

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 to the numeric scores in (a), the DUS solicits qualitative information from the faculty in order to gather more fine-grained assessments of course content.

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. Thus far the Department has offered three Core Renewal classes: *Beyond Price, Can Erbil*; *Economics, Policy and Law*, Tracy Regan, and *Real Estate & Urban Action* Geoff Sanzenbacher.

This year, Geoff Sanzenbacher's course was offered, where students learn at both the practical and academic levels. They work in teams to do an Urban Plan Simulation, where they present to a simulated city council on a plan to redevelop a neighborhood. The students' final project redevelops a public housing project into a mixed-income development. Students use ArcGIS software and use other economic data to support their plans. Finally, students make a field trip to Harbor Point (formerly Columbia Point), where they observe the results of a successful mixed-income redevelopment.

The course is co-taught with Neil McCullagh of BC's Urban Action Lab. Neil focusses on the history of housing policy while Geoff concentrates on the economics of housing policy.

Econ principles—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.

Quality of teaching—The most important student outcome from our department's contribution to the core is what students learn, which depends first and foremost on the quality of instruction. Student evaluations for these courses indicate clearly that students learn well and are glad they took the course.

Clubs—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.

Giving beginners a sense of the potential of economics—Honors thesis posters are on display in the department and will remain up in the fall, so that students just starting in econ can get a sense of what advanced work looks like.

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