

Economics Courses Offered and Required in Two-year Colleges

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American junior colleges which offer economics at all, offer from one to 10 courses. The mean is three courses. Altogether, at least 35 different courses in economics or closely related subjects can be found in our two-year colleges, but the Principles of Economics course is by far the most common. Where economics is required of some students, the Principles course is the one most likely to be specified, and students majoring in business or closely related fields are those most often compelled to meet economics requirements.

According to the American Association of Junior Colleges, the number of two-year colleges grew from 678 in 1961, with a total enrollment of 748,619, to 912 in 1967, with a total enrollment of 1,671,440 [1]. In fact, in 1968, 28 percent of all students enrolled in American institutions of higher education were enrolled in two-year colleges.* Total enrollment is expected to reach nearly 3,000,000 by 1972, and it is predicted that junior colleges will enroll one-half of all college-bound high school graduates by 1975 [2].

Currently, about two-thirds of the full-time students entering the two-year colleges intend to transfer to four-year schools. Certainly, the four-year colleges should be aware of these developments and have a fairly clear picture of the kind and quality of education received by students transferring from junior colleges.

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*An annual enrollment increase of 12 percent is anticipated. In 1965, for example, there was a rise of 23.83 percent. The percentage increase in total enrollment would be even higher if we concentrated only on public colleges, for enrollment in private schools declined in some years [1]. The net increase in the number of two-year colleges reported by the AAJC between 1964 and 1965 was 52; it was 66 between 1965 and 1966; and between 1966 and 1967 the net increase was 75.

This article reports the results of a nation-wide survey made by the New York University Center for Economic Education in 1968 and 1969, offers some comments on those results, and makes suggestions for further studies in the junior college area.*

The Questionnaire and the Sample Population

The NYU Center sent a questionnaire to every accredited two-year college listed in the latest edition of the *World Almanac* early in 1969. For purposes of the study, the terms "two-year college" and "junior college" were considered to be synonymous, and referred to any institution offering two years of education above the high school level, regardless of the school's name (junior college, community college, technical institute, vocational college, agricultural and mechanical college, seminary, military school, academy, or whatever), provided that at least some of the courses were transferable to an accredited four-year college or university. The two years of training might be terminal for some students, but might be considered the first half of four years of college work for others. Whether or not the school offered an A.A. degree or the equivalent was not considered important as long as some or all of its courses were seen as being equivalent to courses offered for freshmen and sophomores at accredited four-year colleges.

The questionnaire asked for the name and address of the school, and for a list of the courses in economics or closely related subjects which the school regularly offers. A list of 24 courses typically offered in colleges was provided, so that the respondents could simply check off those offered in their institutions. Space was provided for the addition of any other courses not included in the check list. It asked which students, if any, are required to take economics, and what courses are specifically mandated. It also asked for the latest total enrollment figures and for the number and/or approximate percentage of all students who take one or more courses in economics. The questionnaire asked for the number of persons teaching economics full-time, and for the number teaching it part-time. (Persons who are full-time faculty members but who teach other courses as well were listed as part-time instructors.) It asked for the number of instructors with doctorates in economics, the number with masters degrees as their highest degree in economics, and the number with bachelors degrees as the highest economics preparation.† Finally, the respondent was asked to indicate the department or division responsible for the teaching of economics.

The questionnaire was returned by 293 schools, about 54 percent of those having received it, but only 32 percent of all junior colleges listed in the 1968 *Directory* of the American Association of Junior Colleges. Since the sample was not scientifically selected, there was concern about its adequacy. Several authorities on junior colleges were consulted, and all agreed that the sample was large enough. (Other studies have used as few as 57 colleges, less than one-fifth the size of the

*The complete report of the NYU survey can be obtained from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service, National Cash Register Company, 4936 Fairmont Avenue, Bethesda, Maryland 20014. George G. Dawson, *Economics in Two-Year Colleges*, Document #ED 030 435. Price: \$1.15 hard copy; 25¢ microfilm.

