

EVALUATION REPORT

Foundation for Teaching Economics
2016 Programs in Economics Education

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Overview

This independent evaluation of the Foundation for Teaching Economics' 2016 programs for teachers and students included the following programs conducted from fall 2015 through summer 2016:

- Economics for Leaders (13)
- Economic History for Leaders (2)
- Environment and the Economy (2)
- Issues of International Trade (3)
- Economic Demise of the Soviet Union (1)
- Water in the West (1)
- Online courses (8): 3 Economics Online for Teachers, 2 Economic History Online for Teachers, 1 Teacher Economics: The Federal Reserve System, 1 Teacher Economics: World Development, and 1 Economics of Disasters Online

The evaluation is based on feedback from more than 900 individuals (more than 480 high school students and nearly 450 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, Economic History for Leaders, and some 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. Follow-up surveys with participants in prior-year programs were not conducted this year.

A significant advancement in the evaluation this year was the introduction of online surveys and assessments to gather data from program participants. The change to online data collection has several potential benefits, including improved data quality, as it reduces the need for scanning and data entry required when instruments are completed on paper; reduced staff resources devoted to printing/copying and mailing hard copies of tests and evaluation forms; and opportunities to conduct additional types of analyses that are not practical when data are collected on paper. Not all sites were able to implement fully the online approach this year, and there are still some kinks to work out, but FTE took a significant step forward with this change and should be commended for it.¹

Results from participants' feedback and tests of understanding clearly demonstrate the positive impact of FTE programs on participants' learning and on teaching and economics education.

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

¹ There were some inconsistencies between the online surveys and paper-based surveys completed by respondents in some programs, and inconsistencies in the format of questions and response categories across programs. These are issues that can be addressed in the coming months in preparation for FTE's 2017 programs.

- FTE instructors for their knowledge and responsiveness;
- FTE activities and materials, particularly simulations and activities that can be easily used in classroom; and
- the impact of FTE programs on their understanding of economics.

Across FTE's programs, participants gave rave reviews of the course content and instructional staff. Students in the Economics for Leaders program gave high ratings for the economics and leadership sessions, activities, and program staff. Teachers were also impressed with the Economics for Leaders program—97% said that their teaching would improve as a result of the program and 95% said the simulations were exceptional or superb.

Moreover, there were substantial learning gains as a result of FTE courses, with students and teachers demonstrating higher performance on post-tests based on course content. For example, on a test of economics understanding based on the U.S. Department of Education's National Assessment of Educational Progress 2012 economics assessment, students in the Economics for Leaders program demonstrated a strong grasp of the content taught. Students had an average percent correct of 79%, a gain of 13 percentage points from the pre-test.

FTE's one-day programs and on-line courses were very successful, with participants across the programs in the fall and spring offering high praise for the content.

With an impressive set of programs addressing important economic issues, and a top-notch cadre of instructors and leadership staff, FTE continues to make a substantial impact on the teaching and learning of economics.

In each section below, the results from surveys completed by program participants are summarized. When applicable, test results are described.

Economics for Leaders

Test of 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 comprises 30 multiple-choice questions from the U.S. Department of Education's National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)—*The Nation's Report Card*—economics assessment.² Economics content experts selected, from among released NAEP questions, 30 that are aligned with 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 gauge learning gains.

² See <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/economics> for more information about the NAEP economics assessment.

The average percent correct on the end-of-course test across all programs using the test based on NAEP 2012 was 79, a 13 percentage-point increase from the pre-test (tables 1 and 2). Performance on the end-of-course test ranged from 72 percent correct in the Gainesville program to 86 percent correct in the Ithaca program. The overall average percent correct on the post-test was 26 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 2012.

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 view the performance of students exposed to FTE's Economics for Leaders curriculum.

Students' Evaluations

At the end of the weeklong program, 433 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 3. Table 4 presents results of evaluations of the staff, residence halls, food, and recreational activities.

Students' ratings of the program content, materials, responsiveness of instructors, and overall program were overwhelmingly positive (table 3). Overall, 80 to 91 percent of students agreed or strongly agreed that the morning economics sessions stimulated their interest, the content was clear, and the instructors were responsive. Remarkably, in four sites—Houston, Boulder, New Haven-2, and Durham, 100 percent of the students said the instructors for the economics sessions were responsive. Eighty-seven percent of students were positive regarding the challenging content; most respondents responded to a statement about how the instructors made challenging content easy to understand, while some responded to a statement about how challenging the content was. Students in the Ithaca site provided noticeably more neutral ratings (i.e., less favorable) for the economics sessions than other sites, although there is no clear indication in the comments why that might be.

