

EVALUATION REPORT

**Foundation for Teaching Economics
2020 Programs in Economics Education**

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Overview

This independent evaluation of the Foundation for Teaching Economics' 2020 programs for teachers and students includes the following programs conducted from fall 2019 through summer 2020:

- Economics for Leaders (22)
- Environment and the Economy (1)
- Economics and Environmentalism Online (1)
- Economics of Disasters Online (2)
- Economics Online for Teachers (2)
- Economic History Online for Teachers (1)
- Economic Demise of the Soviet Union Online (1)
- One Day Program: Fundamentals of Environmental Economics (In-Person Meeting) (6)
- One Day Program: Understanding Global Economic Issues (In-Person Meeting) (3)
- Webinars (4):
 - COVID-19 Economic Implications and Policy Response, Economic Freedom and Pandemics in American History, This is Your Brain on Numbers: Data, Statistics, and COVID-19, The Economic Implications of COVID-19: An Update
- Virtual Workshops (6):
 - Active Learning Simulations Can Be Virtual Too!—Web Conferencing Tools Section 1, Active Learning Simulations Can Be Virtual Too!—Web Conferencing Tools Section 2, Active Learning Simulations Can Be Virtual Too!—Interactive Slide Decks (Pear Deck) Section 1, Active Learning Simulations Can Be Virtual Too!—Interactive Slide Decks (Pear

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- Professional Teacher Association Conference: Budgets, Debts, and Deficits: Policy and Practice: Teacher Evaluations (1)

The evaluation is based on feedback from more than 1428 individuals (approximately 617 high school students and 811 teachers) served by FTE programs this past year. Participants in all programs completed questionnaires after each program, rating and providing written comments about the instructors, the content, materials, program format, and efficacy. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most FTE programs transitioned to online platforms and participants were asked to assess the ease and accessibility of those platforms.

The evaluation methodology 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 efficacy and impact of the program on learning and comprehension.

FTE remains committed to bringing the economic way of thinking to both high school students who are interested in ideas, and teachers who seek to improve their pedagogical tools in the classroom. FTE's purpose is consistent and clear: sound economic thinking is essential for future leaders and for teachers who have a strong hand in educating those leaders. Despite a pandemic in which almost all large in-person gatherings are postponed, FTE successfully transitioned to the virtual learning environment. Some in-person gatherings did occur in the fall of 2019 and in locations where it was permitted in 2020.

Results from feedback and comprehension tests clearly show the positive impact of FTE programs on participants' learning and FTE faculty's ability to bring the economic way of thinking into the classroom. The pandemic did not stop successful and interactive FTE programs. The evidence shows that in some cases FTE programs increased the understanding of economic concepts for students by 27percent! Students praised the online teaching across many programs which speaks to the clarity, thoughtfulness, and enthusiasm of FTE instructors.

Overwhelmingly and consistently, across the programs executed this year, participants praised:

- FTE instructors for their commitment to both the ideas and the courses, their enthusiasm, their ability to transcend energy into online teaching and their engagement with students;
- FTE programming content for its timeliness, relevance and clarity;
- FTE programs for enhancing the participants' understanding of the importance of critical thinking and the ability to apply that to present policy issues and gain a historical understanding of economic events and systems

Across FTE programs, participants gave high praise for both the instruction, the instructors, and the creative online interaction. Students in the *Economics for Leaders*, the largest student program at 620 participants, gave exceptional ratings for the clear and challenging content, instructors, and teaching quality, and for the program staff. An impressive 86percent of students in this program agreed that the program improved their understanding of key economic ideas. This goes to the need for and effectiveness of this program.

The pre and post test results demonstrate clear gains in understanding among student participants. Students increased their pretest average from 76percent to an average post-test score of 85percent, a gain of 9percent and a one-percent overall score increase from last year. The virtual and synchronous nature of these programs did not impair the teaching effectiveness nor the ability to interact and digest these important economic concepts. To meet the market demand from international students, FTE offered one EFL program in a six-week online asynchronous format. The program incorporated recorded lectures and interactive online discussion between the professor and students.

