstrate competence in writing, oral, and interpersonal communication skills. These skills are mainly developed in advanced major courses. Students completing a baccalaureate degree should demonstrate the ability to write a cogent scientific argument, explain scientific results, and develop these skills at greater depth. These skills refer to abilities that sharpen student readiness for postbaccalaureate employment, graduate school, or professional school.

* 1. *Demonstrate effective writing for different purposes.*

***Artefacts to be collected from History FA courses, Doctrines FA courses***

* 1. *Demonstrate effective presentation design.*

***Artefacts to be collected from History FA courses, Doctrines FA courses***

The above list of LOAs implies the following “assessment matrix,” meaning that the numbered LOAs in the three main categories *might* be assessed within all of the marked courses. This is relevant in the context of the assessment procedure applied in this cycle: instructors were asked to *self-select* student work and assign them to (possibly a set of) LOAs.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | **Professional** | |
|  |  |  | **Knowledge base** | |  | **Scientific inquiry** | |  | **development** | |
|  |  |  | 1.1. | 1.2. | 1.3. | 2.1. | 2.2. | 2.3. | 3.1. | 3.2. |
| 1 | Core | **2010** | x | x | x | x | x | x |  |  |
| 2 | Core | **2020** | x | x | x | x | x | x |  |  |
| 3 | Core | **4010** | x | x | x | x | x | x |  |  |
| 4 | Core | **4020** | x | x | x | x | x | x |  |  |
| 5 | FA/Metrics | **4650** |  |  | x | x | x |  | x | x |
| 6 | Doc/Keynes | **5050** |  |  | x |  |  |  | x | x |
| 7 | Doc/Doctrines | **5060** |  |  | x |  |  |  | x | x |
| 8 | Doc/Marxian | **5080** |  |  | x |  |  |  | x | x |
| 9 | His/ME | **5400** |  |  | x |  |  | x | x | x |
| 10 | His/EU | **5410** |  |  | x |  |  | x | x | X |
| 11 | His/China | **5420** |  |  | x |  |  | x | x | X |
| 12 | His/Asia | **5430** |  |  | x |  |  | x | x | X |
| 13 | His/LA | **5460** |  |  | x |  |  | x | x | X |
| 14 | His/US | **5470** |  |  | x |  |  | x | x | X |

**Table 3-1**

**4 - Assessment outcomes**

We focus here on an overview. The artefacts have been reviewed and discussed by the chair and undergraduate director. In summary, artefacts do demonstrate students’ ability to engage the material in line with the learning outcomes delineated above. However, the sheer number of artefacts made a more comprehensive and formal review burdensome. Further, the distribution of LOs across assessed courses is uneven. In light of these observations, the following section suggests revisions to assessment procedure, to be discussed by the UG committee at the beginning of the next assessment cycle (Fall 2017).

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | **Professional** | |
|  | **MIDTERM** |  | **Knowledge base** | |  | **Scientific inquiry** | |  | **development** | |
|  | **ARTEFACTS** |  | 1.1. | 1.2. | 1.3. | 2.1. | 2.2. | 2.3. | 3.1. | 3.2. |
| 1 | Core | **2010** | x | x | x | x | x |  |  |  |
| 2 | Core | **2020** | x | x | x | x | x |  |  |  |
| 3 | Core | **4010** |  |  |  | x | x |  |  |  |
| 4 | Core | **4020** | x |  |  | x | x | x |  |  |
| 5 | FA/Metrics | **4650** |  |  |  | x | x |  |  |  |
| 6 | Doc/Keynes | **5050** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 7 | Doc/Doctrines | **5060** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | x |
| 8 | Doc/Marxian | **5080** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 9 | His/ME | **5400** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 10 | His/EU | **5410** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 11 | His/China | **5420** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 12 | His/Asia | **5430** |  |  |  |  |  |  | x | x |
| 13 | His/LA | **5460** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 14 | His/US | **5470** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Table 4-1:**

