

# EVALUATION REPORT

Foundation for Teaching Economics  
2014 Programs in Economics Education

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## Contents

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Contents .....                                 | i#  |
| Tables .....                                   | ii# |
| Introduction.....                              | 1#  |
| Economics for Leaders .....                    | 2#  |
| Test of Students' Economic Understanding ..... | 2#  |
| Students' Evaluations .....                    | 3#  |
| Teachers' Evaluations .....                    | 4#  |
| Economic Forces in American History .....      | 5#  |
| Environment and the Economy.....               | 5#  |
| Right Start in Teaching Economics .....        | 6#  |
| Economic Issues for Teachers .....             | 6#  |
| One-Day Programs.....                          | 7#  |
| Online Programs .....                          | 8#  |

## Tables

- Table 1. Economics for Leaders: Student Performance on Achievement Test
- Table 2. Economics for Leaders: Percent Correct on Pre-Test
- Table 3. Economics for Leaders: Percent Correct on Items, by Site and Overall
- Table 4. Economics for Leaders: Student Evaluations of Content, Materials, Instructors, and Overall Program
- Table 5. Economics for Leaders: Student Evaluations of Staff Members and Accommodations
- Table 6. Economics for Leaders: Teacher Evaluations of Content, Materials, Instructors, and Overall Program
- Table 7. Economics for Leaders: Teacher Evaluations of Individual Staff Members, Economics Curriculum, and Accommodations
- Table 8. Economics for Leaders: Follow-up Teacher Questionnaire for 2013 Programs
- Table 9. Economic Forces in American History: Teacher Evaluations of Sessions, Instructors, and Overall Program
- Table 10. Economic Forces in American History: Follow-up Teacher Questionnaire for 2013 Programs
- Table 11. Environment and the Economy: Teacher Evaluations of Sessions, Instructors, and Overall Program
- Table 12. Environment and the Economy: Follow-up Teacher Questionnaire for 2013 Programs
- Table 13. Right Start in Teaching Economics: Teacher Evaluations of Sessions, Instructors, and Overall Program
- Table 14. Right Start in Teaching Economics: Follow-up Teacher Questionnaire for 2013 Program
- Table 15. Economic Issues for Teachers: Teacher Evaluations of Sessions, Instructors, and Overall Program
- Table 16. Economic Issues for Teachers: Follow-up Teacher Questionnaire for 2013 Programs
- Table 17. Issues of International Trade: Teacher Evaluations of Sessions, Instructors, and Overall Program
- Table 18. Economics of Disasters: Teacher Evaluations of Sessions, Instructors, and Overall Program
- Table 19. One-Day Programs: Follow-up Teacher Questionnaire for 2013 Programs
- Table 20. Economics Online for Teachers Part 1: Teacher Evaluations
- Table 21. Economics Online for Teachers Part 2: Teacher Evaluations
- Table 22. Economics of Disasters Online: Teacher Evaluations
- Table 23. Economic Demise of the Soviet Union Online: Teacher Evaluations
- Table 24. Online Courses: Follow-up Teacher Questionnaire for 2013 Programs

## Introduction

Our independent evaluation of the Foundation for Teaching Economics' 2014 programs for teachers and students<sup>1</sup> included the following programs:

- 14 Economics for Leaders (7 student-and-teacher sessions and 7 student-only sessions)
- 2 Economic Forces in American History
- 4 Environment and the Economy
- 2 Right Start in Teaching Economics
- 2 Economic Issues for Teachers
- 2 Issues of International Trade
- 1 Economics of Disasters
- 5 Online courses: 2 Economics Online for Teachers-Part 1, 1 Economics Online for Teachers-Part 2, 1 Economics of Disasters Online, and 1 Economic Demise of the Soviet Union Online

Our evaluation is based on feedback from nearly 1,000 individuals (more than 450 high school students and more than 525 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 2013 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 100 teachers are included in this report.

Highlights include the following:

- Students in the 2014 Economics for Leaders program had, on average, a 12 percentage-point gain from pre- to post-test, demonstrating substantial learning over the course of the weeklong program.
- Teacher participants in all 2014 online courses demonstrated learning gains from pre- to post-test. Average gains ranged from 14 to 25 percentage points.
- Teachers in FTE's 2014 programs reported changes in their understanding of key economic concepts. In follow-up surveys, teachers in FTE's 2013 programs overwhelmingly reported increased confidence and enthusiasm for teaching economics.

