

Undergraduate Student Learning Assessment Activities Report Department of Agricultural Economics

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES Fall Semester 2001 through Spring Semester 2004 (past five semesters)

(Joint Report for Agribusiness and Agricultural Economics Degree Programs)

The Department continues to be involved in the University's student learning outcomes assessment efforts. Student learning outcomes assessment data has been collected each semester during the past four years by the Department of Agricultural Economics using a senior assessment learning outcomes survey (given to graduating seniors each semester). Also a graduating senior luncheon has been held each semester by the Department Head as an opportunity for an exit interview session for graduating seniors to provide personal feedback and offer suggestions for changes in curriculum requirements and/or advising program.

A direct knowledge-based exam was given to both graduating seniors and new freshmen majors in the Department during 2001 and 2002 but was discontinued in 2003.

An Alumni Outcomes Assessment Survey was developed (August 2002) and mailed out (December 2002) to 159 former students who graduated from the Department in the years 1997, 1998 and 1999. The results of this Alumni Survey were summarized during the 2003 Spring Semester and reported as part of the Department's 5 Year Academic Program Review in May, 2003 (refer to Tables 8 and 9).

Graduating Senior Assessment Learning Outcomes Survey

The senior survey addresses questions regarding the perceptions by graduating seniors for various areas of the Department which include: (1) the quality of their educational learning experience; (2) the factors which influenced their choice of academic major; (3) satisfaction with department courses, advising, and career preparation; and (4) the students' participation in internships, international study, and industry related work experiences while attending the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. The survey is attached in Table 1.

Graduating seniors for both Agribusiness majors and Agricultural Economics majors have been surveyed separately to determine their perceptions of the Department and the quality of their education received. The responses by graduating seniors for the past five semesters (December, 2002 to May, 2004) regarding their perceptions of the Department are very positive in every category (with only a very limited number responses that disagreed). The largest share of all graduating seniors (i.e. both Agribusiness and Ag Economics) would recommend their departmental major to another student (47 out of 69 responses Strongly Agreed) while an equal share of graduating seniors reported having an overall positive attitude towards the Department of Agricultural Economics (46 out of 69 responses Strongly Agreed).

Almost an equal number of responses by graduating seniors either Strongly Agreed or Agreed with the statement that the Department had prepared them for their career (64 out of 69 responses) or for a further education (61 out of 69 responses). Most importantly, 35 responses by graduating seniors for both degree programs strongly agreed (while 30 responses Agreed) with the statement that they were satisfied with their academic experience in the Department of Agricultural Economics. These responses indicate a positive academic program learning experience by seniors graduating from the Department.

The graduating senior assessment learning outcomes survey was rewritten during 2002 to more directly measure the thirteen (13) specific student learning objectives that have been established and approved by the Department's teaching faculty. Results from this survey for the past five semesters (December, 2002 to May, 2004) for both Agribusiness and Agricultural Economics graduating seniors in regards to these specific student learning objectives indicate a high level of agreement (either Strongly Agreed or Agreed was answered) for each of the Department's thirteen (13) learning objectives.

Graduating seniors who disagreed with gaining a proficiency in a particular learning objective (identified by the highest number of disagree responses) indicate that the department should direct more attention toward helping students: (1) to communicate more effectively through oral presentations and interpersonal relationships, (2) to communicate more effectively through written and electronic means, and (3) to better recognize the importance of ethics in both personal life and a professional career.

Students graduating with a major from the Department of Agricultural Economics (both Agribusiness and Ag Economics majors collectively) expressed an overall high level of satisfaction with their experience in the Department. Out of 77 responses, 55 graduating seniors Strongly Agreed with the statement "I was personally satisfied with my Department" while another 25 Agreed with that statement. The level of satisfaction expressed by graduating seniors in terms of their faculty advising was equally as favorable.

Direct Knowledge Based Learning Exam

A direct knowledge based exam was developed three years ago by having faculty compose questions they felt would accurately test the students' understanding of key areas in agricultural economics. The exam has been given to both new students (freshmen orientation course) and graduating seniors each semester for the past two years. The results gathered from this direct knowledge based testing have yielded mixed results with no consistent pattern. This test has not been an effective measure to accurately assess the learning proficiency of the department's curriculum for each major (program of study). Many students have only taken one or two upper level courses in the Department and are inadequately prepared to answer questions covering a broad range of topics/problems in agricultural economics. The students end up guessing (especially with the freshmen orientation class) at the answers which yields misleading results from the entire process. It was a great idea three years ago but it has not worked effectively as a measure of student learning assessment. The use of this test was discontinued in 2003.

New Assessment Learning Test for Graduating Seniors

The test will be totally revised next summer (2004) and implemented during the 2004 Fall Semester for graduating seniors. A new format for this direct based knowledge exam will be introduced. The test will become discipline specific and will consist of 20 multiple choice questions. The first ten questions of the exam will be core based knowledge that any graduating senior from the department should be able to answer correctly (demonstrate proficiency) no matter what their particular area or emphasis of study has been in the Department.

