

# EVALUATION REPORT

Foundation for Teaching Economics  
2013 Programs in Economics Education

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## Introduction

Our independent evaluation of the Foundation for Teaching Economics' 2013 programs for teachers and students<sup>1</sup> included the following programs:

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

Our evaluation is based on feedback from more than 1,500 individuals (465 high school students and more than 1,100 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 2012 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 124 teachers are included in this report, although there is no follow-up data available for some programs because of low response rates.

Highlights from this year's evaluation include the following.

- Students in the Economics for Leaders program posted, on average, an 11 percentage-point gain from pre- to post-test, demonstrating substantial learning over the course of the week-long program.

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<sup>1</sup> Programs evaluated include programs conducted from September 2012 through early August 2013.

- Overall, 90 percent or more of teachers in the Economics for Leaders program said the sessions were stimulating and clear and the instructors were responsive.
- Overall, 91 percent of teachers in Economic Forces in American History reported 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.
- One hundred percent of the teachers in the Environment and the Economy program said the sessions were stimulating and the content was clear.
- One hundred percent of the teachers in the Right Start in Teaching Economics agreed or strongly agreed that the instructors were responsive and 92 percent of the teachers rated the instructors exceptional or superb.
- There were impressive learning gains in the online courses for teachers, including a 21.7 percentage point gain from pre- to post-test in one program.
- Across programs, teachers in last year’s programs report that they have used FTE materials with their students and report increased enthusiasm, confidence and student understanding.

Finally, participant feedback is amazingly consistent from program to program and site to site: participants recognize and appreciate FTE’s knowledgeable and responsive instructors and view course content and classroom activities as valuable resources, and teachers report using the content and resources when they return to the classroom.

In 2013, 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.<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>2</sup> 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.

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 way to gauge learning gains.

On average across all program sites, the average percent correct on the end-of-course test was 83, an 11-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 Los Angeles program to 89 percent correct in the New Haven and Chicago programs. The largest gain from pre- to post-test, at 16 percentage points, was in the New Haven program. The overall average percent correct on the post-test was 30 percentage points higher than that for the national sample of grade 12 students (53 percent 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 #1 was 81 across all sites, on average, it was just 58 in the Seattle program.

### **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 positive about the level of interest/stimulation and clarity of the morning economics and afternoon leadership sessions (although more positive about the leadership sessions). On average across all sites, 86 percent strongly agreed or agreed that the morning sessions stimulated their interest and 94 percent said the same about the afternoon sessions. Ninety-seven percent said the content of the morning sessions was clear and 93 percent said that of the afternoon sessions. While the exact percentages varied from site to site, the ratings were pretty consistently high across all programs. Many students mentioned "In the Chips" and "Cartel" as favorite economics sessions and "Behavioral Styles" and "Trust Walk" as favorite leadership sessions.

It is not unusual for fewer students to report that the economics sessions were challenging compared with other aspects of the program (based on evaluations from previous years), and that was the case in 2013 too. Overall, 49 percent of students agreed or strongly agreed that the morning economics sessions were challenging. This varied by session, however, from 32 percent in Boulder to 73 percent in Santa Barbara saying the sessions were challenging.

Overall, 94 percent of students said that the instructors were responsive (table 4) and from 85 to 97 percent, overall, rated the instructional and leadership staff exceptional or superb (table 5). Student appreciated the expertise of the economics and leadership staff and, particularly in the Hillsdale program, conveyed a dislike for views that are based on opinion rather than fact. The staff in the Chicago program was particularly highly rated, with 100 percent of students rating them exceptional or superb and agreeing or strongly agreeing that the instructors were responsive.

Typical of past years, ratings of residence halls and food vary from place to place, but once again, Williamsburg has the least desirable accommodations according to students (57 percent rated the residence halls fair or poor).

Overall, 95 percent of students would recommend Economics for Leaders to their friends and 88 percent or more say that the program improved their understanding of economic issues and their leadership skills (table 4). Over and over, students mention how significant this program was for their development as leaders and for their understanding of economics. For many students, the only change they would make is to make the program longer.

### **Teachers' Evaluations**

Teachers participating in the Economics for Leaders program 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.

The teachers that participated in the 2013 Economics for Leaders program were extremely enthusiastic about their experience and what they learned, which is reflected in their positive ratings of aspects of the program. Overall, 90 percent or more said the sessions were stimulating and clear and the instructors were responsive. Ninety-two percent strongly agreed or agreed that they will recommend the program to colleagues and that their experience will improve their teaching. Teachers in the Boulder program were particularly positive.

Eighty-three percent and eighty-seven percent of the teachers rated the professors and mentor teachers exceptional or superb, respectively. Teachers were impressed with the professors' and mentor teachers' knowledge and enthusiasm. Teachers' comments indicate that they appreciated when instructors were able to tolerate differing views on topics rather than shutting down discussion.

