

A Brief Report on Assessment Activity: Economics Department

Focus: The Honors Curriculum in Economics

An assessment of student preparation for graduate studies in Economics indicated that our students lacked rigorous training in Microeconomics and Macroeconomics. This training is also essential for conducting state of the art research. Furthermore, graduate programs in Economics are far more theoretical and mathematical than undergraduate courses. Hence we found that students interested in pursuing further studies in Economics were not receiving adequate training. In order to provide them with a suitable background, we reinstated the honors sequence in Intermediate Microeconomics and Macroeconomics in 2008-09. These courses form the basis for an honors degree in Economics. Students who took these courses went through a far more rigorous curriculum and were substantially better prepared for graduate studies in Economics. For instance, in Intermediate Macroeconomics Honors, the same text was used as in the regular course, but each chapter was augmented with a mathematical version of the model under investigation. This enabled students to conceptualize the essence of an economic model. In addition, they appreciated the fact that theorizing involves the process of abstraction and they learned how to abstract away unnecessary details and construct a model that can capture the basic trade-offs involved. The Intermediate Microeconomics Honors course used designated teams and in depth research into microeconomic problems. The groups also did in-class presentations and evaluated and critiqued each other's work. An assessment of these students indicated that they possessed a substantially better ability to construct and solve economic models. In addition, many of these students went on to do write research papers of higher quality and were able to carry out more ambitious research projects with significantly greater ease.