Department of Economics
Undergraduate Assessment Report

October 12, 2005

This report summarizes the Economics Department's learning objectives for undergraduate majors and our current assessment tools and plans to achieve these objectives. The undergraduate committee is still working on some elements of the assessment plan; when it is completed it will be submitted to the entire department for final approval. Hopefully, we can begin implementing the full assessment plan in the spring or, at the latest, the fall of 2006.

I. A. Learning Outcomes for Economics Majors.

Consistent with the Department's Strategic Plan (1999), the objective of our undergraduate program is to provide majors with a high-quality educational experience that enables our graduates, whether as practitioners of economics or as informed citizens, to understand the range of economic challenges facing Hawaii, the U.S. and the Asia-Pacific region.

To accomplish these goals, the Department intends that each student:

A.1 Be conversant with fundamental economic concepts necessary for informed citizenship and general business discourse. An indication of such competence is satisfactory knowledge of the core content of principles and intermediate theory courses in macro and micro.

A.2 Master analytical methods, research skills, and empirical techniques appropriate for applied economic analysis in career-track government or private sector employment, or for advanced study in business and economics. Skills include appropriate application of intermediate-level conceptual models, ability to conduct and document academic research, facility with elementary statistical methods and standard data sources.

A.3 Demonstrate the ability to think critically about economic issues and to apply economic reasoning appropriately to analyze policy problems. Correctly identify economic choices and fallacies in practical application. Evaluate effects of policies.

A.4 Develop expertise needed to effectively communicate results of economic research and analysis to colleagues and decision-makers through written reports and oral presentations.

B. Help Students Attain Career and Post-Graduate Studies Goals

B.1 Achieve placement of all qualified graduates in rewarding career paths and advanced study.

C. Provide Vibrant Academic Climate in the Department

C.1 Maintain a vibrant academic climate in the department that attracts high quality majors. This requires offering courses that are attractive to students as well as co-curricular activities to engage them.

To assess our progress in achieving these objectives, we have made use of a variety of assessment tools.

II. Assessment Tools to Achieve Learning Objectives

The Department has tried a number of assessment tools in recent years, but to date has not settled on a single tool to measure learning achievements of our majors.

1. Commercial Objective Testing. We tried to use the Educational Testing Service (ETS) Economics Assessment Exam to assess the theoretical knowledge gained by our majors. All students enrolled in 400-level economics courses were invited to take the exam, which was offered on alternate dates in March. Faculty teaching 400-level courses agreed to award up to five percent additional credit toward the final exam for students taking the ETS exam, with the credit awarded proportional to student performance.

Since ETS provides comparison national norms, the exam may also be used to determine how our students rank vis-à-vis peers in the rest of the nation. Unfortunately, a very poor participation rate for the voluntary exam severely limited its usefulness. Of the 89 students enrolled in 400-level courses, only 24 students took the exam. The slim participation may be in part due to the long exam hours—2 full hours. The average score for these students was also very low, placing them in only the 22nd percentile nationally. While these results are troublesome, there are a number of factors that may explain the low scores; one possibility is the potential presence of selection bias toward lower-performing students who were most in need of the extra credit; there was also a higher proportion of juniors and non-economics majors taking our test than in the national comparison group (The results are available on request.)

Primarily due to the high cost ($13 per student) and low turnout, we decided not to use the ETS again. As an alternative method of administering objective tests to ensure more comprehensive coverage and participation, the Department is considering a variety of alternative tools, including requiring students to take a capstone course before graduation where a final assessment of student learning could be completed.

2. Objective Mini-Tests. We have been using mini-exams in Intermediate Micro and Macroeconomics classes, as a lower-cost alternative to the use of commercial objective tests. Beginning in the Spring of 2002, instructors in two courses (one in Intermediate Micro Theory—ECON 301—and one in

Intermediate Macro Theory—ECON 300) included a handful of targeted questions on their midterm and final exams to be used to assess student learning. The results were reported to the undergraduate committee and department chair. These mini-tests have been discontinued partly because of faculty disinterest and partly the tests were not designed properly.

