# BA Economics

# Educational Effectiveness Assessment Plan

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**BA Economics**

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## Introduction

**Purpose.** This document defines the program outcomes (also known as learning goals) and measurable learning objectives for the BA Economics program and outlines a plan for measuring the achievement of the stated outcomes by using several tools. This plan will guide the assessment of the academic effectiveness of the BA Economics program. Assessment is an integral part of continuous program improvement.

**Relationship to AACSB standards and terminology.** The BA in Economics is one of four degree programs accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB, [www.aacsb.edu](http://www.aacsb.edu)). This plan is consistent with both AACSB and NWCCU standards. The AACSB uses the term *learning goal*: “Learning goals state the educational expectations for each degree program. They specify the intellectual and behavioral competencies a program is intended to instill. In defining these goals, the faculty members clarify how they intend for graduates to be competent and effective as a result of completing the program.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Thus, learning goals are the same as *program student learning outcomes (PSLOs)* as employed by UAA and by NWCCU. To avoid further confusion, the Department of Economics has decided to use AACSB terminology. This plan reflects that decision.

To reinforce AACSB standards, each learning goal will be supported by one to three measurable *learning objectives*. A learning objective is directly measurable in a way that can be mapped into a “yes, they did it” or “no, they didn’t” outcome. While at least one assessment tool must be used to measure each objective; multiple tools are encouraged. Readers should note that the term “learning objective” employed by AACSB is not the same as the term “program objective” employed in some UAA assessment plans.

AACSB also makes an important distinction between *direct measures* of learning and *indirect measures*. Alumni surveys or student self-assessments are examples of indirect measures. The AACSB regards these tools as supplementary.[[2]](#footnote-2)

## College Mission Statement

The College of Business and Public Policy at the University of Alaska Anchorage prepares students for leadership at the frontiers of a changing world. We help diverse and growing communities in Alaska and elsewhere meet their challenges by delivering the highest quality in business and public policy education, research, and professional assistance.

## Economics Program Mission Statement

The mission of the Economics program is to discover and disseminate knowledge through teaching, research, and engagement. Economics students develop critical thinking, quantitative, problem solving, and communication skills allowing them to contribute to complex policy debates and excel in a rapidly changing global labor market.

## Learning Goals

( = NWCCU Program Outcomes)

Learning goals are what graduates should be able to do and/or what overall traits they should possess at the conclusion of the program.

**Learning Goals**

Students earning the BA in Economics at UAA are able to:

1. Demonstrate the economic way of thinking and apply it to a wide variety of issues and problems.

2. Use economic concepts and analytical skills to address economic problems.

3. Demonstrate a basic descriptive knowledge of the U. S. and world economies.

4. Understand the role of institutions, especially markets and government, in shaping economic outcomes.

5. Obtain and analyze relevant economic data to test hypotheses against evidence.

## Learning Objectives

### Goal 1. Demonstrate the economic way of thinking and apply it to a wide variety of issues and problems.

Objective 1.1. Achieve a total score at or above the mean score on the TUCE exam (Test of Understanding College Economics).

*comment.* Based on comparative data from most recent edition of the TUCE (4’th edition, 2006), students scoring 12 points or higher on the micro section, or 14 points or higher in the macro section, would score in the top 50% nationwide. The TUCE exam will be given on a regular schedule in some Principles of Microeconomics (ECON 202) and Macroeconomics courses (ECON 201).

Objective 1.2. Successfully apply the economic way of thinking to an issue or problem in a written senior paper.

*comment.* The paper will be produced as part of Economics 492: Seminar in Economic Research, or a similar course where students write a research paper.

### Goal 2. Use economic concepts and analytical skills to address economic problems.

Objective 2.1. Achieve a score of 70% or higher on a set of additional questions to be administered in the core theory classes, Intermediate Microeconomics, Econometrics, and Intermediate Macroeconomics.

*comment.* The additional questions are generated by UAA faculty and provided to the students at the time of the final exam in the respective courses. Questions may be a part of the final exam and responses to the additional questions will be reported separately from final exam scores.

### Goal 3. Demonstrate a basic descriptive knowledge of the U. S. and world economies.

Objective 3.1. Economics majors must achieve a score of 70% or higher on a set of additional questions or a score that is at least equal to the average on the TUCE. These questions will be administered in Principles of Microeconomics or Principles of Macroeconomics.

*comment.* Questions may be given from the TUCE or will be generated by UAA faculty and provided to the students around the time of the final exam in the respective courses. The Econ assessment coordinator will collect questions from faculty and coordinate use in Principles courses. If questions are a part of the final exam, responses to the additional questions will be reported separately from final exam scores.

### Goal 4. Understand the role of institutions, especially markets and government, in shaping economic outcomes.

Objective 4.1. Demonstrate knowledge of institutions, especially markets and government. Knowledge will be assessed using relevant questions on a standardized exam such as the TUCE or by using a series of separately-scored questions to be administered in one or more of the following courses: Intermediate Microeconomics, Economic Development, Public Finance, Money and Banking, Labor Economics, History of Economic Thought, and/or Industrial Organization.