The remaining ten questions will be discipline specific (production economics, marketing, international trade, natural resources, agribusiness management, agricultural policy). Each student will choose the area of emphasis that they feel the most qualified from their program of study. Hopefully the results of this testing process will measure how well our graduating seniors have mastered the basic curriculum presented in our introductory courses that all majors must complete as well as the advanced level courses that these students have chosen in their program of study as an area of emphasis.

Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Alumni Survey

An alumni survey for recent graduates was developed as another tool to measure student learning assessment outcomes for the Department's undergraduate program. The Alumni Survey was sent out to all department graduates for the years 1999, 1998, and 1997 respectively last December (2002). Of the 159 alumni surveys mailed out to these recent graduates, 67 surveys were completed and returned to the department for a surprising response rate of 42 percent.

Results of the Alumni Survey regarding their perceptions of the Department and their level of education received were extremely favorable. In regards to having a positive attitude toward Department, 65 out of 67 alumni either Strongly Agreed or Agreed with that statement. As to whether the Department prepared them for a further education, 15 alumni answered that they were uncertain (highest number of responses for any question). In terms of recommending agricultural economics as a field of study to another person, 63 out of 67 alumni responses either Strongly Agreed or Agreed with that statement as well.

In terms of the response by these alumni to the Department's student learning objectives, the results from the alumni assessment learning survey were equally as favorable. The most positive response from these recent department alumni was being prepared with the technical knowledge in agricultural sciences and natural resources (61 out of 67 either Strongly Agreed or Agreed with this learning objective). Specific learning areas where some Department alumni thought they were lacking necessary skills were identified as: (1) being able to identify economic forces underlying the changes and trends in U.S. agricultural sector; (2) being able to communicate effectively through oral presentations; and (3) being able to plan more effectively through time management.

Conclusions and Assessment Activities Results (Program Changes)

1. In order for students to gain stronger writing skills, all degree programs (i.e. AECN, ABUS, and NREE majors) in the Department now require six hours of written communication courses which must be selected from ENGL and/or JGEN. The communication elective requirement that was dropped in the CASNR core has been replaced by the Department with an additional 3 hours of written communications.
2. In order for students to gain stronger oral communication skills, the Department no longer accepts COMM 109 for its academic degree programs (i.e. AECN, ABUS, and NREE majors). Students must select from COMM 209, COMM 212 or COMM 311 in order to meet their oral communication course requirement.
3. In order for students to gain a stronger understanding of microeconomic theory for upper level AECN courses, Department now requires ECON 312 Intermediate Microeconomics (in addition to the previous ECON 311 requirement) for its academic degree programs (i.e. AECN, ABUS, and NREE majors).
4. The Department has implemented the activity of holding monthly Noon Hour Teaching Roundtable Discussions to begin a better dialogue among faculty of the various curriculum and advising issues and to keep faculty better informed of curriculum/academic advising revisions or program changes.

Table 1: Graduating Senior Survey Items

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I have a positive attitude towards the Department of Agricultural Economics.					
I am satisfied with my academic experiences in the Department of Agricultural Economics.					
I am satisfied with student activities in the Department of Agricultural Economics.					
My education in the Department of Agricultural Economics contributed to my intellectual growth.					
My education in the Department of Agricultural Economics has fostered my personal development.					
My education in the Department of Agricultural Economics prepared me for further education.					
My education in the Department of Agricultural Economics prepared me for a career.					
I would recommend a program of study in the Department of Agricultural Economics to someone who wants to earn a major like mine.					

My academic experiences and student activities in the Department of Agricultural Economics developed my skills, knowledge, and proficiency in being able to...	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Understand theoretical concepts and principles of economics applied to agricultural sciences and/or natural resources.					
Possess basic technical knowledge in agricultural sciences and/or natural resource economics.					
Identify the economic forces (i.e. causes and policies) underlying changes and trends in the agricultural economy for U.S. farm sector.					
Possess a basic understanding of a world oriented market economy and gain an international perspective.					
Demonstrate problem-solving and analytical skills (statistical, computer, math, operations research).					
Recognize the importance of ethics in both personal life and a professional career as well as the importance of stewardship of our natural resources.					
Understand the need to acquire life-long learning skills and knowledge with the ability to effectively adapt to possible career changes.					
Communicate effectively through written and electronic means.					
Communicate effectively through oral presentations and interpersonal relationship/communication skills.					
Acquire team building skills to work cooperatively with others in groups.					
Demonstrate leadership capabilities with others and to take personal initiative.					
Analyze new ideas/current issues and to objectively discuss these new ideas/current issues with others.					
Plan and organize more effectively through better time management.					

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I was personally satisfied with my Department.					
I was personally satisfied with the teaching ability of Department faculty.					
I was personally satisfied with the professional expertise of Department faculty.					
I was personally satisfied with opportunities to interact with Department faculty.					
I was personally satisfied that my Department courses prepared me for employment.					
I was personally satisfied that my Department courses prepared me for Graduate School.					
I was personally satisfied with the faculty advising in the Department.					