3. Review of Students' Work Product. Beginning in the Fall of 2001, we have collected essays from one upper-division writing intensive course and asked "outside" faculty members to review the work with an eye toward the learning objectives articulated by the faculty over the past year. The reports of the faculty "outside reader" suggest that this may a useful way of evaluating progress toward broad learning objectives, as well as how coursework supports these objectives. For example, in reviewing papers for a course in International Monetary Economics (ECON 461), UHM Economics Professor Theresa Greaney found Substantial evidence that students were able to apply analytical tools to real world policy analysis, but less evidence that they were able to use the key graphical tools to support their analyses. She found generally positive evidence of the ability to use writing to communicate economic ideas.

Another reviewer, UHM Economics Professor James Moncur, noted that term papers from a class covering China's Economy (ECON 416**)** displayed considerable institutional knowledge, but made little reference to relevant principles of economic analysis and made little use of data to support positions. In the Spring of 2006, the Department will follow similar procedures for the evaluation of Oral designated course, ECON 430.

In sum, the Department has yet to adopt a tool to measure achievement in the general population of our majors. Until such a tool is finalized, we continue to use the traditional method of classroom faculty assessment using homework assignments, tests, and grades to ascertain student learning.

III. Helping Students Achieve Career and Post-Graduate Higher Education Goals

1. Internships. Based on student input from surveys of incoming and outgoing majors, the Department has setup a more formal internship program with the Cooperative Education Program. We have added two courses, ECON 390 and 391 for the internships. ECON 390 concentrates on short-term work experience using economics skills, and ECON 391 concentrates on a longer-term work experience for more advanced students; it requires a two-semester commitment.

During the Fall of 2003, the undergraduate committee evaluated the department internship program. We solicited information from faculty, students, and employers. Overall, students mentioned benefits from our internship program, such as providing valuable training to them and their further career planning decisions. However, not every company provides an environment that is

conducive to learning. Tasks vary greatly from company to company, ranging from assisting in surveys, forecasting, and tax filing which heightened students' knowledge of economics and computers to tedious administrative help which has little educational value. Students have several suggestions to other students and our department to find better internship opportunities. Based on our assessment, the undergraduate committee is working on summarizing student experiences to be posted on the Economics Department web site to help other students select internships.

2. **Faculty Mentoring.** Beginning with the 2001-2002 academic year, each econ major is assigned to a faculty member who serves as his/her mentor. The faculty mentor is expected to provide advice to mentees on future academic and career opportunities, and may be asked to review/oversee student work or to grade presentations of students who enroll in internships. In the Fall of 2003, the Department surveyed student participation and satisfaction in our mentoring program. The report shows that department's mentoring program benefits a small but significant percentage (27 out of 102) of our majors. This suggests that some form of mentoring should continue. The report also shows that, among both students and faculty members, there is substantial amount of apathy as well. It is possible that many faculty and students do not have a good grasp of what mentoring is about; and/or they believe that they have better things to do with their valuable time. The undergraduate committee is currently developing content to be added to the Economics Department web site to inform students about the mentoring process. An undergraduate mentoring guide is also being updated for use by faculty.

3. Career Placement. Survey results indicate a need for assistance with career placement. The Department has developed stronger ties with Career Services and is advising students on how to go about looking for career opportunities. The Department, in conjunction with the student-led Economics Club, holds an annual Career Night for our majors/minors/potential majors. Guest speakers typically include Career Office Counselors, recent UHM economics graduates, and potential employers. These Career Nights have been enormously successful often with standing room only attendance. Unfortunately, the Department does not have the resources to track our graduates to ascertain student career achievements as we do not have a strong record of keeping contact with our alumni (however, with a few exceptions).

IV. Creating a Satisfying Academic Experience

1. Survey of Incoming and Graduating Seniors. Beginning in 2002, the department has surveyed our incoming majors (administered at the time of major declaration) and graduating seniors (at the time they complete the goldenrod form) to assess satisfaction with the program, the usefulness and appropriateness of courses offered, success of the curriculum in building specific skills, and the career placement record. The surveys include objective questions designed to permit comparisons of responses at different stages of the program. Opportunities for subjective evaluations are also provided. Because of how these surveys are administered, we receive an extremely high participation rate. The difficulty right now is finding the resources to process this massive amount of the information. The Department is currently working on putting the surveys into a web based database system to facilitate both the administration of the surveys and the reporting of results.

2. The Department has completed three surveys intended to solicit student opinion, satisfaction and ideas about new programs. The programs surveyed include the Department's Internship/Co-op program, Mentoring program, and Foreign Exchange program. Results from these surveys have been very Valuable in helping the department to understand students' needs and concerns. We are currently using this information to update content on the Department's undergraduate web page.