Students overall were somewhat more positive about the afternoon leadership sessions than the economic sessions, with 87 to 96 percent reporting that the sessions stimulated their interest, the content was clear, and instructors were responsive. Interesting, though, in both New Haven programs, the morning economics sessions were more favorably received than the afternoon leadership sessions. Although there were no clear patterns in students' comments, it appears that there were some students in the New Haven programs who felt the leadership sessions were too focused on team building and a number of students suggested tying the leadership portion more closely to the economics. Some said they wanted more economics and much less of the leadership.

Overall, 91 percent of students said they would recommend Economics for Leaders to their friends. Eighty-six percent said their understanding of economics had improved as a result of the program. A question about the impact on leadership skills, which has been asked of students in the past, was dropped from the online evaluation form this

year, perhaps inadvertently. FTE should consider reinstating it to gather information about students' perceptions of the impact of the leadership portion of Economics for Leaders.

When asked their favorite sessions, many students said they liked buying/selling and markets, of the economics sessions, and Power Walk and Trust Walk, of the leadership sessions.

Students' ratings of and comments about the economics and leadership staff were extremely positive (table 4). Eighty-five percent of students rated the economics teams (the composition of which varied by program; some included professors and mentor teachers and some just the latter) exceptional or superb and 91 percent rated the leadership team (i.e., student administrators) exceptional or superb. Program coordinators were rated exceptional or superb by 90 percent of students overall. The leadership teams in the Berkeley and St. Louis programs were rated especially highly.

It is not unusual for the residence halls and food to have markedly lower ratings than the substantive parts of the Economics for Leaders program, and this year was no different. Only about half rated the residence halls and food exceptional or superb (50% for residence halls and 53% for food). The residence halls in the New Haven and Seattle programs had particularly poor ratings.

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. Feedback from 116 teachers across seven sites is presented in tables 5 and 6.

Teachers were extremely pleased with the Economics for Leaders sessions. Overall, 95 percent or more strongly agreed or agreed that the morning and afternoon sessions stimulated their interest, the content was clear and challenging, the materials were helpful, and the instructors were responsive. Nearly all teachers (97 percent) said they would recommend the program to colleagues and the program would improve their teaching. In many programs, 100 percent of teachers provided such high ratings for nearly all elements.

The instructional staff received extremely high ratings as well (table 6). Ninety-two percent and 97 percent of teacher rated the professors and mentor teachers, respectively, exceptional or superb. Teachers praised the instructional staff for their deep knowledge and ability to impart that knowledge to students and teachers.

When asked about the Economics for Leaders curriculum, 83 percent of the teachers rated the lectures and 95 percent rated the simulations exceptional or superb. Teachers like that the activities are hands-on, interactive activities that can be easily utilized in the classroom and they appreciate the online resources that FTE makes available.

Ninety-one percent of teachers rated the program organization exceptional or superb. Comments were primarily in support of the current format and pace.

Teachers were even less positive about the residence halls than were students; 30 percent rated them fair or poor. The Seattle site drew the most ire due to lack of air conditioning, noise from construction, and a bed bug problem that some said the university was not forthcoming about.

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. Overall and in all but one site, nearly three-quarters of teachers said their understanding had changed quite a bit.

Economic History for Leaders

Economic History for Leaders combines the history and economics content of FTE's Economic Forces in American History with the student-teacher format of the Economics for Leaders program. It was offered at two sites this year, Williamsburg (student only) and Nashville. Evaluation feedback from students and teachers is presented in tables 7 and 8 (results are presented separately for both sites).

Test of Economic Understanding

To gauge the impact of the Economic History for Leaders program on student learning, a test based on the program curriculum was given to students at the end of the session; a pre-test based on the post-test was given at the beginning of the session. In the Williamsburg program, the percent correct on the post-test was 69, a remarkable 22 percentage point gain from the pre-test. The Nashville site showed an impressive 15 percentage point gain from pre to post-test.

Students' Evaluations

Students were very enthusiastic about the program (table 7), providing positive views of the morning and afternoon sessions, including the program content and responsiveness of instructors. Somewhat more positive views were expressed by students in the Nashville program.

