

Form E-1-A for Boston College Departments/Programs

Department/Program: Economics/Social Science Core

1) **Have formal learning outcomes been developed? What are they?** (What specific sets of skills and knowledge does the Program expect students to have acquired from taking Social Science Core in Economics?)

(a) Students should understand basic economic theory (e.g., Where do prices come from? Why is there inflation? Unemployment?). They should apply this knowledge to questions like, “Is it a good idea to cap drug prices?” “Should the Fed focus more on unemployment or inflation?” “Should free trade and immigration be promoted?” Applications of economics to the real world are endless, from poverty to the environment to health care, and much more.

(b) Students should master logical thinking, acquiring proficiency with the analytical tools of economics, including graphical analyses and simple algebra. They should acquire a foundation for creative problem solving, with an emphasis on intellectual flexibility rather than rote memorization.

(c) Students should understand that when two people engage in free exchange that both can be made better off. They should understand that economic solutions tend to maximize the size of the pie but don’t guarantee that it will be divided fairly. They should understand that there is more to life than econ, and that insights from sociology, psychology and other disciplines can enrich economic analyses by providing insights into what people are like and why groups can matter.

(d) Students should understand the difference between correlation and causality, and the difference between anecdotal evidence and data-driven analysis. They should develop an appreciation for how difficult it is to assess the impact of public policies.

(e) Students should understand that there’s a difference between how we would *like* the economy to work and how it *actually* works. They should realize that providing social safety nets can dilute work incentives, creating a dilemma for policymakers who care about both efficiency and fairness.

2) **Where are these learning outcomes published? Be specific.** (Where are the Program’s learning expectations accessible to students?)

The above learning outcomes are posted on the Economics Department webpage.

Additionally, syllabi of Core courses offer a more tailored set of objectives related directly to the Social Science Core for the individual courses. Students taking these courses are clearly informed of how these fit with the Social Science Core, or put differently, how this Social Science Core course helps them understand the world around them.

For example, the ECON1101 syllabi state:

As a Core course designed to fulfill a Social Science Core requirement, this course will:

1. Introduce economics as a way of thinking and approaching problems.
2. Guide students to think analytically.
3. Guide students to analyze current issues through an economic perspective.
4. Prepare students for future courses in economics.

Specifically, students will be able to:

5. Discuss economic issues using the vocabulary and terminology of economics.
6. Apply economic theory to real world issues.
7. Analyze the impact of fiscal and monetary policies on markets and the economy.
8. Recognize the impact of other government policies on markets and the economy.

3) **Other than GPA, what data/evidence is used to determine whether students have achieved the stated outcomes for the program?** (What evidence and analytical approaches do you use to assess which of the student learning outcomes are being achieved more or less well?)

(a) Instructors teaching the economics social science Core course (ECON1101) each semester will use a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being highest) to evaluate how well the students in their classes achieved the outcomes listed above.

(b) Reports will be maintained in the Economics Department files of annual faculty meetings held to assess strengths and weaknesses of students taking the economics social science Core course (ECON1101) and whether the curriculum needs modification.

(c) In addition, the Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS) in Economics will form and chair a faculty committee every third year to review the curriculum of the economics social science Core course (ECON1101) and make recommendations to be discussed at the annual faculty meeting. A written report will be maintained in department files.

Note: ECON1101 will only be taught by full-time (i.e. Professors of the Practice) faculty moving forward.

4) **Who interprets the evidence? What is the process?** (Who in the Program or Department is responsible for interpreting the data and making recommendations for curriculum changes if appropriate? When does this occur?)

The DUS will have primary responsibility for designing and implementing modifications to the Economics Core courses. The DUS reports to and is advised by the Economics Department faculty at an annual meeting to discuss undergraduate issues, curriculum and program modifications.

5) **What changes have been made as a result of using the data/evidence?** (Have there been any recent changes to your curriculum? Why were they made?)

Core Renewal Classes. In fall of 2023 the Department offered, for the second time, three Core Renewal classes: *Beyond Price*, Can Erbil; *Economics, Policy and Law*, Tracy Regan, and *Real Estate & Urban Action* Geoff Sanzenbacher.

We are well into our streamlined econ principles format and it is working well. During the '19-'20 academic year, the Department replaced its two-semester sequence, Micro Economic Principles (ECON1131) and Macroeconomic Principles (ECON1132), with a four-credit, one-semester course (ECON1101, Principles of Economics). These changes were made to better respond to the large number of incoming BC students that have taken Economics/AP exams in high school (and not as a result of the evaluation data collected by the Department). Condensing the Principles course into one semester enables the majors and minors an opportunity to take more electives so they have broader and deeper education that better showcases the discipline. The electives are a mix of theoretical and applied economics.

Student leadership in the economics department regularly hosting virtual and in person drop-in advising. Majors who are also in the Economics Honor Society, Omicron Delta Epsilon [ODE], and the Boston College Economics Association [BCEA] answer questions of all students, even first year's.

6) **Date of the most recent program review.** (Your latest comprehensive departmental self-study and external review.)

The last external review of the Department of Economics took place in 2012.

From May 2018 through December 2019, DUS at the time hosted a series of information, self-evaluation Departmental meetings devoted to undergraduate teaching goals, along with the discussion of the new Economic Principles course.

An inaugural 2-day TA/TF (Teaching Assistant/Teaching Fellow) Teaching Workshop for 3rd-year Ph.D. students was hosted by the then DUS and a Professor of the Practice—who were both teaching ECON1101—during the fall of 2020. Since this was the first year of the workshop, the 4th-year and beyond students were invited to participate. Four follow-up lunches were hosted throughout the academic year. TAs cover the discussion sections that accompany ECON1101, beginning in their 3rd-year as Ph.D. students.

This workshop is now an ongoing program. In addition, Workshop leaders are making themselves available to Teaching Assistants throughout the year to answer questions about problems they may encounter. So the Workshop is beginning to blossom into a mentoring system.

The Honors Thesis

The Senior Honors Thesis has been thoroughly restructured, with Michael Grubb sharing the honors program director role with Bob Murphy. The fall course has been enhanced to include a number of presentations on research methods.

The honors thesis sequence, ECON4497-4498, has been reformatted to stimulate participation of our best students, including additional meetings in the fall and allowing 4498 to count toward the major.

The first completely renewed Senior Honors thesis debuted in 2022-23, with Michael Grubb as director. The format has been completely revised, and its size has doubled. The curriculum was fundamentally revised so that research methods were taught in class. Outside speakers from the library, research services, and the Institutional Review Board were brought in to discuss various aspects of research and data. The idea was not just about methodology but networking: to connect students to these resources in a personal way so they would feel comfortable going to those offices for more help later. Organization of the class was changed so as to increase student takeup. The department website was revised to better advertise the thesis course. The course was designated an economics elective, which increased takeup. Thesis guidelines and application procedures were also thoroughly revamped. These efforts succeeded, leading to a doubling of the class size. Student feedback has been overwhelmingly positive; many have remarked that it was the highlight of their BC education.