V. Use of Assessment Results

The Department has primarily used assessment results to guide the revision of our curriculum and to respond to student requests for more opportunities for active involvement in the program, including more regular information about department news, internships, faculty interaction, and job placement. Based on initial survey results, over the past three years the Department has implemented a number of changes to our program.

1. Curriculum Reform. The Department completely revised the prerequisites for undergraduate courses to better meet the needs of both majors and non-majors. For example, ECON 301—intermediate microeconomics—will now require only ECON 130 or faculty approval instead of both ECON 130 and 131. Our upper level course offerings are now divided into two groups, one group is intended to serve both majors and non-majors and only requires one semester of principals as a prerequisite. The more advanced group of courses is intended primarily for majors and requires intermediate economics as a prerequisite.

The Department implemented a program for new course development and renovation of existing courses. The result is up to four new courses (one is still awaiting approval) have been introduced in recent years: Economics of Tourism—ECON 320/TIM 320**,** Economic Forecasting**—**Econ 427**,** Games and Economic Behavior**—**ECON 356**,** and Mathematics for Social Sciences—SOCS 121 (still pending approval). These new courses have proved to be Enormously popular with recent enrollments of 50 students+ for each course. The Department, in conjunction with the Department of Sociology and Political Science, has received approval for three certificate programs: "Undergraduate Certificate in Political Economy", "Interdisciplinary Certificate in Human Resources/Organizational Management", and "Interdisciplinary Certificate in

Social Science and Health".

In the Fall of 2005, the Department proposed an Upper Division Honors Program, which received unanimous approval from the faculty. Completion of the Honors curriculum makes students eligible for graduation with Honors, High Honors or Highest Honors. We are in the process of discussing with the Honors Program director to begin implementing the program. The Department has also been considering the possibility of offering on-line courses.

5. E-mail and Web. The Department overhauled its undergraduate program web site to include more comprehensive and timely program information (http://www.economics. hawaii.edu). We have also established an e-mail list of

all economics majors and minors so that we can quickly distribute important department information; this list has been extensively utilized to publicize events, speakers and opportunities for our majors and minors. Information about seminars, workshops, department events, and student opportunities is now regularly posted on the Department website. Students and potential UH students now have easier access to departmental information. Positive comments have been received about the website revisions.

6. Exchange programs. The Department has initiated international exchange programs with Thammasat University in Thailand and Nihon University in Japan, and is encouraging students to participate in other foreign study programs. Extensive information about these programs is available on our Department website. These programs are now oversubscribed, with more applicants than available slots.

7. Clubs and societies. To increase student involvement and recognition in our program , the Department's undergraduate committee has resurrected two important undergraduate organizations—the Economics Club and the Omicron Delta Epsilon Honor Society. We have added new members to ODE every semester since Fall 2001, and the Economics Club now numbers about 20 students. Some of the Club's major projects include the organization of Career Night, an analysis of the student free bus pass project for the Chancellor's office, and the coffee shop design project for Saunders Hall, a project that was requested by the Dean of the College of Social Sciences.

8. Tutoring. Given some of the results from our objective testing, and based on feedback from students, the Undergraduate Advisor, Gary Kikuchi has worked with the Economics Club to establish a peer tutoring program (This is a joint program with the Sociology Department.) The pilot program covered 130 and 131. Three Economics Club members were hired as tutors. All tutors are required to have earned an A- or higher in 130 and 131 and a GPA of 3.5 or higher in economics course work. To assess the demand for tutoring services, tutors have surveyed 800 students in Economics and Sociology. All economics tutors are registered in ECON 390—Economics Internship.

VI. Concluding Observations on the Assessment Process

The Department has been very successful in collecting and responding to student input on the program. We have had some success in assessing student learning. Much more remains to be done. While reviews of student work product have been valuable to individual faculty teaching these courses, a more comprehensive method of evaluation is needed. The Department still needs to obtain better objective evidence on how students are meeting learning objectives. We are in the process of developing additional assessment tools.

Economics Department Graduate Assessment Report

October 11, 2005

While the Economics Department has been developing an assessment program since 2001, until now the focus has been almost exclusively on the undergraduate program. (See UHM Department of Economics Undergraduate Assessment Report, October 12, 2005 .) The Graduate Committee has recently begun work on an assessment program for the graduate programs, which will be brought to the full faculty for discussion, refinement and adoption. In this work, the Committee intends to: (1) identify specific learning goals or other outcomes for our program, (2) identify ways to assess how well our programs are accomplishing these objectives, (3) implement assessment activities, (4) interpret the results, (5) use the assessment results to recommend program changes or improvements.

