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ASSESSING THE STATE OF ECONOMICS EDUCATION IN UPLB

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ABSTRACT

The paper highlights the role of the Department of Economics in the education of the students in the Economics profession. Since the institution of the B.S. Economics program back in 1986, the Department has produced over 600 graduates and these graduates can be found in various government agencies and private institutions. It is thus imperative to assess the program under the context of Economics Education, an emerging field of study in Economics unlike the traditional field of Economics *of* Education.

The paper starts off with a comparison of the Department's offering of the Bachelor of Science degree as compared with three tertiary education institutions providing similar programs namely, UP Diliman, De La Salle University, and Ateneo de Manila University. The second part of the paper examines more deeply the Economics program in terms of the quality of Economics Education received by undergraduate students, such as teaching methods, core and specialization courses offered, and teaching facilities. These can be perceived as inputs necessary for quality Economics Education.

The last part of the paper provides a measure of the relevance of the Department's program by linking the perceptions of graduates about the Economics program with their chosen career paths. This would give a better appreciation of whether the skills and concepts learned complement their job preferences.

Introduction

The field of Economics Education, which deals with the dissemination of knowledge about the single subject of economics, is vastly different from the field of Economics *of* Education, which is concerned with the benefits, costs, production, and financing of the dissemination of knowledge. Most studies on the former discuss the method Economics was taught with and the materials used in teaching, such as the course syllabi, instructional materials, and exams apart from the common classroom observation. Another aspect that is looked upon in the analysis of tertiary Economics, relative to the analysis of the teaching methods, is the variation in the textbooks used for the different Economics course topics taught. Other studies regarding Economics Education inputs and outputs have shown that quality education can be affected by simultaneously having overpopulation and lack of facilities in school. Siegfried and Fels (1979) were able to establish an Economics Education production function wherein the outputs of Economics Education were measured as a function of the inputs to it, such as student human capital and faculty human capital.

Studies on Economics Education in Western countries are broadly performed and extensively published as a result of their already established database. Studies such as those done by Becker (1997, 2000), Salemi et al. (2001), and Salemi and Siegfried (1999) focused on the methodology of teaching Economics. Course syllabi, other instructional materials and exams were analyzed apart from the common classroom observation. Colander (2000) focused on the general changes in the Economics Education structure for the past 50 years, with emphasis on the Economics graduate program.

For the Philippines, an undergraduate thesis done by Dimapilis in 2007 assessed the status of tertiary Economics Education in the Philippines, analyzing the components of the Philippines' Economics Education production function. Also, Bello and Camacho (2004) reviewed the undergraduate Economics program of the Department of Economics, University of the Philippines Los Baños. The review essentially looked at the quantity and quality of enrolment, teaching methods, core and specialization courses offered, and teaching facilities. Still, the Philippines lacks studies regarding the status of Economics Education, which is still treated as an emerging field of study in the country.

This paper continues the thrust of the Department along the lines of Economics Education. After looking at its own program, the next step was to compare it with the

undergraduate Economics programs of other tertiary education institutions. Taking off from the initial survey conducted in 2004 among the senior students, a follow-up survey was done in 2008 among the same subset of senior students. Furthermore, the study was extended with the use of a tracer survey conducted on graduates of the program to determine whether the degree and extent to which the skills and concepts they learned under the program were applicable to their career paths.

UPLB BS Economics Program vs. Other Universities' Programs

Dimapilis (2007) conducted an initial study comparing the BS Economics program in UPLB with other higher education institutions (HEIs) offering undergraduate Economics programs. Examples of these include UP Diliman's BS Economics and BS Business Economics programs, Ateneo de Manila University's AB Economics Honors, AB Economics Standard, and AB Management Economics programs, and De La Salle University's BS Applied Economics–BS Commerce Major in Financial Management program. Table 1 summarizes each HEI's curriculum program set against the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) prescribed AB Economics program as the benchmark. The standard curriculum that was set by CHED has four main categories of subject contents, namely, General Education, the Economics Major Fields, the Economics Electives, and the Other Courses.