FTE added new learning options to their menu of programs this year including webinars and virtual workshops. These added important and timely topics to FTE offerings and allowed FTE to partner with subject matter experts on topics including: COVID-19 and pandemic response, COVID-19 and data, and economic freedom and pandemics. The workshops allowed teachers an opportunity to learn how to bring active simulations to online platforms.

With an impressive set of programs addressing salient economic issues and a framework for analyzing economic problems, a superb team of instructors and leadership staff, FTE continues to make a profound impact on teaching the economic way of thinking in the classroom.

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

Economics for Leaders—Student Programs

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 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.¹ 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 to gauge comprehension and learning gains.

The average percent correct on the end-of-course test across all FTE programs using the test based on NAEP in 2020 was 85, a nine percentage-point increase from the pre-test (Table 1), the same as last year's increase. Performance on the end-of-course test ranged from 78 percent correct to 93 percent. The overall percent correct on the posttest was 32 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, suggesting some selection bias. The University of Michigan program was more advanced, and students were required to have completed an AP economics course or a high school economics course to enroll. Nevertheless, the NAEP national data provide a point of comparison against which we can assess the performance of students exposed to FTE's *Economics for Leaders* curriculum.

¹ See <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/economics/> for more information about the NAEP economics assessment.

Students' Evaluations

At the end of the weeklong program, 617 students completed evaluations of the economics and leadership sessions, staff, overall program, and the online platforms which included: Canvas, Zoom, Moblab and Pear Deck. Results overall and by online cohort for the program content, materials, instructors, and overall program are shown in Table 2. Table 3 presents results of each programs' evaluations of the staff, and these online platforms.

Students' ratings of the program content, materials, responsiveness of instructors, and overall program were overwhelmingly positive (Table 2). Overall, 92 to 97 percent of students agreed or strongly agreed that the economics sessions stimulated their interest, the content was clear, and the instructors were responsive. Overall, 92 percent would recommend the program to a friend and 93 percent agreed that their understanding of economic ideas was improved.

Students gave accolades to their teachers for being able to distill complex topics in an online capacity that was both engaging and fun. Overall, an impressive 98 percent agreed the instructors were responsive and thoughtful.

When asked about their favorite sessions, students' comments indicated across the board that they enjoyed the activities and the teaching. The students enjoyed Dr. Scott Baier and Dr. Jamie Wagner , suggesting they both were able to keep a fun pace in the class, use humor and stories to engage students with the content, and were passionate. The FTE instructors are perhaps the best asset to the programs because they effectively generate interest and enthusiasm from the students.

Students' ratings of and comments about the economics and leadership staff were overwhelmingly positive (Table 3). Ninety-one percent of the students rated the economics teams exceptional or superb and the leadership team (student administrators) exceptional or superb. Program coordinators were rated exceptional or superb by 92 percent of students overall. These are categorical ratings improvements over last year and in an online format! The Washington University cohort agreed unanimously that the economics team was exceptional or superb. The Santa Barbara cohort agreed unanimously that the program coordinators were exceptional or superb. This demonstrates perhaps more strikingly than in previous years, that the people who teach and run FTE programs are essential to its success and have been even more successful during a year when almost all instruction is delivered online.

What is new this year is evaluations of the online technology used which includes: the Canvas Learning Management System, the Zoom web conferencing platform, and the online platforms Moblab and Pear Deck. This combination of technologies is used to deliver content, create space for peer and student-teacher discussions and for online simulations which demonstrate key economic concepts. These technological platforms did quite well from the perspective of the students. Students gave Moblab high marks with 89 percent of students agreeing that it was excellent or superb. Zoom and Pear Deck received similar ratings with 75 and 78 percent respectively, agreeing they were exceptional or superb. Canvas received ratings of 82 percent agreeing it was excellent or superb. Students repeatedly mentioned that Canvas was accessible, easy to use and made the courses operate smoothly. Moblab was likely newer to many students and they enjoyed being able to learn through simulations, playing games and bringing economics to life.

Environment and the Economy

Environment and the Economy (Table 4) was an in-person meeting held in Florida in June of 2020. This was one of the few in-person meetings that was able to continue with 28 participants. This course is designed for teachers and the participants surveyed indicated that most of the teacher participants teach economics and history. Professors Don Fell and David Dieterle taught the course and are described as clear, compelling, and engaging.