†See "The Preparation and Professionalization of Economics Instructors in Two-Year Colleges" by Darrell R. Lewis in this issue for the results of this part of the NYU Survey.

sample obtained in the NYU survey.) It should be noted, however, that the sample may be seriously biased, for it is probable that the colleges which replied are those more interested in economics and hence more likely to have an economics program. In short, the sample may represent only those American junior colleges which do offer one or more courses in economics, and may not adequately depict the colleges as a whole.

In terms of the three basic types of colleges (public, independent, and church-related), the sample reflects the national pattern. For example, 12 percent of the AAJC's list is made up of independent schools, and exactly 12 percent of the sample consists of independent colleges. Replies came from 44 states, the District of Columbia, and the Canal Zone. Thus, only six states are not represented. Only two percent of the nation's junior colleges are found in the six unrepresented states, and their total enrollment accounts for less than one percent of all students enrolled in American two-year colleges. The findings were compared with some of the local studies where similar information had been obtained, such as Koch's survey of junior colleges in Illinois and Missouri [2], and Thompson's survey of California colleges [3]. In so far as it is possible to compare this study with the others, the findings were very similar.

The fact that every college returning the questionnaire offers at least one economics course does *not* imply that all two-year institutions include economics in their curriculum. The questionnaire asked that colleges not offering any economics place a check mark in an appropriate place and return the questionnaire anyway. None did this, and it is probable that many of those schools failing to return the questionnaire do not offer economics at all. Unfortunately, this survey did not reveal the number or percentage of junior colleges offering economics. It simply showed that at least 293 colleges do so, and the sample probably does represent the situation in two-year colleges which have some sort of economics program.

Economics Offerings

Every college returning the questionnaire offers at least one economics course. The largest number of courses in economics and closely related subjects offered by a single institution was 10. The mean was three courses. (Interdisciplinary social science courses which include some economics were considered to be economics courses for purposes of the study.)

A course in Principles of economics was most common—all but one school including such a course in its curriculum. Statistics was the second most common course, 100 schools offering this subject. (Statistics was considered an economics course if offered by the same department or division offering the basic economics course or if required or strongly recommended for students compelled to take economics.) Other commonly taught courses included Business organization, Economic geography, Economic history of the United States, Problems of economics, Business (or corporate) finance, General economics (basically designed for terminal students), and Consumer economics. The offerings are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1
Economics Offerings in Junior Colleges

Course	Percentage of colleges
Principles of economics	over 99
Statistics	34
Business organization	31
Economic geography	24
Economic history of the U.S.	17
Problems of economics	16
Business (or corporate) finance	13
Consumer economics	12
General economics	12
Money, credit, and banking	11
Interdisciplinary social science	11
Labor economics	4
The securities market	4
Economic development	3
Managerial economics	3

(In addition, the following courses were offered in two percent or less of the junior colleges: Government and business, History of economic thought, Comparative economics, Public finance, Economic history of Europe, Price theory, International economics, Agricultural economics, and Personal finance.)

The course titled "General economics" in Table 1 is a course offered by 12 percent of the colleges *in addition to* their regular Principles of economics course. It appears under various titles, such as Basic economics, Fundamentals of economics, Elements of economics, The American economy, Economics for the citizen, General economics, Economic problems and issues, Survey of economics, and Economics for non-majors. It is usually a three-credit offering, although in some cases it carries two or four credits. It is not considered comparable to the principles course and may not often be transferred for credit in a four-year college. The course is basically designed for terminal students (those whose formal education will end with the junior college), and is less rigorous than the principles course.

In addition to the courses listed above, at least 24 miscellaneous business courses bearing some relation to economics were reported. A few schools offer courses dealing with the local area, such as "Economic development of the Texas Gulf Coast" and "Problems of the San Joaquin Valley." One college offers a course in urban economics, one in political and economic institutions, and one in industrial economics. Altogether, about 35 different courses were reported, not counting the several miscellaneous business courses.