All HEIs conformed to the CHED standard structure of Economics programs and are similar to a great extent. The major differences lie mainly in the Other Courses category which depends on the programs' specialization. For example, UPLB's Other Courses Category includes 3 units of a mandatory Agricultural Economics subject (for specialization under either Development or Natural Resource Economics) aside from Non-Economics Core Courses. For UPD's BS Business Economics, the BA Core courses as well as the BA electives were included in the non-Econ subjects, as well as the Management courses for ADMU ABME, and Commerce and Finance courses for DLSU AE-MFI. Free Electives which provide flexibility for the students' choices of subjects were available except in DLSU AE-MFI.

The differences are more evident when comparing the number or percentage of the total units allocated by each program. Table 2 shows the simplified structure of the Economics program/s for each HEI as patterned after the categories of CHED. UPLB's allocation of units for major courses falls within the CHED-prescribed number, and its

allocation is highest among the HEIs in percentage terms. This suggests UPLB's extensive approach in teaching the different Economics major subjects as compared with other HEIs. Also, UPLB, along with the ADMU Economics programs, has the second largest portion of their curriculum allotted for the Economics major subjects. The drawback, however, is the reduced flexibility for students to choose a second area of interest, with the limited number of units allowed for Other Courses and Free Electives (40 in total) as compared with UPD's BS Economics with 42 units allotted for Free Electives alone and 10 units for Other Courses.

Further comparisons were made by Dimapilis (2007) in terms of measures of inputs to and outputs of Economics Education. Measures for Economics Education inputs include the tuition fee rates, the textbooks used, the facilities of the school used, the composition and characteristics of the faculty (whether BS, MS, or PhD graduates), regular unit load per semester, the average class size, and the course curriculum, while measures of output of Economics Education were the data on enrollment of HEIs, the data on graduation from the HEIs, and the percentage of honor graduates relative to the graduating classes. Table 3 summarizes the measures for Economics Education inputs for each HEI.

The UPLB BS Economics program is quite comparable to other HEIs in terms of Economics Education inputs. UPLB's faculty composition is at par with other schools (although the percentage of PhD graduates is lower at 31% compared with UPD's 90% and DLSU's 34%). Tuition fees for UPLB and UP Diliman are expectedly lower than their private HEI counterparts, and average class sizes of UPLB Economics lectures are lower compared to the other programs. It is however in teaching facilities where UPLB has a slight disadvantage, with not enough computers made available for students, only one particular econometrics software used (STATA), and only two LCD projectors shared for all existing classrooms.

Measures of outputs of Economics Education are summarized in Table 4, although such measures are widely perceived to be inadequate and difficult to compare. For example, the grading system for UP constituent units and that of DLSU and ADMU differ considerably. In terms of the number of enrollees, UPLB from the past six years had 66 students per year level, on the average, or 264 for all year levels annually. This pales with UP Diliman's and Ateneo's enrollment figures, although such can be partly attributed to the number of slots made available for incoming freshmen. The average number of graduates,

however, is 53 per batch, 13 students less than the enrollment figure which may imply delays in finishing the degree (which sometimes leads to non-completion at all). The mean GWA, per batch, upon graduation, however, is about 2.24, which is relatively good in standing. However, UPLB does not impose a minimum required retention grade unlike UP Diliman (around 2.5 GWA) and Ateneo (minimum required grades for certain subjects). Lastly, figures show that on the average, about 16% of the batch (from 2000 to first term 2007) graduated with honors.

Economics Students' Perceptions on the B.S. Economics Program

A survey identical to Bello and Camacho (2004) was administered for the current batch of senior students, and essentially the same demographic characteristics were observed. The number of this year's respondents is slightly higher at 49 students (compared to the previous 45). Majority of the respondents are aged 21 years and below (92%), and there are more female respondents (33). More students chose development economics as their field of specialization (88%) as opposed to natural resource economics.

