

ASSESSMENT PLAN FOR THE MASTER OF ARTS IN ECONOMICS

A. Learning Outcomes

The objective of the Masters of Arts (MA) program in economics is to offer students the opportunity to develop and apply analytical and research skills to economic issues. Graduates from the MA program should be able to assume positions of leadership as professional economists in government or private business. The program should also provide a firm basis for its graduates to be successful in further graduate studies in economics at top doctoral programs.

The particular skills that the program strives to develop in its students are as follows:

- (1) The ability to use economic theory to address economics-related issues in a global context. Students should have an appreciation for the usefulness and limitations of applying the economic approach to addressing a wide range of issues.
- (2) The ability to undertake research on economic issues. This should include the abilities to critically review previous research, to develop approaches to answering relevant questions, and to appropriately draw inferences from the outcomes of these research activities. The stress is on the ability to use theoretical models and data appropriately to answer research questions empirically.
- (3) The ability to analyze data. Students should have the ability to construct, estimate, and interpret econometric models.
- (4) The ability to effectively communicate research findings. The student should be able to develop written reports of their research that document their approach and findings in sufficient detail.

Not all MA students should be expected to leave the program with the same additions to their set of skills, as the structure of the program allows for a degree of flexibility to match the particular interests and needs of the individual student. Students may choose to emphasize their study of issues related to international economics and economic growth, or they may choose to concentrate on issues related to the applied microeconomic areas of health, labor and environmental economics. Other students may choose to take classes that develop their applied business skills. Nonetheless, all graduates of the program should have a firm appreciation of the economic approach, and be able to undertake and explain empirical research that applies that approach.

B. Assessment Methods

The MA program assesses its attempts to meet its goals in the following ways:

- (1) Students must demonstrate an understanding of economic theory by correctly answering questions on economic theory contained in the comprehensive exam.

To Be Determined - The ability to conduct empirical research. The ability to analyze data is shown in the successful completion of analytic questions contained in the comprehensive exam.

The comprehensive examination addresses students' abilities to communicate ideas effectively orally and in writing.

The MA program engages in active oversight of the important core classes devoted to developing analytical and research skills. The program assures that the applied microeconomics and macroeconomics courses remain problem-oriented, so as to develop analytical skills. The program also assures that the econometrics course emphasizes applied projects that give students practice in using empirical modeling techniques that are likely to arise in later applied use of these methods when students complete their comprehensive exams.

In the past, the MA program has utilized an exit-survey program to be administered to graduating students. As set up, the survey is to be administered by the Dean's Office. The exit-survey program has not been active in recent years, and it will be useful to resurrect that program in further assessing the ability of the program to meet the students' needs. The program will seek to develop an open-ended oral interview of graduating students, with the survey carried out by the Managing Director of the program. This may be done in a group format, or on a one-on-one basis. The exit interview would seek out information on the student's perceptions before entering their program, their opinions on how well the program has met their needs, and their suggestions on how the program might be improved.