Economics Requirements

About 74 percent (218 schools) reported that they require economics of *some* students. The students most likely to be required to take economics are those majoring in business or closely related fields. (Business administration, management, marketing, accounting, commerce, business education, office administration,

and secretarial majors were considered business students for purposes of the study.) About 89 percent of the 218 schools requiring economics of some students require it of business majors. Social science majors (including history, political science, and sociology) are required to take economics in only about 16 percent of the 218 schools. This is distressingly low, in view of the strong relationship that economics has to the social sciences. Economics is required of engineering, pre-engineering, and closely related fields in 14 percent of the 218 schools. Table 2 summarizes the specific requirements.

Table 2
Students Required to Take Economics

Major Field	Percentage of 218 colleges
Business	89
Social sciences	16
Engineering	14
Law or pre-law	6
Data processing	6
Forestry and related fields	5
Agriculture	4
Pharmacy or pre-pharmacy	3
Education (teacher-trainees)	3
Home economics	3

Care should be taken in interpreting the figures in Table 2. The fact that three percent of the 218 colleges require economics of teacher trainees does *not* necessarily mean that only three percent of all education students take economics, for not all of the 218 colleges have education students. All we know is that at least three percent of the schools do have education students and do require them to take economics.

It is not surprising that business students are usually required to take economics. In fact, a nation-wide survey of the economics preparation of business education majors recently revealed that over 90 percent are required to study economics [4]. But, aside from the categories "Social sciences" and "Engineering," the actual numbers of colleges reporting economics requirements are quite small.*

The total number of students taking at least one economics course was nearly 99,000. This represents about 14 percent of the total enrollment in the 293 colleges which returned the questionnaire.† Only about eight percent take an economics

*Other students required to take economics in some colleges were those majoring in nursing, industrial arts, journalism, aeronautics, dentistry, medical technology, theology, metallurgy, mathematics, geology, electronics, pre-medicine, building contracting, and undertaking. The total number of students majoring in these fields is probably very small, and some of the subjects are undoubtedly offered in only a few of the nation's junior colleges. Students preparing for business careers are probably more numerous than those in the other fields. A few colleges (four) require economics of *all* students, and five others require it of all degree candidates.

†Enrollment figures reported in the *World Almanac* or in the *Directory* of the AAJC were used in the few cases where respondents failed to indicate their total enrollment. No distinction was made between day and evening students, terminal and transfer students, degree and non-degree candidates, or full-time and part-time students. All students were counted, but no student was counted twice.

course in those schools which do not require it of any of their students. In those schools which do require economics of some students, the number actually taking economics represents over 15 percent of the total enrollment. These schools account for 74 percent of all schools in the sample and about 76 percent of total enrollment in the sample population. It is not surprising, of course, to find that more students take economics when it is a required subject.

In addition to the 14 percent of students enrolled in the 293 colleges in the sample who take a course in economics, we know that there are many colleges not included in the sample which do offer economics.* If we conservatively estimate that only five percent of all junior college students *not* included in the sample are taking economics, the grand total approaches 157,000. In any event, it is safe to conclude that a substantial number of students in junior colleges take economics. The number is certainly large enough to merit the attention of the four-year colleges and of the economic education movement.

In the 218 colleges requiring economics of some students, the principles courses is the one most often specifically mandated; at least 89 percent do so. Very few other courses are specifically required. Business organization and Problems of economics were required in six percent of the cases, and Statistics in four percent, but all other courses were required by less than three percent of the 218 schools.

Economics is the responsibility of a social science department or division in about half of the sample colleges. A business department or division (often called Department of Business Administration, Department of Business Education, Department of Business and Economics, or some similar title) bears responsibility for economics in about 34 percent of the schools. These business departments are sometimes within a division of social science, however. Economics is the joint responsibility of a social science department and a business department in five percent of the cases. Only about two percent of the colleges have a separate economics department. In very few cases, economics is taught in a General Studies Department, an Academic or Liberal Arts Department, a Department of History (or History and Political Science), or the Home Economics Department.