Teachers' Evaluations

One hundred percent of teachers reported that the content was stimulating, clear, and challenging. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, 100 percent agreed or strongly agreed that this program will improve their teaching. Given the constraints of meeting in-person during a pandemic, the meeting space and social distancing measures were successful. Eighty-six percent of the participants gave the meeting space exceptional or superb ratings and 89 percent agreed that the social distancing measures were exceptional or superb, an important and outstanding result. The food got lower ratings with only 54 percent agreeing that it was exceptional or superb. Most of the negative comments regarding the food service were about the limitations due to COVID-19 rather than poor quality food.

Online Programs--Teachers

Economics and Environmentalism Online (EEO)

The Economics and Environmentalism Program (Table 5) had 13 participants and 100 percent agreed or strongly agreed that the content stimulated their interest, the instructors were responsive and returned assignments in a timely manner. An impressive 90 percent agreed or strongly agreed that the program will improve their teaching. The teachers seemed to rate the discussion element of the course the strongest with 90 percent agreeing or strongly agreeing that was the best component.

Economics of Disasters Online (EODO)

The *Economics of Disasters Online* course (Table 6) had 45 participants, 21 in the winter and 24 in the summer. The teachers enjoyed the program and praised it for stimulating interest, responsive instructors, and 100 percent agreed or strongly agreed that this course will improve their teaching. Where the teachers reported lower scores for this program was in the activities, assignments, and discussion boards. Sixty-nine percent reported that the assignments and lectures were exceptional or superb. Seventy-one percent reported that the discussion boards were exceptional or superb, an increase of 18 percent from last year in the same category.

Economics Online for Teachers (EOFT)

The *Economics Online for Teachers* course (Table 7) had 45 participants overall with four offerings, one each in fall, winter, spring, and summer. By far, the spring was the highest-rated program. One hundred percent of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed that the content was clear, challenging, and stimulated their interest, that the instructors were responsive and returned assignments in a timely manner, that their teaching would improve, and that they would recommend the course. Out of all the

elements of the course, the activities ranked the highest, with 86 percent agreeing they were exceptional or superb, followed by the lectures which 72 percent felt were exceptional or superb.

Economic History Online for Teachers

The *Economic History Online for Teachers* course (Table 8) had 14 participants this year. One hundred percent of teachers reported that the instructors returned the material in a timely manner, that the content was stimulating and challenging and that the course will improve their teaching. One hundred percent rated the overall instruction as exceptional or superb. Some written comments indicated that the textbook was under-utilized and that the course content did not match the title of the course.

Economic Demise of the Soviet Union Online (EDSUO)

Economic Demise of the Soviet Union Online (Table 9) was delivered once in an online capacity this year with 26 participants. The content was well-received and praised the teacher participants across the board. One hundred percent agreed that the content was clear, challenging and that they would recommend the course. Overall, 95 percent agreed that the instructors were exceptional or superb and 95 percent agreed that the materials were helpful for their learning and classrooms. Seventy-four percent reported that the discussion boards were exceptional or superb and 95 percent reported that the materials were useful. The written feedback suggested that the professor was engaging and his real-world experiences in the Soviet economy made the course relevant and personal. Many felt that it would help them in their classrooms.

One Day Programs

Nine One Day programs were offered this year—*Fundamentals of Environmental Economics* (Table 10) and *Understanding Global Economic Issues* (Table 11).

Fundamentals of Environmental Economics

The *Fundamental of Environmental Economics* (Table 10) program was offered at six sites and it was enthusiastically received across 98 teacher participants. Across all categories, this program received very high marks and tapped into a desire of teachers to effectively bring these issues into their classrooms. Across the board this program received compliments in every category and the comments suggested the instructors were engaging, the sessions provided worthwhile simulations, and that it gave teachers resources they can adopt in their classrooms.

Understanding Global Economic Issues

The *Understanding Global Economics Issues* (Table 11) program was held in three locations this year for 69 participants. The overall marks for this course were very good. One hundred percent reported that the course was challenging and that the instructors were responsive. Ninety-nine percent reported that the content was clear, and 97 percent would recommend the course to a friend. Ninety-six percent reported that it would improve their teaching in the classroom.