Table 5 compares the reasons of the students for choosing Economics as their undergraduate course. The rankings remain the same with interest as the main consideration followed by parents and peer recommendation. Most of the 14 responses under the "others" category cited Economics as an excellent prelude to post-graduate law.

The reasons why the students found it difficult to study Economics was attributed to the instructor and the course itself, followed by the facilities (Table 6). Again, this mirrors the results of the 2004 survey. The grading system was deemed an inconsequential reason. Other reasons stated were due to lack of interest or difficulty in studying.

Table 7 summarizes the major considerations used by the instructor in evaluating the students. Exams come out on top, followed by technical papers, presentation/reporting and quizzes. In 2004, these were also the top four factors. For students who felt that the grade they received was not reflective of their performance, they stated that technical papers should be given the next highest weight following exams.

Based on the general assessment of the program, the 2008 respondents found the BS Economics program fair to good (Table 8). The overall competency profile was close to

good, scoring highest on providing appreciation of the economic issues and problems besetting the country (3.96) as well as enabling the student to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate concepts and issues relevant to policy and decision-making (3.94). Except for teaching method according to creativity which got a rating of fair (2.96), all the other elements of the academic profile were rated as above fair. The BS Economics program rated highest in the appropriate balance between fundamentals/basics and elective courses followed by its multi-disciplinary approach to analyzing issues (3.94 and 3.73, respectively). In terms of real world exposure and structural features, the program was rated as above fair. The prerequisites were rated good especially the competencies provided by the basic and intermediate theory courses.

Economics Graduates' Perceptions on the B.S. Economics Program

Thirty-two BS Economics graduates responded to a survey relating their assessment of the BS Economics program particularly to their choices of present and/or past occupations. The ages of the respondents range from 22 (the most recent graduate) to 39, with more female respondents (20) than male (12). Twenty-four chose development economics as their field of specialization (75.0%). Majority of the respondents have remained in their jobs for 2 or more years already (19), although 63.1% of them have had previous work. Breaking down the type of jobs by sector shows 62.7% of present and past jobs chosen were in the private sector (Table 9). Also, research work seems to be the most preferred nature of work, with 31 out of 66 responses attributed to it. Other jobs account for the next biggest share, suggesting the versatility of the Economics graduates that the program produces. Some of these jobs include banking and finance, insurance, accounting, market analysis, stock markets, and even work with water distribution and telecommunications.

The ratings of these graduates on the BS Economics program are shown in Table 10. The evaluation criteria by the graduates are essentially the same as for the students in Table 8, the only major difference being that of sections five and six which relate their assessment of the curriculum to their current and/or previous jobs ("prerequisites" category for the students' survey). Also, their evaluation proves to be valuable since these come from the point-of-view of people who are already immersed in the "real world", thus they are in a slightly better position to rate and make comments about the program.

In general, the alumni considered the program to be good in its instructional aspects (overall competency profile, academic profile, real world exposure, and structural features). Just like the students' assessment, the highest mean ratings stem from the program being able to provide the necessary analytical and quantitative skills (4.13), especially with respect to policy and decision-making analysis in the public and private sector (4.03). Also rated highly were the program's appropriate balance between the basic and electives courses and a balance between the economic theory and applications of these theories, enabling students to best appreciate economic issues and problems and the policies meant to address them. All other criteria were rated at close to fair standards (3.59 or below), notably with lower ratings in the provision of guest seminars and study tours (3.16) and flexibility of the program when it comes to access to most recent publications and books (3.13) and to taking advantage of new teaching modes and technologies (3.31).