Comparison of Three Types of Colleges

Unless otherwise indicated, the figures given earlier pertain to the sample schools in the aggregate. In this section we break down some of the findings by type of college—public, independent, and church-related. Public colleges are those controlled by a state, local district, junior college district, unified district, county, or some other unit of government. Independent colleges are not under the control of a unit of government, nor are they controlled by, or affiliated with, a religious institution. Church-related colleges are controlled by, or affiliated with, a church or religious institution. As indicated earlier, our sample of each type of college is in about the same proportion to the total sample as each type is to the total junior college population in the United States.

For the most part, the individual types of colleges follow the same general

*In California alone there are at least 32 junior colleges not included in the sample, with a total enrollment of well over 230,000, which do offer economics. Information on the teaching of economics in those colleges was obtained from Thompson's study [3]. Enrollment figures on those schools came from the *Directory* of the AAJC.

pattern as the total sample population. There are a few exceptions, however. The percentage of students in the independent colleges who take economics is significantly higher—31 percent as compared with 13 percent for the other types of schools. Nevertheless, 74 percent of the independent colleges require economics of some students, the same percentage as the total sample. The possible explanation is that many independent colleges cater largely to students preparing for careers in business, and business students are the ones most likely to take economics. Even where economics is not specifically required of business students it is often so strongly recommended that it is practically a requirement.

Another exception to the general pattern is that the church-related schools are less inclined to require economics—65 percent as compared with 76 percent of the public and 74 percent of the independent colleges. The church colleges offer an average of two economics courses, while the others offer three. Only 23 percent of their economics instructors teach the subject full-time, compared with 43 percent for all colleges. It seems, then, that church-related colleges place less emphasis upon economics than the other two types (Table 3).

Table 3
Comparison of Three Types of Colleges

Factor	Public	Independent	Church	All colleges
Students taking eco.	13%	31%	13%	14%
Schools requiring eco. of some students	76%	74%	65%	74%
Eco. instructors teaching eco. full-time	44%	45%	23%	43%
Instructors with doctorates in eco. as highest degree	3%	4%	3%	3%
Instructors with masters in eco. as highest degree	47%	37%	50%	46%
Instructors with bachelors in eco. as highest degree	12%	19%	11%	13%
Instructors with no degree in eco.	38%	40%	36%	38%
Average number of eco. courses offered	3	3	2	3

Conclusion

Fact-finding studies of the type represented by this report are but a first step. Evaluations should be made of the economics courses offered by the junior colleges to see if they are comparable to similar courses in the four-year institutions. Thompson's studies in California suggest that some junior colleges are as effective as four-year institutions in teaching basic economics. A study now being made by the NYU Center for Economic Education shows that some New York junior-colleges fall far below the four-year colleges. Not only did their students achieve much lower mean scores on both the pre-test and post-test, but the average gain was

considerably less. (The New York junior college students made an average gain of two points in the scaled score, as compared with an average gain of over four points for students in one-semester courses in four-year colleges.) These studies cover a small population, however, and much more research is needed with an adequate national sample.

If junior colleges will be increasingly catering to students who intend to transfer to four-year schools, the universities should be concerned about the quality of instruction being provided. If the economics courses in the junior colleges prove to be less effective than similar courses in four-year institutions, steps might be taken by the Centers, Councils, and universities to assist the two-year colleges to improve the quality of their offerings. Even if they should prove to be as effective, cooperation between the university economist and the junior college teacher should be beneficial to both institutions. Centers and Councils can help to bring about this cooperation, or at least to improve communication between them. In view of the fact that 38 percent of the economics instructors in the sample do not have bachelors degrees in economics, it is quite probable that they would welcome the advice and assistance of the universities and the economic education organizations.

It must be realized, of course, that the two-year colleges will continue to serve many students who will not transfer to four-year schools. The so-called "General economics" course might suffice for such persons, but it would be interesting to see how much economics is learned in these courses as compared with the traditional principles course. The more rigorous principles course ought to be required of the business students, however. (Over half of the students in the economics classes tested in the NYU study were preparing for careers in business.)

In any event, the four-year colleges, the universities, and the Centers and Councils for Economic Education should have a better knowledge and understanding of the existing situation and the trends in the junior colleges.

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