



Annual Departmental Assessment Report

Department: Economics
Year: AY19-20
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Section 1: Learning Objectives Assessed for the Economics Major

1. Proficiency in microeconomic analysis, which applies to EC 201
2. Proficiency in macroeconomic analysis, which applies to EC 202

Section 2: Assessment Activities

A previous assessment was based on data collected in Spring 2017. Professors Keaton Miller and Jeremy Piger collected data based on student performance in their EC 201 and EC 202 classes, respectively. Each professor selected three central concepts, as indicated in table 1, and then identified on their final exams an “easy” and a “hard” question associated with each concept. The performance of the students on these questions comprised the collected data.

Table 1: Spring 2017 Central Concepts

Course	Concepts		
EC 201	opportunity cost	pareto efficiency	marginal thinking
EC 202	monetary policy	unemployment	inflation

In order to establish and assess trend patterns, the analogous data were collected by the same professors in the same classes in Spring 2019. The comparative results are presented below.

Section 2.1: Assessment of proficiency in microeconomic analysis.

Table 2 presents the outcomes of both the Spring 2017 assessment and the Spring 2019 assessment of EC 201 concepts.

Table 2: Micro: percent of students answering question correctly

	opportunity cost		pareto efficiency		marginal thinking	
term	S17	S19	S17	S19	S17	S19
easy	90%	90%	53%	85%	80%	94%
hard	50%	80%	87%	32%	61%	54%

There are positive signs. Students continue to demonstrate basic understanding of opportunity cost and marginal thinking (a term I despise, though the concept is paramount), and great improvement of performance is seen on the the easy question about pareto efficiency (which is perhaps the

most subtle concept among the three). Turning to the hard-question outcomes, we see indication of an improved understanding of more nuanced aspects of opportunity cost, and the students' performance on the marginal thinking question, while somewhat lower, does not appear to reflect a substantive decline in understanding (by which I mean that I think it's likely there is no statistically significant distinction between performances). The sharp decline in performance on the hard pareto efficiency question is troubling. As acknowledged in a previous report, there was some indication that the 2017 score of 87% was anomalous and reflected the possibility of mechanically answering the relevant question correctly; in particular, it seems that the 87% score received in Spring 2017 did not necessarily reflect a nuanced understanding of pareto efficiency. However, even ignoring the magnitude of the relative decline in scores and focusing instead on absolute outcomes, a 32% success rate is problematic.

Section 2.2: Assessment of proficiency in macroeconomic analysis.

Table 3 presents the outcomes of both the Spring 2017 assessment and the Spring 2019 assessment of EC 202 concepts.

Table 3: Macro: percent of students answering question correctly

	monetary policy		unemployment		inflation	
term	S17	S19	S17	S19	S17	S19
easy	51%	55%	90%	97%	96%	98%
hard	41%	36%	46%	51%	72%	73%

The results here are remarkable in their consistency. The basics of unemployment and inflation remain well-understood, and even the nuances of inflation continue to be internalized by students. And, student understanding of monetary policy continues to be limited, with poor performances even on the easy questions.

Section 3: Actions Taken Based on Assessment Analysis

The results of the assessment will be communicated to appropriate instructional employees, with suggestions for improving outcomes. Given the noted trends now evident with two years of data collection, renewed emphasis on pareto efficiency and monetary policy will be advised.

Section 4: Other Efforts to Improve the Student Educational Experience

The economics department has successfully launched the new applied masters program, with an unexpectedly large inaugural class of 15 students, as well as considerable interest expressed in the program by current undergraduates. Efforts and resources will continue to be directed towards this program with the purpose of solidifying its strong start; it is our view that, if appropriately nurtured, this program will grow in its attractiveness as an avenue for UO undergrads to obtain affordable graduate education.

Section 5: Plans for Next Year

We will collect data from some of our intermediate level theory courses in order to assess the intellectual development of our majors.