Regarding the curriculum, teachers were more enthusiastic about the simulations (91 percent overall rated them exceptional or superb) than the lectures (76 percent overall rated them exceptional or superb). Teachers are excited to return to the classroom to implement what they have learned and feel they have the tools to enhance their teaching and make economics more engaging. There were some complaints about the readings: some teachers said they were out of date, others thought they were boring, and some felt they should have been assigned in advance so there was sufficient time to read them. A number of teachers said they would have liked more interaction with the kids during the morning sessions.

Overall, 79 percent of teachers report that they are definitely or very likely going to use the FTE's Gooru collection to review Economics for Leaders topics and many commented enthusiastically about this resource. Some observed that the Gooru search function needs to be improved.

In order to gauge the impact of the Economics for Leaders economics curriculum on teachers' 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, 28 percent of teachers said that their understanding changed quite a bit and 39 percent said it changed somewhat. This was fairly consistent across programs except for Austin, in which 62 percent of teachers reported that their understanding did not change at all. Comments from teachers in the Austin site do not suggest why so many reported no change in understanding, but ratings on aspects of the program and instructors were lower in Austin than in other sites.

Follow-up surveys were completed by 26 teachers who participated in Economics for Leaders in 2012. Sixty-nine percent of respondents report that they have taught economics since taking the course and of those 94 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. All responding teachers report that their enthusiasm for and confidence in teaching economics has increased very much or somewhat as a result of the program. Eighty-eight percent said that their students' understanding of economic principles has improved.

Similar to the feedback from students, views on the residence halls and food varied, but the Williamsburg accommodations were apparently abysmal (81 percent rated them fair or poor).

## **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 shown in table 9a, participants were very pleased with the Economics Forces in American History multi-day program. Overall, 93 percent or more strongly agreed or agreed that the session stimulated their interest, the content was clear and challenging, and the handouts were helpful. Nearly all participants rated the instructors exceptional or superb (96 percent) and 99 percent said the instructors were responsive. Participants in the Chicago program absolutely raved about Lee Craig's ability to "weave a story" and Price Fishback's deep knowledge. Ninety percent or more of the teachers rated the lectures and simulations exceptional or superb.

Teachers report a shift in their understanding as a result of the program. Overall, 91 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 (56 percent quite a bit and 35 percent somewhat).

The one-day format of the Economic Forces in American History program was also very highly rated (table 9b). Ninety percent of teachers said the sessions were stimulating and 97 percent said that the session content was clear. Ninety-five percent of teachers overall rated the instructors exceptional or superb and 91 percent said the instructors were responsive. Teachers especially loved Debbie Henney's energy and enthusiasm. While feedback in the Lincoln, Rockford, and Columbia programs was extremely positive, the feedback from Omaha participants was less so, but there is no indication in the comments as to why that might be.

Twenty-three teachers who took Economic Forces in American History last year responded to the follow-up survey and say that they have used or plan to use the course materials in their classrooms (table 10). All teachers report increased enthusiasm for and confidence in teaching economics and 77 percent say that their students' understanding of economic principles has improved.

## **Environment and the Economy**

Across the 6 Environment and the Economy programs, 100 percent of the teachers said the sessions were stimulating and the content was clear. Ninety-nine percent said 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. Ninety-seven percent of teachers overall rated the instructors exceptional or superb. Ratings were uniformly very high across all sites, although the Honolulu and Killington programs were particularly high.

Of the 28 teachers who participated in this program last year and responded to the follow-up survey, 89 percent have taught an economics class and 92 percent of them have used material from the program; the rest plan to (table 12). All responding teachers report increased enthusiasm for and confidence in teaching economics, and 77 percent report that their students' understanding 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, Economics of Disasters, Economics of Water Use and the Environment, and the Economic Demise of the Soviet Union—are presented in tables 13, 14, 16, 18, and 19. Evaluations of the one-day format of Economic Forces in American History are presented in table 9b, discussed above. Follow-up survey data for Is Capitalism Good for the Poor, Economics of Disasters, and the Economic Demise of the Soviet Union are shown in tables 15, 17, and 20, respectively. Follow-up data are not available for Issues of International Trade or Economics of Water Use and the Environment.

### Issues of International Trade

This program was delivered in five sites this year and was consistently well received (table 13). Nearly all (98 percent) participants said the sessions were stimulating and the content clear and 99 percent said they would recommend the program to colleagues. The instructors were rated exceptional or superb by 96 percent of the teachers. The overall program was rated exceptional or superb by 94 percent of teachers.

### Is Capitalism Good for the Poor?

This program was delivered at two sites this year and was well liked by participants in both (table 14). All teachers said the session content was clear and that they would recommend the program to colleagues. Instructors were deemed responsive by all participants.

Teachers also report a shift in their understanding as a result of the program. In both programs, 100 percent of teachers agreed with the statement “Capitalism is good for the poor” after the workshop. In comparison, 77 percent in Pearland and 65 percent in Newark said they would have agreed with this statement before taking the course.