In terms of the program's relevance, basic grounding in mathematical and statistical methods was a major help in the respondents' current and previous lines of work (4.14 and 4.10, respectively). This gives credence to well-taught basic and intermediate economic theory courses, a necessary prerequisite for the ease in understanding higher and more advanced economics courses. Still, some respondents suggested the option of internship in a research institute, government agency, or private sector as an alternative to the undergraduate thesis. Not all students have their sights set on further studies in Economics, and the internship can give them a taste of applying their knowledge and skills in the real world. This is also related to comments suggesting a more practical and applied approach while easing on the currently high technical nature of the program. Also, comments also suggest having a less general curriculum since it somewhat "waters down" knowledge of the fields of specialization a student chooses to immerse himself in. A primary example is money and banking being the only course related to the finance and banking industry, which accounts for a respectable number of graduates' line of work.

Conclusions

A look at the BS Economics program of UPLB shows a program that is comparable to other highly regarded tertiary schools' own Economics programs. Only the Department is observed to include all economic fields of study in its program such that its students are well-rounded and better-equipped to face the numerous challenges after graduating from it. Undergraduate students at the final stages of their learning process rate the program as highly

competent especially when it comes to providing the basic ins-and-outs of economic theory and its applications; this sentiment is shared by most Economics alumni who have personally experienced the “real world” and are succeeding in building their chosen careers anchored on strong economic fundamentals. Despite this, the lack of infrastructure and perceived inflexibility of the program greatly dampens the positive views about the BS Economics program. Survey respondents mostly suggested acquiring new materials and improving the existing facilities to be immediate priorities of the Department, whilst making the program structure more flexible and attuned to the needs of the current times.

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Table 1. Structure of the Simplified Economics Programs per HEI, as patterned against the CHED Minimum Standard

CHED	UPLB	UPD			ADMU		DLSU
	BS ECON	BS ECON	BS BECO	AB E(H)	AB E(S)	AB ME	AE-MFI
GE	RGEP + other required subjects	RGEP + other required subjects	RGEP + other required subjects	GE	GE	GE	GE
Major Courses (Economics Core + Electives)	Econ Core + Specialized (Econ)	Econ Core + Econ Electives	Econ Core + Econ Electives	Econ Core + Econ Electives	Econ Core + Econ Electives	Econ Core + Econ Electives	Econ Core + Econ Electives
Other Courses	Non-Economics Core Courses + Specialized (AgEcon)	Non-Econ Core	Non-Econ Core BA Core BA Elective	—	—	Mgt Core	Commerce Finance
	Free Electives	Free Electives	Free Electives	Free Electives	Free Electives	Free Electives	—

Source: Dimapilis (2007)

Table 2. Simplified Economics Program Structure per HEI, in number of units per category (percent of total units in parenthesis)

Subjects	CHED	UPLB	UPD			ADMU		DLSU
		BS E	BS E	BS BE	AB E(H)	AB E(S)	AB ME	AE-MFI
GE	63 (50.00)	57 (39.58)	50 (37.03)	50 (37.03)	98 (70.00)	89 (67.94)	92 (63.45)	68 (31.63)
Major*	45 (35.71)	47 (32.64)	33 (24.44)	33 (24.44)	36 (25.71)	36 (27.48)	21 (14.48)	66 (30.70)
Other Courses	18 (14.29)	28 (19.44)	10 (7.41)	46 (34.07)	—	—	20 (13.79)	81 (37.67)
Free Electives	—	12 (8.33)	42 (31.11)	6 (4.44)	6 (4.29)	6 (4.58)	12 (8.28)	—
Total	126	144	135	135	140	131	145	215

*values that were projected were the minimum Economics subjects that can be taken by the students per program, per HEI, assuming that the student chooses to pursue another area of interest by getting non-Economics subjects for the Free Electives instead of more Economics subjects

Source: Dimapilis (2007)

Table 3. Faculty Profile, Tuition Fee Rate per Unit, Average Class Size, and Facilities Used in Teaching per HEI

Factor	UPLB	UPD	DLSU	ADMU
Faculty Profile (% with PhD and MA/MS)	75	100	77	75
Unit Load (per semester)	18	18	18	18
Tuition Fee Rate (PhP per unit)	1,000	1,000	1,809	~2,500
Average Class Size	30	40(regular) 80(lecture)	40	40(max) 12(min)
Facilities Used in Teaching				
Computer-student ratio	1:2	1:1	—	1:1
Software	STATA	EViews; STATA	EViews, STATA	SPSS, EViews, STATA
OHPs-classroom ratio	1:1	1:1	—	1:1
LCD-classroom ratio	1	1:1	—	1:1