This document summarizes the results of the Graduate Committee's deliberations so far. These ideas will be brought before the full Economics faculty in the near future.

1. Background

The UH-M Economics Department offers two graduate degrees. The Ph.D. degree is intended to provide rigorous academic training for students who will embark on teaching and research careers in academia, the public sector, or private industry. The MA program is intended to train students for careers as professional economists. Traditionally, the Department has had a larger proportion of Ph.D. students than MA students, although this varies from year to year.

2. Relevant literature, practice

There are a surprisingly limited number of Economics graduate programs for which we could find assessment plans or reports. In most cases, departments emphasize their use of the traditional assessment mechanisms built into the Ph.D. program: the qualifying (preliminary) exams, the dissertation proposal and oral comprehensive exam, and the final dissertation defense. [1] Programs also typically conduct alumni surveys to track professional progress of graduates.

[1] See Georgia State University, Department of Economics Learning Outcomes Assessment Plans, **http://education.gsu.edu/ctl/outcomes/AYSPS/Economics_Assessment_Plan.htm#Ph.%20D**; Iowa State Economics Department Outcomes Assessment, **http://www.econ.iastate.edu/programs/graduate/Files/OutcomesAssessment.pdf**; Northern Illinois University Assessment Plan, **http://www.niu.edu/assessment/_plans/pdf_files/econ.pdf**; Oklahoma State University Program Outcome Assessment Model for the Agricultural Economics Porgram, **http://accreditation.okstate.edu/RR/assessment/plans/dasnr/agricultural_economics.pdf**, 2002.

3. Learning Outcomes and Objectives

M.A.

1. Students will demonstrate an understanding of economic theory and analytical and quantitative tools appropriate for applied analysis.
2. Students will be able to understand, use, and analyze economic data.
3. Students will demonstrate the ability to analyze a specific economic problem and draw reasoned policy conclusions
4. Students will demonstrate the ability to write a professional report and present the results orally.
5. Students will be well prepared for a position in their field that directly uses their MA training or for admission to a professional program or Ph.D. program in their field.

Ph.D.

The goal of the Ph.D. program is to train professional economists for careers in teaching, research and policy analysis.

1. Students will demonstrate an understanding of economic theory and analytical and quantitative tools.
2. Students will demonstrate an ability to understand, integrate, and apply the various tools, concepts, and principles of economics and quantitative methods to analyze and to develop solutions to economic problems in a clear and concise written form.
3. Students will demonstrate a "frontier" level competency and familiarity with the literature in the student's perceived specialty area.
4. Students will demonstrate the ability to conduct independent and original research in economics.
5. Students will have the skills necessary to qualify for teaching positions at the university and college levels, and for research positions in the public or private sector.
6. Program graduates will be able to obtain employment that uses the level of expertise obtained in the Ph.D. program.

4. Existing Assessment Activities

The Graduate Core. A key component of our graduate programs is continual evaluation of the content and methodologies covered in the seven-course Ph.D. and four-course MA core curricula. The most significant evaluation typically occurs at the time of new faculty hires; recent Department recruitment in microeconomic theory and econometrics have led to substantial revisions to these core courses that bring them more closely in line with curricula at leading institutions. Revisions to core structure and content also occur periodically in response input from faculty and graduate students.

Qualifying Exams. The qualifying (preliminary) exams, given at the end of the first year of the Ph.D. program, serve as a means of assessing the effectiveness of the program in facilitating student learning of core theory and economic methodology.

Research Seminar and Third-Year Research Paper. In our department, all Ph.D. students are required to enroll in Econ 730 Research Seminar during the fall of their third year, and to complete their Third-Year Research Paper. The course is designed to survey research methods and to get students started on dissertation research. Their Research Paper is reviewed by a three-person committee who are able to assess the student's preparation for advanced research in their intended research area. This evaluation and the students' work in the Research Seminar also provide the Graduate Chair with information useful for assessing the success of core and field courses in providing students with preparation necessary for dissertation-level research.

