

EVALUATION REPORT

Foundation for Teaching Economics
2012 Programs in Economics Education

Submitted by
Dana Kelly
and Ina V.S. Mullis
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Introduction

Our independent evaluation of the Foundation for Teaching Economics' 2012 programs for teachers and students¹ included the following programs:

- 13 Economics for Leaders (7 student-and-teacher sessions and 6 student-only sessions)
- 3 Economic Forces in American History
- 5 Economic Forces in American History: One-day Program
- 8 Environment and the Economy
- 2 Issues of International Trade
- 1 Is Capitalism Good for the Poor?
- 1 The Economics of Disasters
- 4 Teaching Economic Issues
- 2 The Right Start in Teaching Economics
- 6 Online courses: 2 Economics Online for Teachers-Part 1, 1 Economics Online for Teachers-Part 2, 1 Economics of Disasters Online, 1 Is Capitalism Good for the Poor Online, and 1 Economic Demise of the Soviet Union

Our evaluation is based on feedback from more than 1,500 individuals (more than 500 high school students and more than 1,000 teachers) served by FTE programs this past year. Participants in all programs completed questionnaires at the conclusion of the program, rating and providing written comments about the instructors, content, materials, program format, and accommodations, among other things. The evaluation instruments for the Economics for Leaders program and the online courses also included pre-tests and end-of-course tests aligned with course content to provide information about the impact of the program on learning. Teachers who participated in FTE programs in 2011 responded to follow-up surveys regarding their use of FTE materials in the classroom and the impact of the program on their teaching. Follow-up data from more than 174 teachers are included in this report, although there is no follow-up data available for some programs because of low response rates.²

Overwhelmingly and consistently, across the programs delivered this year, participants applauded:

- the quality of the instructional staff, including their knowledge, enthusiasm, professionalism, and approachability;
- the clarity and comprehensiveness of the lessons and materials; and

¹ Programs evaluated include programs conducted from September 2011 through early August 2012.

² In general, response rates for the follow-up surveys were quite low, and for some programs too few teachers responded to report meaningful results. FTE might consider revising its approach to gathering follow-up information given the low response rates.

- the practical nature of the courses, particularly the clear and engaging hands-on activities that teachers can implement in their own classrooms.

Across programs, teachers raved about how much they have learned and how excited they are to return to the classroom with new knowledge and hands-on, engaging activities for students. In follow-up surveys teachers reported that they have used the materials with their students. Students in the Economics for Leaders program praised the instructional staff for their knowledge and communication styles and are extremely enthusiastic about how much they have learned and grown as a result of the Economics for Leaders program. Finally, there was a 10 percentage point gain from pre- to post-test, on average, in the Economics for Leaders program. There were impressive learning gains in the on-line courses for teachers as well.

In 2012, as in past years, FTE has provided students and teachers with an exceptional set of programs, each of which is having a remarkable impact on participants and, in turn, economics teaching and learning.

In each section below, the results from evaluations completed by program participants are summarized. When applicable, test results are described. Follow-up surveys completed by teachers in last year's program are discussed when available.

Economics for Leaders

Test of Students' Economic Understanding

Students' understanding of the Economics for Leaders economics curriculum was measured by a test given to all students at the end of the week-long sessions. This test, introduced in 2008, comprises 30 multiple-choice questions from the U.S. Department of Education's National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)—*The Nation's Report Card*—2006 economics assessment.³ After the 2006 NAEP economics assessment, 53 questions were made available to public. Economics content experts selected from these questions (items) 30 multiple-choice questions with the strongest relationship to the tools of economic reasoning and the five economic reasoning principles at the heart of the Economics for Leaders course curriculum to serve as the test of economic understanding. A short pre-test based on these questions was given to students at the beginning of the week in order to provide a means of gauging learning gains.

On average across all program sites, the average percent correct on the end-of-course test was 82, a 10-percentage-point increase from the pre-test (tables 1 and 2). Performance on the end-of-course test ranged from 76 percent correct in the Seattle program to 87 percent correct in the Ithaca program. The largest gains from pre- to post-test, at 16 percentage points, were in the Austin and Williamsburg programs. The overall average percent correct on the post-test was 27 percentage points higher than that for the national sample of grade 12 students (53 percent

³ See <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard.gov> for more information about the NAEP economics assessment and to view all of the NAEP released test questions.

correct) who answered these questions on the NAEP assessment in 2006. A limitation in this comparison is that students who choose to attend the Economics for Leaders program are likely to be, on average, more academically-oriented and perhaps have had more relevant coursework prior to attending than many high school students. Nonetheless, the NAEP national data provide a point of comparison against which to view the performance of students exposed to FTE's Economics for Leaders curriculum.