Source: Dimapilis (2007)

Table 4. Summary of Measures of Output per HEI

Factor	UPLB	UPD	DLSU*	ADMU
Average number of enrollees	66/yr level; 264 overall/yr	~600 per enrollment; 90 per batch admitted	—	Econ/S: 65 Econ/H: 9 MgtEcon: 123
Average number of graduates	53 per batch	~90 per batch	—	almost the same as enrollment
Mean GWA	2.24 (1.45 to 3)	2.5 to required	—	retention requirement
% Honor Graduates	16% (6 to 33%)	—	—	12 to 15%

*data not available

Source: Dimapilis (2007)

Table 5. Major Considerations in Choice of Economics as an Undergraduate Course

Factor	2004 Survey (n=56)		2008 Survey (n=64)	
	Responses	% of Responses	Responses	% of Responses
Interest	24	42.9	23	35.9
Popularity	4	7.1	5	7.8
Recommended by parents and peers	21	37.5	22	34.4
Other	7	12.5	14	21.9

*Total responses do not sum up to 45 (2004) or 49 (2008) due to multiple responses.

Table 6. Reasons for Difficulty/Non-Difficulty in Taking Any of the Economics Courses

Reasons	2004 Survey		2008 Survey	
	Responses	% of Responses	Responses	% of Responses
Why difficult?	(n=76)		(n=92)	
Instructor	23	30.3	33	35.9
Course itself	22	28.9	30	32.6
Environment	6	7.9	5	5.4
Facilities	9	11.8	10	10.9
Grading system	4	5.3	3	3.3
Class size	6	7.9	4	4.3
Other reasons	6	7.9	7	7.6
Why not difficult?	(n=8)		(n=2)	
Course was easy to understand	2	25.0	—	—
Had a very good instructor	3	37.5	2	100.0
Fair grading system	1	12.5	—	—
Other reasons	2	25.0	—	—

*Total responses do not sum up to 45 (2004) or 49 (2008) due to multiple responses.

Table 7. Respondent's Rankings of Major Considerations of Instructors in Evaluating Student Performance

	2004 Survey		2008 Survey	
	n	Mean Rank	n	Mean Rank
As given by the professor	(n=30)		(n=40)	
Technical paper	26	2.69	35	3.14
Presentation/reporting	26	3.96	34	3.50
Exams	29	1.07	39	1.00
Attendance	25	5.28	34	6.12
Recitation	26	4.62	33	5.12
Assignment	25	5.44	35	5.14
Quizzes	27	3.52	37	3.51
As suggested by respondent	(n=15)		(n=9)	
Technical paper	14	4.14	8	2.88
Presentation/reporting	14	3.21	8	3.63
Exams	14	1.86	8	2.00
Attendance	13	6.62	8	6.25
Recitation	14	3.64	8	4.75
Assignment	13	4.85	8	5.13
Quizzes	14	3.36	8	3.50

*Total responses do not sum up to respective n due to missing responses.
 Note: Rank=1 (highest) up to 8 (lowest)