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<sup>1</sup> Programs evaluated include programs conducted from September 2013 through early August 2014.

- Teachers are returning to their classroom and using FTE materials. In follow-up surveys, teachers in FTE's 2013 programs reported overwhelmingly that they have used FTE materials with their students.

Moreover, feedback from participants shows that students and teachers in FTE's 2014 programs were consistently and extremely pleased with the quality of FTE instructors and staff, materials, program format, and course content.

As in years past, in 2014 the FTE implemented a set of consistently high-quality economics education programs and has positively and directly affected hundreds of students and teachers.

In each section below, the results from evaluations completed by program participants are summarized, along with results from follow-up surveys. When applicable, test results are described.

## 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 weeklong 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 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.

The average percent correct on the end-of-course test across all programs was 82, a 12 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 Boulder-2 program to 86 percent correct in the Ithaca and Berkeley programs. The largest gain, at 18 percentage points, was in the Santa Barbara program. The overall average percent correct on the post-test was 29 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. 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. Nevertheless, the NAEP national data provide a point of comparison against which to

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<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.

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 for reflecting on specific strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum and instruction.

### **Students' Evaluations**

At the end of the weeklong 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 staff members, residence halls, food, and recreational activities.

Students were overwhelmingly positive about their experiences in the Economics for Leaders program. Eighty-three percent said the morning economics sessions were stimulating and 84 percent said the program would improve their understanding of economic issues, while 91 percent said the afternoon leadership sessions were stimulating and 90 percent said the program would improve their leadership skills (table 4). More than 90 percent overall said of both the morning and afternoon sessions that the content was clear and the instructors were responsive. Ninety-three percent of students said they would recommend the program to a friend.

Overall, students were extremely enthusiastic in their comments. They truly loved the experience, particularly the opportunities for self-reflection and relationship building, as well as learning economics. When asked which sessions were their favorites, many students simply said the leadership sessions. Specific favorite leadership sessions included trust walk, powerwalk, and "touch someone who." But students like the economics sessions too. Favorite economic sessions included cartel and free markets. When asked if there are sessions they would eliminate, most respondents said they would not eliminate any, or changing anything about the program (except to make it longer!).

Ratings and comments about the economics and leadership staff were overwhelmingly positive (table 5). Eighty-two percent of students rated the economics professors exceptional or superb. Students found many of the professors engaging and passionate about the content, and praised them for making the material easy to understand. Overall, 95 and 94 percent of students rated the student administrators and program coordinators exceptional or superb, respectively, and, with few exceptions, more than 90 percent of students in the individual sites provided these high ratings. Students in the Nashville program were particularly pleased with the leadership team. Students admired and appreciated the personality and energy of the student administrators and program coordinators, providing effusive praise for them.

Overall, students were not as pleased with the residence halls and food. Only 37 percent of students rated the residence halls exceptional or superb and only 25 percent rated the food exceptional or superb. Students in the Dallas, Durham, and Boulder programs seem to have had particularly unpleasant experiences with the residence halls and food, while Santa Barbara was very highly rated (92 percent exceptional or superb).

### **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.

Teachers were extremely positive about the Economics for Leaders program. Ninety-percent or more said the sessions (morning and afternoon) were stimulating, the content was clear, the materials were helpful, and the instructors were responsive (table 6). Ninety-five percent said the program would improve their teaching and that they would recommend the program to colleagues.

Eighty-seven percent of teachers rated the professors and 93 percent rated the mentor teachers exceptional or superb (table 7).

Teachers praised the lectures and the simulations, and expressed an eagerness to return to their classrooms with new content and activities to use with their students. Eighty-five percent rated the lectures exceptional or superb, and 94 percent rated the simulations exceptional or superb (table 7). Ninety-one percent of teachers rated the program organization exceptional or superb. There were some suggestions for changes to the program format, although nothing overwhelmingly in a single direction. Some teachers suggested spending more time discussing the readings, while some suggested spending more time talking about how to extend lessons instead of talking about the readings. Some wanted more interaction with the students, while others comments that the morning sessions were just right.

Overall, teachers were kinder about the accommodations than students were (although many of the sites for which students were very negative did not include teacher participants). Forty-five percent and 70 percent of teachers rated the residence halls and food exceptional or superb.

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). Nearly all (94 percent) of teachers said that their understanding changed somewhat (37 percent) or quite a bit (57 percent).