Table 3 presents the percent correct by program site and question (item) number. Instructors may find this detailed information informative in considering how to tweak future instruction. For example, although the percent correct for question #10 was 80 across all sites, on average, it was just 45 in the Los Angeles site.

Students' Evaluations

At the end of the week-long program, students completed evaluations of the economics and leadership sessions, staff, overall program, and aspects of the accommodations. Results overall and by site for the program content, materials, instructors, and overall program are shown in table 4. Table 5 presents results of evaluations of the individual staff members, residence halls, food, and recreational activities.

Students were overwhelmingly and fairly uniformly positive about their experiences in the Economics for Leaders programs. Overall, 87 percent said the morning economics sessions stimulated their interest and 95 percent said the content was clearly presented. Ninety-one percent of students said the leadership sessions stimulated their interest and 93 percent said the content of these sessions was clear. Most students would recommend the program to a friend (94 percent) and 88 percent and 92 percent said the program has improved their understanding of economics principles and their leadership skills, respectively.

Students were full of praise for the instructors and other staff; 93 percent and 95 percent overall said the economics and leadership session instructors, respectively, were responsive (table 4) and 84 to 97 percent overall rated the instructors and staff exceptional or superb. For many sites, individual instructors and staff were rated exceptional or superb by 100 percent of the students.

Overall, the residence halls, food, and recreational activities were rated mostly good or better by students, although student evaluations of the food and residence halls in Austin and Chicago were quite low.

The Austin site stands out a bit from the others in that it had somewhat lower ratings relative to other sites (although still more positive than negative for most aspects of the program). From comments it is difficult to determine if there was anything specific that resulted in lower ratings. There was only one professor at this site, rather than the usual two, which may have something to do with it, or maybe it was the

particularly poor food and accommodations. Or, it may simply have been a more challenging or demanding group of students.

When asked about their favorite sessions, students overwhelmingly, but not uniformly, say the leadership sessions were their favorite. Specific favorites mentioned by many include Trust Walk and Power Walk and, for economics, Corporate Swamp and Cartel. There were few calls to eliminate sessions; most students said all of the sessions and activities were important and contributed to the whole. Most students said not to change anything about the program. Suggestions for changes largely centered on aspects of scheduling—starting later in the morning, having more unstructured time, or having a longer overall program (i.e., more than one week).

What stands out most in students' written comments is the powerful effect the entire week has had on the vast majority of the students. Many of them write about how this was life-changing for them – because of the relationships they developed, what they learned about themselves, the economics knowledge they acquired, or other reasons.

Teachers' Evaluations

Teachers participating in the Economics for Leaders programs were asked to evaluate different aspects of the sessions, program faculty, the program overall, and the accommodations. Results are presented in tables 6 and 7.

Teachers were overwhelmingly positive about the Economics for Leaders program. More than 90 percent overall said the sessions were stimulating, the content clear, the materials helpful, and the instructors were responsive (table 6). Ninety-seven percent of teachers said their teaching would improve a result of the program and that they were recommend Economics for Leaders to their colleagues.

From first-time FTE attendees to returning teachers, participants were enthusiastic in their comments about the program. They are excited to have engaging simulations to implement in their classrooms and to have had the opportunity to engage with first-rate professors, fellow teachers, and students in the program. Overall, 91-92 percent of teachers rated the professors and mentor teachers exceptional or superb. In their comments, teachers were effusive in their praise for the instructors. In terms of format, the vast majority said the program format is just great (89 percent exceptional or superb). Teachers especially appreciate having interactions with students and seeing students engage with the economics material. Some called for more teacher-student interaction throughout the week, though.

In order to gauge the impact of the Economics for Leaders economics curriculum on their understanding, teachers were asked whether or not their understanding of the role of the government in the history of the U.S. economy changed as a result of the program (table 7). Overall, 78 percent of teachers said that their understanding changed at least somewhat (34 percent said it changed quite a bit and 44 said it changed somewhat).

Thirty-seven teachers who participated in Economics for Leaders in 2011 responded to the follow-up survey. Eighty-one percent of respondents report that they have taught economics since taking the course and of those 71 percent have used course materials in their classrooms (table 8). Of those who have not taught economics, 100 percent intend to use program materials in the future. About two-thirds of responding teachers report that their enthusiasm for teaching economics has increased very much or somewhat and 94 percent said that their confidence in teaching economics has increased very much or somewhat as a result of the program. Seventy-six percent said that their students' understanding of economic principles has improved.

Economic Forces in American History

Economic Forces in American History was offered in two formats: as a multiple-day program and as a one-day program. Tables 9a and 9b present the evaluations for each format, respectively.