FTE Webinars

FTE introduced four webinars this year which brought in experts to focus specifically on policy and economic issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic. This allowed FTE to broaden their audience and use the economic way of thinking and apply it to these policy issues. There were 866 total participants across all four webinars with 348 completed program surveys. Overall, these were a great success and an important contribution both in terms of presenting relevant and timely material but also the ability to pivot to new programs in the face of a pandemic. The overall results (Table 12) indicate that 90 percent of the teacher participants agreed that the speakers were exceptional or superb and that 95 percent would recommend these webinars to a colleague.

COVID-19 Economic Implications and Policy Response

This webinar (Table 12) had 258 participants and 100 percent agreed that the contents was clear. Ninety six percent agreed or strongly agreed that the material presented would improve their teaching and that they would recommend the course. Ninety-three percent agreed that the instructor was exceptional or superb.

Economic Freedom and Pandemics in American History

This course had 231 participants and 96 percent agreed or strongly agreed that the content was clear. Ninety-five percent said they would recommend the course to a colleague.

This is Your Brain on Numbers: Data, Statistics and COVID-19

This webinar had 266 participants and 94 percent agreed or strongly agreed that the content was clear. Ninety-four percent said they would recommend the webinar to a colleague.

The Economic Implications of COVID-19: An Update

This webinar had 111 participants and 100 percent agreed that the content was clear, and 94 percent agreed that it would improve their teaching and they would recommend the course.

FTE Virtual Workshops

FTE held six virtual teacher workshops this year with 171 participants and 114 of them completing program evaluations (Table 13). Overall, 100 percent agreed or strongly agreed that the content was clear, and 98 percent would recommend the course. Ninety-seven percent agreed that the workshop would improve their teaching.

Active Learning Simulations Can Be Virtual Too! Web Conferencing Tools Section 1

Twenty-five teachers attended this workshop and, of those who completed the program evaluation, 100 percent agreed that the content was clear, with 96 agreeing or strongly agreeing that it would improve their teaching. One hundred percent agreed that the instructor was exceptional or superb.

Active Learning Simulations Can Be Virtual Too! Web Conferencing Tools Section 2

Twenty-six teachers attended this workshop, and this got remarkably high marks across the board. Of the participants who completed program evaluations, 100 percent agreed or strongly agreed that the content was clear, they would recommend the course, and that the content would improve their teaching.

Active Learning Simulations Can Be Virtual Too! Interactive Slide Decks (Pear Deck) Section 1

Twenty-six teachers attended this workshop and it too received high marks. One hundred percent agreed that the content was clear, they would recommend the course, and that the instructor was exceptional or superb. Twenty-five percent suggested the workshop was too short indicating that more could be done to expand learning in this workshop.

Active Learning Simulations Can Be Virtual Too! Interactive Slide Decks (Pear Deck) Section 2

Twenty-eight teachers attended this workshop and it also received high praise. Of the participants who completed program evaluations, 100 percent agreed that the content was clear, they would recommend the course, and it would improve their teaching.

Active Learning Simulations Can Be Virtual Too! Activity Apps (MobLab) Section 1

Twenty-five teachers attended this workshop and, of those participants who completed program evaluations, gave it consistently good marks and comments. One hundred percent agreed that the content was clear, they would recommend the course and it would improve their teaching.

Active Learning Simulations Can Be Virtual Too! Activity Apps (MobLab) Section 2

Fourteen teachers attended this workshop. Of those participants completing the program evaluation, 100 percent agreed that the content was clear, they would recommend the course, and it would improve their teaching. Ninety-one percent agreed that the topic and instructor was exceptional or superb.

FTE Professional Teacher Association Conference

FTE held an in-person Professional Teacher Association Conference titled “Budgets, Debts, and Deficits: Policy and Practice” (Table 14) in November 2019. This in-person event was held in Washington, DC with 34 participants. This event received high praise and sparked interest in future conferences. One hundred percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the course would improve their teaching and that they would recommend the course to a friend. Ninety-seven percent rated the food as exceptional or superb, no small feat.