Follow-up surveys were completed by 35 teachers that participated in Economics for Leaders in 2013 (table 8). Eighty-six percent of respondents have taught an economic class since participating in Economics for Leaders and nearly all (93 percent) have

used course material with their students. All respondents report at least somewhat increased enthusiasm for and confidence in teaching economics as a result of the program, and 88 percent report that their students' understanding of economics is much better or better. Nearly all (94 percent) respondents have recommended the program to colleagues.

### **Economic Forces in American History**

Economic Forces in American History was offered at two sites this year and results for both and overall are reported in table 9. Across both sites, 94 percent of teachers said the sessions were stimulating and 88 percent said the content was clear. Eighty-five percent said the handouts were helpful and 97 percent said the instructors were responsive. Simulations were more highly rated than lectures (72 percent exceptional compared with 38 percent exceptional) but both were well liked. Eighty-six percent of teachers said the program organization was exceptional or superb. Although in general the Boston program was more well received than the Los Angeles program, that was not the case for ratings of the site itself.

In order to gauge the impact of the Economic Forces in American History 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. Most (85 percent) teachers said that their understanding changed at least somewhat (somewhat 45 percent and quite a bit 40 percent).

Follow-up surveys were completed by 20 teachers who participated in Economic Forces in American History in 2013 (table 10). Eighty-five respondents have taught an economics class since participating in Economic Forces in American History and nearly all (94 percent) have used course material with their students. Nearly all (95 percent) respondents report at least somewhat increased enthusiasm for teaching economics and all respondents report increased confidence in teaching economics as a result of the program. Ninety-five percent reported that their students' understanding of economics is much better or better. All respondents have recommended the program to colleagues.

### **Environment and the Economy**

As in past years, the Environment and the Economy program was remarkable well received and was consistently highly rated across all sites. Across the four Environment and the Economy programs, nearly all (99 percent) teachers reported that the sessions were stimulating, the content was clear, and the instructors were responsive. Ninety-nine percent also said that the program improved their teaching and that they would recommend the program to colleagues. Ninety-five percent of teacher rated the instructors and the format of the program exceptional or superb. Ninety-two percent rated the materials exceptional or superb.

Teachers liked the interactive nature of the program, found the instructors engaging, and said the readings were informative. They are eager to return to the classroom and put what they have learned into practice.

Follow-up surveys were completed by 15 teachers who participated in Environment and the Economy in 2013 (table 12). Seventy-three percent of respondents have taught an economics class since participating in Environment and the Economy and nearly all (91 percent) have used course material with their students. All respondents report at least somewhat increased enthusiasm for and increased confidence in teaching economics as a result of the program, and 86 percent report that their students' understanding of economics is much better or better. All respondents have recommended the program to colleagues.

### **Right Start in Teaching Economics**

Teachers love this program. They find it challenging (93 percent agreed or strongly agreed that it is challenging), but they also find it extremely engaging and rewarding and many teachers commented on how much they learned in such a short amount of time. One hundred percent of participants said the sessions were stimulating and 98 percent said the content was clear. Ninety percent of teachers said the handouts were helpful and 92 percent felt it would improve their teaching.

Teachers give high praise to the instructors. Ninety-six percent rated the instructors exceptional or superb and said the instructors were responsive. Teachers' comments indicate that the instructors connect well with the teachers and that teachers appreciate how accessible instructors make the material.

Follow-up surveys were completed by 12 teachers who participated in the Right Start in Teaching Economics in 2013 (table 14). About two-thirds (67 percent) of respondents have taught an economics class since participating in Rights Start in Teaching Economics and all of them have used course material with their students. All respondents report at least somewhat increased enthusiasm for and increased confidence in teaching economics as a result of the program, and 92 percent report that their students' understanding of economics is much better or better. All respondents have recommended the program to colleagues.

### **Economic Issues for Teachers**

Teachers also love Economic Issues for Teachers. Across the two sites, 93 percent said the sessions were stimulating the 95 percent said the content was clear and handouts were helpful. Ninety-eight percent said the instructors were responsive, that they would recommend the program to colleagues, and that the program would improve their teaching. The overall program was rated exceptional or superb by 100% of participants (80 percent rated it exceptional). More than 90 percent rated the

format and materials exceptional or superb. The Scottsdale program was particularly highly rated.

Teachers like the pace and format of this program and appreciate how much they were able to learn and the many activities they can take away from the course and use immediately in the classroom. Combining multiple topics in a single course is a draw for many participants.