As in years past, the multiple-day program was well-received by teachers (table 9a). Ninety-two percent or more of teachers across the three sites said the sessions were stimulating, clear and challenging, the handouts were helpful and the instructors were responsive. Ninety percent of teachers rated the instructors exceptional or superb. Teachers praised the instructors for being knowledgeable, engaging and approachable. Eighty-five and 88 percent rated the lectures and simulations, respectively, exceptional or superb. Numerous teachers commented that the activities/simulations work perfectly with the lectures and that they are eager to implement both in their classrooms.

Teachers had varied things to say about the Question and Answer and the Readings Discussion and Sharing sessions. About the former, many teachers commented that these sessions were very helpful for clarifying issues and extending their understanding, although teachers in some sites said that most questions were addressed during the lecture so there was little need for the additional session. About the latter, many teachers said that it was an excellent opportunity to have discussion time with colleagues with diverse views and experiences, and to learn from each other, but some teachers commented that the quality of these sessions varied and some were less productive than others.

Teachers report a shift in their understanding as a result of the program. Overall, 90 percent of teachers report that their understanding of the government's role in the history of the U.S. economy has changed at least somewhat as a result of the program (58 percent quite a bit and 32 percent somewhat).

The one-day format of the Economic Forces in American History program was also very highly rated (table 9b). Ninety-four percent rated the overall program exceptional or superb. Ninety-eight percent of teachers said the sessions were stimulating and clear and 90 percent said that the handouts were helpful. Ninety-one percent of teachers overall rated the instructors exceptional or superb and 99 percent

said the instructors were responsive. Nearly all (97 and 98 percent, respectively) said they would recommend the program to colleagues and that they felt their teaching would improve as a result of the program.

Most of the 58 teachers who took Economic Forces in American History last year and responded to the follow-up survey say that they have used or plan to use the course materials in their classrooms (table 10).⁴ Nearly all teachers report increased enthusiasm for and confidence in teaching economics and 82 percent say that their students' understanding of economic principles has improved.

Environment and the Economy

As in years past, the Environment and the Economy program received rave reviews from participants. Overall, 100 percent of teachers said the sessions were stimulating and 98 percent said the content was clear, the instructors were responsive, that they will recommend the program to colleagues, and that they felt their teaching would improve as a result of the program. Teachers liked the highly structured format and waste-no-time pace and commented that the content was comprehensive and thought-provoking. Ninety-five percent of teachers overall rated the instructors exceptional or superb. Ratings are uniformly very high across all sites, although the Jacksonville program was particularly high.

Of the 45 teachers who participated in this program last year and responded to the follow-up survey, 71 percent have taught an economics class and 86 percent of them have used material from the program (table 12). All responding teachers report increased enthusiasm for and confidence in teaching economics, and 82 percent report that their students' understanding of economics principles is much better or better.

One-Day Programs

Teachers' evaluations of FTE's one-day programs—Issues of International Trade, Is Capitalism Good for the Poor, and the Economics of Disasters—are presented in tables 13, 14, 16. Evaluations of the one-day format of Economic Forces in American History are presented in table 9b, discussed above. Follow-up survey data from teachers who participated in Is Capitalism Good for the Poor are shown in table 15. Follow-up data are not available for the other two programs.

Issues of International Trade

This program was delivered in two sites this year and was well received in both (table 13). All participants said the sessions were stimulating and the content clear. All teachers said they would recommend the program to colleagues and 98 percent said

⁴ It is not possible to determine if respondents to the follow-up questionnaire participated in the multi-day or one-day format of the Economic Forces in American History program in 2011.

that they felt their teaching would improve as a result of the program. The instructors were rated exceptional or superb by 98 percent of the teachers.

Is Capitalism Good for the Poor?

This program was delivered at one site this year and was well liked by participants (table 14). Eighty-nine percent of teachers said the sessions were stimulating and 96 percent said the content was clear. Eighty-percent said the materials were helpful. Ninety-percent or more of teachers rated the instructors exceptional or superb and 96 percent said that the instructors were responsive. Teachers also report a shift in their understanding as a result of the program. Eighty-three percent agreed with the statement “Capitalism is good for the poor” after the workshop. In comparison, 38 percent said they would have agreed with this statement before the course.

Eleven teachers that participated in the program last year responded to the follow-up survey and all are either using program materials or plan to when they teach economics in the future (table 15). All respondents report increased enthusiasm for and confidence in teaching economics as a result of the program. Eighty-two percent report that their students’ understanding of economic principles is much better or better.