In the Williamsburg program, 81 percent of students said the morning sessions were stimulating and 78 percent said the content was clear. Eighty-four percent said the afternoon sessions were stimulating and 91 percent said the content was clear. Ninety-one percent said the program improved their ability to understand economic concepts. Eighty-four percent said they would recommend the program to a friend. In the Nashville program, 96 percent of students said the morning economics sessions and afternoon leadership sessions stimulated their interest and 100 percent said the content of the economics and leadership sessions was clear. One hundred percent said that their ability to understand economic concepts was improved as a result of the program and 91 percent would recommend the program to a friend.

Across both sites, favorite economics sessions mentioned included the lectures on the Great Depression and women in the workforce. Favorite leadership activities included the Jedi activity and building a bike.

The staff also received high marks from the students, particularly in the Nashville program where 96 to 100 percent of students rated the program coordinators, leadership team and economics team exceptional or superb.

Teachers' Evaluations

Teachers in the Nashville site were even more enthusiastic about this program than students (table 8). One hundred percent of respondents said the sessions were stimulating, the content was clear, the handouts and materials were helpful, and the instructors were responsive. The professor and mentor teacher were rated exceptional or superb by 100 percent and 89 percent of teachers, respectively.

All teachers rated the lectures and simulations exceptional or superb. Although there were not many comments about program content, teachers who did comment said that they were ready to use the simulations and activities in their classrooms.

In order to gauge the impact of the program 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. All teachers said that their understanding changed at least somewhat (44 percent somewhat and 56 percent quite a bit).

Environment and the Economy

The Environment and the Economy program was offered at two locations this year and as usual it was extremely well liked by participants. In both sites, all or nearly all teachers reported that the sessions were stimulating, the content was clear, the handouts were helpful, and the instructors were responsive. Moreover, 100 percent also said that the program improved their teaching and that they would recommend the program to colleagues. Ninety-four percent or more rated the instructors and program format exceptional or superb.

Teachers commented on how well organized and structured the program is and how well the instructors know and deliver the content. A number of teachers remarked that they had not previously taught environmental concepts in their economics classes but plan to do so now. One teacher called the program "inspirational."

One-Day Programs

Four one-day programs were offered in 2015—Issues of International Trade (table 10), Economic Forces in American History (table 11), Economic Demise of the Soviet Union (EDSU; table 12) and Water in the West (no table).

Issues of International Trade

One hundred percent of the teachers who participated in the three Issues of International Trade programs said the workshop provided useful information and they intend to use it in their classes. Ninety-seven percent said the binder of materials was useful, the workshop will fit well into their course curriculum, and the event was well organized. All or nearly all would recommend the program to colleagues and would attend another FTE workshop. Many teachers commented that learning new activities

that they can use with their students was the most important thing that they learned at the workshop. Others commented on some of the key principles learned.

Instructors for Issues of International Trade were rated highly in terms of the content and delivery of the workshop, with 79 percent of teachers overall rating the instructors excellent in terms of content and 82 percent rating the instructors excellent in terms of presentation.

Economic Forces in American History

Teachers liked Economic Forces in American History. More than three-quarters and up to 98 percent said the sessions stimulated their interest, the content was clear and challenging, the handouts were helpful, and the instructors were responsive. Most teachers would recommend the program to colleagues (78 percent) and felt that the program had improved their teaching (82 percent). Eighty-one percent of teachers rated the instructors exceptional or superb. Fifty-nine percent rated the overall program exceptional or superb, which is somewhat lower than what is typical for FTE programs. There were virtually no comments from teachers to better understand their experience and why this might be.

Economic Demise of the Soviet Union

One hundred percent of the teachers who participated in the Economic Demise of the Soviet Union said the workshop provided useful information and they intend to use it in their classes, and that the binder of materials was useful. Ninety-six percent said the workshop will fit well into their course curriculum and 100 percent said the event was well organized. One hundred percent of participants would recommend the program to colleagues and would attend another FTE workshop.

Water in the West

Water in the West was offered at one site this year. Teachers were asked to rate several elements of the program on a scale from 1 to 10, including how valuable the conference was to them professionally and personally, the effectiveness of the discussions, the speakers, and FTE staff in their coordination and hosting of the conference. These and other elements had average ratings of 8.8 or higher. Participants were effusive in their praise for the program and many remarked on the visit to the Hoover Dam. Several said the discussions needed to be longer. In the future, survey questions more aligned with those used with other programs and that provide meaningful response categories may be more helpful for understanding participants' views and experiences.