*comment.* Questions and content change on standardized exams such as the TUCE. In some years, it may not be possible to assess knowledge of Goal 4 themes using these instruments. Additional questions will be generated by UAA faculty and provided to the students at the time of the final exam in the respective courses. Questions may be a part of the final exam and responses to the additional questions will be reported separately from final exam scores.

### Goal 5. Obtain and analyze relevant economic data to test hypotheses against evidence.

Objective 5.1. Complete a comprehensive assignment or paper that uses relevant economic data to formally test one or more hypothesis.

Objective 5.2. Use economic data as evidence to support or rebut an argument as part of a written paper about an economic issue.

*comment.* An empirically based student paper will be assessed in the Seminar in Economic Research (Econ 492) and/or in another economics course where a paper is required. The intent of this objective is to isolate and track the use of evidence in written economics papers.

**Table 3**

#### Program Outcomes Assessment Tools and Administration

| **Tool** | **Description** | **Frequency/ Start Date** | **Data Collection Method** | **Administered by** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Standardized Exam | TUCE (Test of Understanding of College Economics) | Annually beginning Fall 2018\* | administered in Principles courses | Dept Chair or designee |
| Upper Division papers | Papers written as part of upper division courses | Annually beginning Fall 2018\* | Instructor evaluations using standard rubrics | Course Instructors |
| Course Level Assessment | Specific assignments and sections of examinations | Annually beginning Fall 2018\* | data compiled from specific assignments and sections of exams | Course instructors; data compiled by Econ assessment coordinator |
| Capstone Course | Evaluation of student performance relative to program outcomes as demonstrated by written work and oral presentations | Annually beginning Fall 2018\* | Faculty evaluation of capstone projects | Instructor of record for capstone course |
| \*Note that we will not assess each objective each year but intend to assess all objectives at least once every three years. | | | | |

**Table 4**

#### Association of Assessment Tools to Program Outcomes

“X” indicates tool is used to measure the outcome.

|  | standardized exam | upper division papers | course level assessment | capstone course |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Goal 1: Demonstrate the economic way of thinking and apply it to a wide variety of issues and problems. | X | X |  | X |
| Goal 2: Use economic concepts and analytical skills to address economic problems. |  |  | X |  |
| Goal 3: Demonstrate a basic descriptive knowledge of the U. S. and world economy. | X |  | X |  |
| Goal 4: Understand the role of institutions, especially markets and government, in shaping economic outcomes. | X |  | X |  |
| Goal 5: Obtain and analyze relevant economic data to test hypotheses against evidence. |  | X | X | X |

## Assessment Implementation & Analysis for Program Improvement

General Implementation Strategy

The CBPP Dean’s Office and College staff is responsible for:

* Providing limited funding for a student worker to assist in collecting and presenting assessment data
* Recognizing the Economics assessment coordinator’s CBPP service, releasing them from other committee work

The Economics program is responsible for:

* Providing questions for alumni and/or employers to be included in possible alumni and employer surveys
* Obtaining, administering, and interpreting the comprehensive exam
* Conducting course level assessment
* Conducting assessment of oral and written communication within the capstone course
* Compiling and analyzing data from course level assessment
* Reviewing data and making recommendations for improvement

Method of Data Analysis and Formulation of Recommendations for Program Improvement

1. Department faculty will collect raw data throughout the course of the year (September-April). Data for all goals will be collected over the course of a three year period.
2. Department faculty designated by the Chair, and/or College staff (if available) will compile and analyze the data prior to or during May of each year.
3. The department’s assessment coordinator shall prepare an annual assessment report and submit it to the Office of Academic Affairs by June 15. The report will include the analysis of data collected during the prior year by each assessment tool; the status of recommendations previously adopted; and proposed recommendations for the faculty to consider.
4. Program faculty will meet every fall at the start of the semester, prior to the start of classes, to review the compiled data from the previous year and to develop recommendations for program improvements to better achieve the stated learning goals.

The proposed programmatic changes may be any action or change in policy that the faculty deems as being necessary to improve performance relative to program outcomes. Recommended changes should also consider workload (faculty, staff, and students), budgetary, facilities, and other relevant constraints. A few examples of changes made by programs at UAA include:

* changes in course content, scheduling, sequencing, prerequisites, delivery methods, etc.
* changes in faculty/staff assignments
* changes in advising methods and requirements
* addition and/or replacement of equipment
* changes to facilities

Modification of the Assessment Plan

The faculty, after reviewing the collected data and the processes used to collect it, may decide to alter the assessment plan. Faculty will discuss the assessment data each year and will seek to identify gaps in the assessment process and revisions that could improve assessment. Complementary assessment data for the BBA program in Economics will be forwarded to the CBPP AACSB assessment coordinator and Economics faculty will follow the same process of discussing and evaluating the BA and BBA assessment data. Changes to assessment may be made to any component of the plan, including the objectives, outcomes, assessment tools, or any other aspect of the plan. When changes are warranted, program faculty shall review and approve the changes. The modified assessment plan will be forwarded to the dean/director’s office and to the Office of Academic Affairs.