Seven 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 reported increased enthusiasm for (100 percent said it increased “very much”) and confidence in teaching economics as a result of the program. Seventy-two percent reported 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). All teachers said the sessions were stimulating and 97 percent said the content was clear. Ninety-three percent of teachers said the instructors were responsive. The program overall was rated exceptional or superb by 75 percent of teachers. Teachers' reports on the impact on their learning indicate a marked shift in understanding as a result of the course. Overall, 71 percent said they disagreed with the statement “Disasters are

good for the economy” after having taken the course. In contrast, 21 percent said that they would have disagreed with this statement before taking the course.

Six teachers who participated in this program in 2012 responded to the follow-up survey. All have used or are planning to use course materials with their students, all report increased enthusiasm for and confidence in teaching economics, and all report that their students’ understanding of economic principles is better or much better.

### **Economics of Water Use and the Environment**

This program was delivered at one site this year and evaluation results are shown in table 18. All participants said the sessions were stimulating and the content was clear. The overall program was deemed exceptional or superb by 96 percent of respondents. Instructors were rated exceptional or superb by 92 percent or more of respondents and 100 of respondents said the instructors were responsive.

### **Economic Demise of the Soviet Union**

This program was delivered at one site this year and evaluation results are shown in table 19. Ninety-five percent or more of teachers said the sessions were stimulating, the content was clear, and the instructors were responsive. The materials were rated exceptional or superb by only 67 percent of respondents; this is still more positive than negative but is less positive than for other programs in 2012. Both instructors were rated exceptional or superb by 82 percent of participating teachers.

In follow-up surveys, 6 teachers who participated in 2011 reported that they have used course materials with their students and that their students’ understanding of economic principles is better or much better. All teachers said their confidence has increased at least somewhat and 83 percent said their enthusiasm increased very much.

## **Teaching Economic Issues**

This course was, as in years past, very well received by participants across all sites. Ninety-six percent of teachers across the four sites said the sessions were stimulating and 97 percent said the content was clear. Ninety-one percent of teachers rated the overall program and 90 percent rated the program format exceptional or superb. Ninety percent of teachers rated the instructors exceptional or superb. Nearly all teachers (99 percent) felt that their teaching would improve as a result of the course.

Follow-up surveys were completed by 8 teachers who participated in the Teaching Economic Issues in 2012 (table 18). All teachers have or plan to use materials and 87 percent report improved student understanding of economic principles. All teachers report increased enthusiasm for and confidence in teaching economics as a result of the course.

## Right Start in Teaching Economics

This course was well received by participating teachers. All teachers agreed or strongly agreed that the instructors were responsive and 92 percent of teachers rated the instructors exceptional or superb. Ninety-six percent of teachers said the content was stimulating and clear. The overall program was rated exceptional or superb by 88 percent of teachers. More than one teacher described the program as “top notch” and many talked about how prepared they feel as a result of participating in the program.

Thirteen teachers who participated in the program last year completed follow-up surveys. Most have used or plan to use course materials and all report increased enthusiasm for and confidence in teaching economics as a result of the course. Ninety-two percent report that their students’ understanding of economic principles has increased.

## Online Programs

The online programs delivered this year included the following:

- Economics Online for Teachers Part 1 (EOFT-1): One session in fall 2012 and one session in winter 2013
- Economics Online for Teachers Part 2 (EOFT-2): One session in fall 2012 and one session in spring 2013
- Economics of Disasters Online (EODO): One session in winter 2013
- Is Capitalism Good for the Poor Online (CAPO): Fall 2012
- Economic Demise of the Soviet Union Online (EDSUO): Spring 2013

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 25 through 29 for detail). Teachers found course content stimulating and clear (typically, 88 percent or more of teachers strongly agreed or agreed, although fewer did so in the CAPO course), as well as challenging (from 93 percent to 100 percent). Instructors were praised for being responsive and overall were rated very highly for most courses. Teachers particularly appreciated Malhaz Jibladze’s and Kathy Ratte’s responsiveness and comments.

Comments about the discussion boards in the online courses ranged from those that praised the discussions as effective tools to those that complained they were pointless and fellow students did not know how to contribute and respond effectively. There were a number of comments about the organization of materials on the course sites

and pleas to make it less cumbersome to locate materials and move from area to area within the course site (e.g., from lectures to assignments).

There were learning gains in all of the online courses, overall, although they gains varied quite a bit. Learning gains observed in the EOFT-1 courses were on average 4.2 percentage points (but ranged from 8.6 percent in one session a puzzling -0.2 percent change in the other). There was a 12.9 percentage point increase in the EOFT-2 course. Learning gains in the Economics of Disasters course was 21.7 percentage points and in the Capitalism course was 18.7 percentage points. There was 17.2 percentage point increase in the EDSUO course.

Follow-up surveys completed by 7 teachers who took an online course last year give some indication that teachers used what they learned (table 30). All 7 teachers have used or plan to use the materials from the online course they took, and all report increased confidence in and enthusiasm for teaching economics as a result of taking the course.