Online Programs

FTE online courses delivered this year and included in this evaluation are the following:

- Economics Online for Teachers, part 1 (2 sessions)
- Economics Online for Teachers, part 2
- Economic History Online for Teachers (2 sessions)

- Teacher Economics: The Federal Reserve System
- Teacher Economics: World Development
- Economics of Disasters Online

Participants completed evaluations at the end of the course on various aspects of the course, including lectures, materials, discussion boards, texts, and instructors. Tests aligned with course content were given to participants in Economics Online for Teachers and Economics of Disasters Online, before and after each course to measure the impact of the course on learning outcomes.

Economics Online for Teachers

Teachers who took Economics Online for Teachers – both part 1 and part 2 – were extremely positive about the course; 85 percent or more said the course stimulated their interest, the content was clear and challenging, and that they would recommend the course to others (table 13). Many teachers commented that the course was “intense” and “challenging.”

Instructors received high praise for being responsive and for returning assignments in a timely manner. Course lectures, activities, assignments, and materials were rated exceptional or excellent by the vast majority of participants, with most of the balance rating these elements good. The discussion boards were rated less favorably, with only 50 to 60 percent of teachers rating them exceptional or excellent. Several teachers commented that the rules for posting comments were frustrating (e.g., having to wait 24 hours after posting a comment before posting a second time).

While there was no measurable gain between the pre and post-test for the second session of EOFT-1, there were small learning gains in first EOFT-1 course (5 percentage points) and EOFT-2 (14 percentage points). Small gains are not surprising given how high performance was on the pre-test.

Economic History Online for Teachers

Feedback from participants in Economic History Online was similar to that for EOFT (table 14). The session content and instructor’s responsiveness and timely return of assignments were appreciated by teachers. In the fall and spring sessions, 50 to 65 percent of teachers rated aspects of the course including lectures, activities, assignments, and materials exceptional and superb. The discussion boards were viewed somewhat more favorably than in EOFT, with 73 percent in one session and 78 percent in the other session rating them exceptional or superb.

Participants raved about instructor Kathy Ratte, as well as her compassion. Several noted that she was a helpful contributor to discussions.

Teacher Economics: The Federal Reserve System

Ninety-five percent of teachers who took this course strongly agreed or agreed that the course stimulated their interest and 90 percent or more said the content was challenging, the instructor was responsive, and assignments were returned in a timely manner (table 15). Several noted that they would have liked more instructor feedback on their assignments. Most teachers (89 percent) said they would recommend the

course to colleagues and 85 percent said they felt their teaching was improved as a result of the course.

Aspects of the course including the lectures, activities and video, assignments, and materials were rated exceptional or excellent by about two-thirds or more of the teachers who took the course. Seventy-nine percent rated the instructor exceptional or excellent. Several teachers remarked that they would have appreciated a more balanced view of the Federal Reserve.

Teacher Economics: World Development

Teachers' feedback on this course was broadly similar to that provided for the Federal Reserve course (table 16). Teachers were very pleased with the instructor—100 percent said he was responsive and 89 percent rated him exceptional or excellent. Nearly all teachers said the course stimulated their interest, they would recommend the course to colleagues, and the course would improve their teaching. At least two-thirds or more rated the lectures, activities and activity videos, assignments, and materials exceptional or excellent. About two-thirds (66 percent) rated the discussion boards exceptional or excellent; 11 percent rated the discussion boards poor.

As with the course on the Federal Reserve, at least one teacher commented that a more balanced view of the issues would be welcome.

Economics of Disasters Online

Many aspects of Economics of Disasters Online were rated very highly by participants (table 17). One hundred percent of teachers said the course simulated their interest, the content was challenging, the instructor returned assignments in a timely manner, and that they would recommend the course. And, 100 percent rated the instructor exceptional or excellent. Seventy-two to 78 percent rated the lectures, activities, assignments, and materials exceptional or excellent. About two-third (67 percent) rated the discussion boards exceptional or excellent. Teachers commented that the course was challenging but very interesting. They really appreciated the instructor's quick turnaround on the assignments.

Teachers learned the course content, as evidenced by the average 22 percentage-point gain between the pre and post-test, a remarkable increase in performance.