## Appendix A: Standardized Exams

**Tool Description:**

The TUCE (Test of Understanding of College Economics) standardized exam may be used for assessment purposes. The TUCE is a standardized test conducted nationally that focuses on material introduced in principles of micro and macro economics. The exam is free and allows us to compare our students to national averages.

**Factors that affect the collected data:**

* Attendance bias. The students who take the exam may not represent the pool of majors. Since the BA Economics is a small program, careful monitoring of the composition of the attendee pool and comparison to other indicators (such as course grades or financial incentives) can help ameliorate this problem.
* Effort bias. Students may not expend maximum effort, especially if the exam does not count toward their grade. Cash prizes and including results as part of the grade can reduce this.

**How to interpret the data:**

The TUCE is nationally normed, scores can be compared to those of the national cohort of graduating seniors for prior years. Trends in absolute scores must be interpreted with caution and, at a minimum, compared to trends in the scores of the national cohort using a differences-in-differences approach.

**Tabulating and Reporting Results:**

Information will be provided on a data sheet for this learning objective and summarized as % successful vs. % unsuccessful.

## Appendix B: Course Level Assessment

**Tool Description:**

Course level assessment for the BA Economics consists of specific assignments, papers, presentations, or sections of examinations that objectively measure the achievement of one or more specific program outcomes. Grades are NOT a course level assessment tool in this plan.

This plan does *not* envisage a weighted averaging process by which course-level results are aggregated into program-level indicators. Instead, we will use specific tools embedded within courses to measure specific outcomes.

**Factors that affect the collected data:**

In spite of the avoidance of course grades as a tool and the other measures noted above, course-level assessment is influenced by the instructor’s perceptions since in most cases the instructor is the individual generating the data. Some specific factors that influence the collected data include:

* The standard set by the instructor. The faculty will attempt to articulate common standards in grading rubrics and/or common questions to address this problem.
* The number and detail of assessments used in the course. For example, a single exam is often not a good indicator of performance for a variety of reasons (must be comprehensive, does not account for students with “test anxiety” (high cortisol levels). The fewer the assessments and the less detailed the assessments, the less reliable the results.

**How to interpret the data:**

Care should be taken to investigate and discuss the factors influencing the results before interpreting the outcome. The results of course-level assessments should also be compared against other measures to get a clearer picture of program performance.

**Sample use of course level assessment in Intermediate Microeconomics**

Under this Assessment Plan, students will answer a final exam question in intermediate microeconomics that covers basic optimization, for example. The student pool will be all students taking intermediate microeconomics. To translate course-level results for this student pool into program-level data requires at least three steps: 1) control for non-majors, perhaps by retaining individual scores until such time as students declare their major and the subsample of majors can be pulled out; 2) ensure that the same question(s) are used across multiple sections of this course; and 3) careful consideration of the variation of question sets across courses.

## Appendix C: Capstone Course

**Tool Description:**

Economics 492 is a senior seminar capstone course and is a required course for the BA in economics. This course as revised requires critical reading and discussion of peer-reviewed literature, a major paper, and an oral presentation. Under this *plan* the paper and presentation will be separately scored and associated with specific outcomes. Capstone final course grades will NOT be used as an assessment tool.

**Factors that affect the collected data:**

* Change in the evaluating faculty over time. Even with common rubrics for written and oral work, changes in faculty evaluators can cause spurious change in results. This can be minimized by having consistency in the instructors who score each paper and/or oral presentation.
* Sample size. The BA economics is currently a small program. Care must be taken to interpret data on papers, presentations, and exams with respect for the volatility that a small sample can induce.

**How to interpret the data:**

This topic has been covered under individual tools described above.

**Tabulating and Reporting Results:**

The department chair is responsible for scheduling classes and ensuring continuity of instruction in the course. The course instructor of record is responsible for providing a compilation of the scores from the paper and presentation. This report is to be submitted to the department assessment coordinator around the same time as the final grades for the course are submitted at the end of the semester.

The departmental assessment coordinator is responsible for listing the scores (without student identifiers) on a data sheet for this learning objective and summarizing the data as % successful vs. % unsuccessful.

1. AACSB International. 2016. Eligibility Procedures and Accreditation Standards for Business Accreditation. http://www.aacsb.edu/-/media/aacsb/docs/accreditation/standards/businessstds\_2013\_update-3oct\_final.ashx?la=en . Revised 31 January 2016. p. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “Provide a portfolio of evidence, including direct assessment of student learning, that shows that students meet all of the learning goals for each accounting degree program. Or, if assessment demonstrates that students are not meeting the learning goals, describe4 efforts that the unit has instituted to eliminate the discrepancy. Indirect assessments may be used as part of the portfolio of evidence to provide contextual information for direct assessment or information for continuous improvement.” AACSB International 2016, op. cit., p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)