Follow-up surveys were completed by 11 teachers who participated in Teaching Economic Issues in 2013 (table 16). Eighty-two percent of respondents have taught an economics class since participating in Teaching Economic Issues and all of them have used course material with their students. All respondents reported increased enthusiasm for teaching economics and most (91 percent) reported increased confidence in teaching economics as a result of the program. About two-thirds of respondents report that their students' understanding of economics is much better or better.

## **One-Day Programs**

Two “One-day Programs” were offered in 2014—Issues of International Trade and Economics of Disasters. Results for Issues of International Trade (one site) are in table 17 and results from Economics of Disasters (also one site) are in table 18. Both programs were well received by teachers. One hundred percent of teacher said the sessions were stimulating, that the program would improve their teaching, and that they would recommend the program to colleagues. Instructors were also highly rated – 100 percent of teachers said the instructors were responsive and 86 to 100 percent rated them exceptional or superb.

Teachers' reports indicate a marked shift in their understanding as a result of the course. Overall, 67 percent said they disagreed with the statement “Disasters are good for the economy” after having taken the course. In contrast, 26 percent said that they would have disagreed with this statement before taking the course.

Follow-up survey results for one-day programs held in 2013 are shown in table 18. These include 25 respondents who participated in Economic Demise of the Soviet Union, Economics of Water and the Environment, Issues of International Trade, Is Capitalism Good for the Poor, and Economics of Disasters. About two-thirds (68 percent) of respondents have taught a course containing economic content since participating a one-day course and 88 percent have used materials from the course. Ninety-two percent of respondents report increased enthusiasm for and confidence in teaching economics, and 79 percent report that their students' understanding of economics has improved. Ninety-one percent of respondents have recommended the program in which they participated to colleagues.

## Online Programs

FTE online courses delivered this year included the following:

- Economics Online for Teachers Part 1 (EOFT-1): One session in fall 2013 and one session in summer 2014
- Economics Online for Teachers Part 2 (EOFT-2): One session in winter 2014
- Economics of Disasters Online (EODO): One session in fall 2013
- Economic Demise of the Soviet Union Online (EDSUO): One session in winter 2014.

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.

There were learning gains in all of the online courses. Learning gains observed in the EOFT-1 courses were on average 15 percentage points. There was a 14 percentage-point increase in the EOFT-2 course. Teachers in the Economics of Disasters course had a 25 percentage-point gain, on average, from pre- to post-test and teachers in the Economic Demise of the Soviet Union course had a 17 percentage-point gain, on average, from pre- to post-test.

Although the specifics of how teachers rated various aspects of the courses varied somewhat by course, the general picture is similar across the online courses, and was particularly consistent for all but EOFT-Part 1 in fall 2013 (see tables 20 through 23 for detail). Teachers found course content stimulating, clear, and challenging (86 to 100 percent of teachers strongly agreed or agreed). Comments suggest that teachers find the online courses demanding (mostly appropriately so) and elements of the courses worthwhile.

Instructors of the online courses were praised for being responsive and overall were rated very highly for most courses; for all but EOFT-Part 1 in fall 2013, instructors were rated exceptional or excellent by 88 percent to 93 percent of teachers (only 57 percent were so rated in the fall 2013 EOFT-Part 1). Instructors across all courses were praised for the timely return of assignments. Assignments, materials, and discussion boards were generally well liked, although were less well liked in the fall 2013 EOFT-Part 1.

Teachers in the fall 2013 EOFT-Part 1 were less positive about their experience and for the most part ratings stand apart from those for other online courses. It appears that a combination of technical glitches and different expectations for the demands of the course may have led to a relatively less positive experience for teachers in the fall 2013 EOFT-Part 1 course.

Overall, from 86 to 100 percent of teachers in the online courses feel that their teaching will improve as a result of the course they took, and 71 to 100 percent will

recommend the course to colleagues (92 to 100 percent if the fall 2013 EOFT-Part 1 is not included).

Fourteen participants in FTE online courses in 2013 completed follow-up surveys (table 24). Eighty-six percent of them have taught economics since taking the online course and all have used material from the course in their classroom. All respondents report increased enthusiasm for teaching economics and 93 percent report increased confidence in teaching economics as a result of taking the online course. The vast majority (72 percent) felt their students' understanding of economics has improved and 86 percent have recommended the course they took to colleagues.