Table 4-1 shows midterm artefacts from assessed courses and the LOAs they cover.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | **Professional** | |
|  | **FINAL** |  | **Knowledge base** | |  | **Scientific inquiry** | |  | **development** | |
|  | **ARTEFACTS** | | 1.1. | 1.2. | 1.3. | 2.1. | 2.2. | 2.3. | 3.1. | 3.2. |
| 1 | Core | **2010** | x | x | x | x | x |  |  |  |
| 2 | Core | **2020** | x | x | x | x | x |  |  |  |
| 3 | Core | **4010** |  |  |  | x | x |  |  |  |
| 4 | Core | **4020** | x |  |  | x | x | x |  |  |
| 5 | FA/Metrics | **4650** |  |  |  | x | x |  |  |  |
| 6 | Doc/Keynes | **5050** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 7 | Doc/Doctrines | **5060** |  |  | x |  |  |  | x |  |
| 8 | Doc/Marxian | **5080** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 9 | His/ME | **5400** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 10 | His/EU | **5410** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 11 | His/China | **5420** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 12 | His/Asia | **5430** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | x |
| 13 | His/LA | **5460** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 14 | His/US | **5470** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Table 4-2**

Table 4-2 shows finals artefacts from assessed courses and the LOAs they cover.

**5 - Proposal for assessment revisions**

This section provides a summary of proposed revisions to the LOAs and related procedures. The intent is to further simplify and clarify the assessment process. To that end, the UG committee is tasked to focus on the *assessment procedures* rather than the *learning outcomes*. The proposed revisions are based on our experience, information posted on the University’s LO [website](http://ugs.utah.edu/learning-outcomes-assessment/), as well as “best practices” by other units, as gleaned from the UGS (and newly formed *Office of Learning Outcomes Assessment*) workshop on LOAs in April 2017. These proposed revisions need to be discussed by the UG committee in the department before the next assessment cycle begins.

1. **Disperse and differentiate LOAs across the assessment matrix** (Table 2-1).

The assessment matrix is “top-left” heavy: the majority of LOAs under headings 1 and 2 are assigned to core courses, and most LOAs covered in FA courses are “communication-related.” This seems unnecessary. By assigning LOAs to courses, the committee should consider the question *whether this topic is covered in the class*, as well as *whether these are primary or secondary learning activities*. Hence, the matrix can be quite densely populated with “P” for primary activities, and “S” for secondary. However, neither designation implies assessment in any given cycle:

1. **Assess each LO in one course per cycle**.

To simplify the assessment process, each LO should be assessed only *once per cycle*. Presumably, the assessed goals should be *primary* in the respective course. The UG chair/committee assigns goals and courses on a rotating basis in order to cover core courses, FA courses, possibly select electives, and different instructor levels. This method ensures that all goals are assessed each year, but the burden on instructors and reviewers is limited. This further has the advantage that *discussion* of artefacts and assessment outcomes could be more in-depth. To match the assessed courses (currently 7) with LOAs (currently 8), the committee could either eliminate/consolidate one LO, or add an elective each year to the assessment cycle; or find some equivalent procedure.

1. **Assign “course stewards:”**

The UG committee should seek to assign to each course on the roster a faculty member (of any rank) as a course steward. The course steward should supervise assignment of primary and secondary learning outcomes to her course. A course steward might further facilitate information dissemination and serve as a point of contact for graduate instructors of the specific course.

1. **Assess only once per semester**.

There seems to be little added benefit to assessing midterm and finals artefacts. It would make sense to collect *one* set of artefacts towards the end of the course, to cover *one LO*.

1. **Augment assessment of three artefacts with summary statistics & overview of assignment**.

Suppose the department targets eight LOs, one each in eight courses, with three artefacts collected once per semester. Instructor submits three artefacts and an overview sheet of the student work selected: how does it apply to the LO? What are the average grades? Did students overall do well, or where did they not understand the assignment or material substance? Can improvements be made? In this manner, instructors select *one* set of artefacts with its summary in response to their LO assigned by the UG committee; and the committee has to review 24 artefacts with 8 summaries to support that.