Economics of Disasters

This program was delivered at one site this year and was rated highly (table 16). Overall, 96 percent of teachers said the sessions were stimulating and the content was clear. Ninety-seven percent of teachers said the instructors were responsive. The program overall was rated deemed exceptional or superb by 77 percent of teachers. Teachers’ reports on the impact on their learning indicate a marked shift in understanding as a result of the course. Overall, 70 percent said they disagreed with the statement “Disasters are good for the economy” after having taken the course. In contrast, 34 percent said that they would have disagreed with this statement before the course.

Teaching Economic Issues

This course was, as in years past, very well received by participants across all sites. A remarkable 99 percent of teachers across the four sites said the sessions were stimulating and the content was clear, and that they would recommend the program to colleagues. Ninety-one percent of teachers rated the overall program, averaged across all topics and sites, exceptional or superb. Ninety-seven percent of teachers rated the instructors exceptional or superb (77 percent exceptional). Teachers really like the efficiency of learning four topics in one course and, as one teacher put it, getting “the most bang for [your] buck.” They also liked the pace of the course.

Follow-up surveys completed by 17 teachers who participated in the Teaching Economic Issues last year suggest that teachers are implementing what they learned (table 18). All teachers have or plan to use materials and 83 percent report improved

student understanding of economic principles as a result of the course. Nearly all (94 percent) teachers report increased enthusiasm for and confidence in teaching economics as a result of the course.

Right Start in Teaching Economics

Across the two sites for this program, 96 percent of teachers said the sessions were stimulating and 100 percent said the content was clear (table 19). All teachers said they would recommend the program to a colleague and that they expected their teaching to improve as a result of the program. Teachers gave high ratings to the overall program and program format (98 percent rated the overall program exceptional or superb and 90 percent rated the format exceptional or superb). One hundred percent of teachers said the instructors were responsive and 99 percent rated the instructors exceptional or superb. Teachers are excited to implement what they learned with their students. One teacher said this should be a required course for novice economics teachers.

Online Programs

The online programs delivered this year included the following:

- Economics Online for Teachers Part 1 (EOFT-1): One session in fall 2011 and one session in winter 2012
- Economics Online for Teachers Part 2 (EOFT-2): Spring 2012
- Economics of Disasters Online (EODO): One session in winter 2012
- Is Capitalism Good for the Poor Online (CAPO): Fall 2011
- Economic Demise of the Soviet Union Online (EDSUO): Spring 2012

Tests aligned with course content were given to participants before and after each course to measure the impact of the course on learning outcomes and end-of-course surveys were completed by participants.

Although the specifics of how teachers rated various aspects of the courses varied somewhat by course, the general picture is similar across all courses (see tables 20, 21, 23, 24, and 25 for detail). Teachers found course content stimulating and clear (typically, 90 percent or more of teachers strongly agreed or agreed, although between 83 and 88 percent did so in the EOFT-1 courses), as well as challenging (from 88 percent to 96 percent). Instructors were praised for being responsive and overall were rated very highly for most courses. Participants especially appreciated frequent and quick feedback and a heavy on-line presence by the instructor (à la Kathy Ratte).

The least well liked aspects of the on-line courses, in general, were the discussion boards, followed by the assignments. As many as 20 percent of teachers said that the

discussion boards were fair, which stands in contrast to other aspects of the courses which were rarely rated below good. However, comments do not reveal systematic, specific issues that teachers had with either the discussion boards or assignments. Dissatisfaction with the discussion boards may be due, in part, to how comfortable one is with an on-line course environment. Some participants were open about not loving the on-line format to begin with. Comments from participants in EODO indicate that the presentation of the assignments could have been clearer. Some teachers complained that there were many links click on to get the necessary information and that this could have been better consolidated and clear. There were suggestions to make assignments and lessons available earlier than they were so teachers could look, and in some cases work, ahead.

Several teachers in the EOFT course commented that the time commitment for the course was far more than they expected and to some degree more than they could reasonably give. In terms of content, participants' comments suggest that they were pleased with how much they learned and with what they gained from the experience. More than one participant, though, commented on the right-leaning viewpoints underlying the EOFT curriculum and the desire to see a broader range of views.

There were learning gains in all of the online courses, although they gains varied quite a bit. Learning gains observed in the EOFT-1 courses were on average 5.8 percentage points (but ranged from 10.5 percent in one session and 1.2 percent in the other). There was a 12.5 percentage point increase in the EOFT-2 course. Learning gains in the Economics of Disasters course was 27.6 percentage points and in the Capitalism course was 17.2 percentage points. There was 3 percentage point increase in the EDSUO course.

Follow-up surveys completed by 6 teachers who took the Economics On-line for Teachers course last year give some indication that teachers used what they learned (table 22). All 6 teachers have used or plan to use the materials from the online course they took, and all report increased confidence in and most report increased enthusiasm for teaching economics as a result of taking the course.