Dissertation Proposal. The research proposal and oral comprehensive exam are the primary tools used in the Department for assessing the readiness of students for dissertation research. While the emphasis is on assessment of the preparation of individual students, the proposal process also provides more general information about the extent to which students are learning core theory and methods, and to which the program is facilitating the transition from formal coursework to independent research.

The Dissertation or Individual Project. For Ph.D. students, their committee's evaluation of the dissertation in the final defense is the ultimate appraisal of the learning they have accomplished. The dissertation defense is an excellent evaluative tool both for the individual and for the program because it measures core learning and research accomplishment against the continually evolving yardstick of best practices within the discipline. Because we have rather large committees at UH (4 disciplinary advisors and 1 outside member), dissertation proposals and defenses often provide opportunities for discussion about general shortcomings that we observe, and so they influence department deliberations on the nature and coverage of the Ph.D. program.

For MA students, the capstone experience is an individual project. Students are evaluated on their ability to apply theory and methods from the program to an applied research topic appropriate to their career orientation. They are also required to make an oral presentation of research findings to faculty and students.

Placement. Placement of graduates is arguably a key measure of success for a graduate program. The Department has complete information about the initial placements of students who enter the American (actually, global) market for Ph.D. economists. This information tells us quite a bit about the qualifications of our graduates as viewed by the broader academic and business community. In recent years, for example, an increasing number of our graduates have proven highly competitive in this market, suggesting that training and reputation may have improved. Aside from the primary academic market, the department has a strong tradition of training economic professionals, particularly from Asia, who go on to significant careers in public service.

Teaching Experience. Graduate students interested in academic careers often lecture for the Department, either during the regular term or in summer sessions. Consultation with faculty and results of student course evaluations provide useful assessment information.

Ongoing Graduate Chair Assessment

The Graduate Chair regularly assesses student satisfaction with the program and specific courses through informal discussions and periodic surveys. This information is particularly useful in gauging the appropriateness of entry criteria, the content of core courses, and the demand for field courses.

5. Proposed Additional Assessment Activities

Publication. Ph.D. students are encouraged to publish early and to participate in professional meetings. Publication and professional travel activities can be an indicator of student preparedness for professional careers and for the academic job market. While we are aware of some student's activities through their inclusion in the Department's Working Paper series and through anecdotes, we could implement a more comprehensive inventory of these activities.

Placement. We have noted above the information that comes from placements of graduate students in the primary market for Ph.D. economists. We could do a better job of tracking initial graduate placements of students who take other kinds of jobs. Better tracking of alumni would permit us to maintain more complete records of career advancement beyond the initial placement.

Post-graduate publication and accomplishments. We could implement a survey to better track the impressions, accomplishments and careers of graduates once they leave our program. At present, we have only incomplete information that comes in via personal correspondence. A survey, perhaps conducted 1, 5 and 10 years beyond graduation, could include questions to gauge how well we are preparing graduates for various aspects of professional life.

6. Department Use of Assessment Results

To some extent, this has been discussed above. Information from the Ph.D. qualifying exams has a regular and direct impact on the content and pedagogy of these courses, since the exam graders are drawn from faculty teaching in the core. Information about research preparedness and competence is gleaned from the dissertation process by participating faculty and indirectly affects faculty decisions on the structure and content of the program. In some cases, this indirect evidence has a demonstrable influence on policy. The department's recent decision to adopt a Third-Year Research Paper in lieu of the traditional field exam was a direct outgrowth of observations that many students were insufficiently prepared to make the transition from coursework to independent research.

Several years ago, the Department instituted a summer Math Cram Course for incoming M.A. and Ph.D. students. This was in response to faculty observation from exam results, course evaluations and student feedback that first-year graduate students were often inadequately prepared for the quantitative rigor of first-year courses. Course content and pedagogy have been assessed through evaluations after each summer, and the results have informed course design.

Department faculty take a keen interest in the content of the graduate program and the quality and placement of graduates. Because of this, there is a nearly-continual process of reevaluation of the curriculum, and student achievement. As an example, at present there is an ongoing discussion about whether the two-course core sequence in microeconomics adequately prepares students for their field work and research. Such discussions often begin as casual conversations among interested faculty before moving through the Graduate Committee and the full faculty.

There is room for more systematic use of information on placement and graduate satisfaction. This is particularly important for MA students, where we have considerably less information currently. Survey results would need to be communicated to the full faculty and taken into consideration in decisions on program change.

7. Agenda

A version of this document will be presented to the full faculty in coming months, together with a draft schedule for implementation.