Table 8. Ratings on the BS Economics Program Assessment

Criteria	2004 Survey		2008 Survey	
	N	Mean Ratings	n	Mean Ratings
I. Overall competency profile (from the objectives of the program when it was instituted)				
a. Provides necessary skills in quantitative and policy analysis	44	3.86	49	3.84
b. Enables the students to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate concepts, issues and data relevant to policy and decision-making in the public and private sectors	45	3.78	49	3.94
c. Provides a deep appreciation of the economic issues and problems besetting the country, as well as an objective and critical attitude towards policies meant to address them	44	3.80	49	3.96
II. Academic Profile of BS Economics Program				
a. Teaching method according to: creativity	44	3.14	49	2.96
b. Teaching method according to: interactivity	45	3.42	49	3.24
c. Teaching method according to: innovativeness	45	3.20	49	3.22
d. Multi-disciplinary approach to analyzing issues	45	3.84	48	3.73
e. Balance of theory and applications	45	3.47	49	3.71
f. Appropriate balance between fundamentals/basics and electives courses	45	3.69	49	3.94
g. Incorporation of new advances in relevant field of economics	45	3.60	49	3.45
h. Conforms to “international best practice” method of teaching	44	3.64	49	3.57
i. Introduces appropriate teaching materials	44	3.70	49	3.65
III. Real World Exposure				
a. Appropriate adaptation to regional conditions and issues	45	3.60	48	3.50
b. Provision for seminars: guest lectures, study tours, etc.	38	3.13	48	3.42
IV. Structural Features				
a. Flexibility for adjusting academic profile, components	45	3.76	49	3.71
b. Flexibility for instructional needs (access to recent publications, books, etc.)	45	3.36	49	3.29
c. Flexibility for taking advantage of new teaching modes, technologies	45	3.40	49	3.20
V. Prerequisites				
a. Basic appropriate grounding in mathematics and statistical methods	45	3.98	49	3.92
b. Draws upon appropriate competencies provided by basic and intermediate theory courses	44	3.66	49	4.06

*Total responses do not sum up to 45 (2004) or 49 (2008) due to missing responses.
Note: 5=excellent; 4=good; 3=fair; 2=good; 1=very poor

Table 9. Classification of BS Economics Graduates' Jobs

Job by sector	Government	Private	Other
Current job	15	14	—
Previous job(s)	8	28	2
Total	23	42	2

Job by nature of work	Teaching	Research	Other
Current job	10	13	7
Previous job(s)	3	18	15
Total	13	31	22

*Total responses do not sum up to 32(current job) and 23 (previous job) due to multiple responses.

Table 10. Evaluation on the BS Economics Program and Relevance to Work

Criteria	n	Mean Ratings
I. Overall competency profile (from the objectives of the program when it was instituted)		
a. Provides necessary skills in quantitative and policy analysis	32	4.13
b. Enables the students to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate concepts, issues and data relevant to policy and decision-making in the public and private sectors	32	4.03
c. Provides a deep appreciation of the economic issues and problems besetting the country, as well as an objective and critical attitude towards policies meant to address them	32	3.94
II. Academic Profile of BS Economics Program		
a. Teaching method according to: creativity	32	3.47
b. Teaching method according to: interactivity	32	3.59
c. Teaching method according to: innovativeness	32	3.44
d. Multi-disciplinary approach to analyzing issues	32	3.78
e. Balance of theory and applications	32	3.75
f. Appropriate balance between fundamentals/basics and electives courses	32	3.84
g. Incorporation of new advances in relevant field of economics	32	3.56

h. Conforms to “international best practice” method of teaching	32	3.47
i. Introduces appropriate teaching materials	32	3.56
III. Real World Exposure		
a. Appropriate adaptation to regional conditions and issues	32	3.47
b. Provision for seminars: guest lectures, study tours, etc.	32	3.16
IV. Structural Features		
a. Flexibility for adjusting academic profile, components	32	3.56
b. Flexibility for instructional needs (access to recent publications, books, etc.)	32	3.13
c. Flexibility for taking advantage of new teaching modes, technologies	32	3.31
V. Relevance to Current Job		
a. Basic appropriate grounding in mathematics and statistical methods	29	4.14
b. Draws upon appropriate competencies provided by basic and intermediate theory courses	29	4.10
VI. Relevance to Previous Job(s)		
a. Basic appropriate grounding in mathematics and statistical methods	23	3.96
b. Draws upon appropriate competencies provided by basic and intermediate theory courses	23	4.04

Note: 5=excellent; 4=good; 3=fair; 2=good; 1=very poor