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Report of the Committee on Economic Education

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Report of the Committee on Economic Education

A major event in 2000 was a Research Projects Conference that the Committee sponsored in May with funding from the Association. The 20 economists participating in the Conference were: Rajshree Agarwal, Sam Allgood, Robin Bartlett, William Becker, Betty Blecha, William Bosshardt, Myles Boylan, Joseph Daniel, T. Aldrich Finegan, W. Lee Hansen, Peter Kennedy, Mark Maier, Kim Marie McGoldrick, Michael Salemi (conference chair), John Siegfried, Wendy Stock, John Taylor, Wilbert van der Klaauw, William Walstad, and Michael Watts. Important research questions in economic education were discussed at the Conference, and teams of economists were organized to design new projects to answer those questions. Work is currently underway to obtain funding for five projects in economic education: (1) improving teaching methods; (2) conducting better assessments of student learning; (3) evaluating long-term effects; (4) using new technologies to enhance teaching and learning; and (5) reporting on Ph.D. education in economics in the United States.

The Committee sponsored two sessions at the 2001 ASSA meetings. Alan Krueger chaired the first session, "New Research in Economic Education." It included three papers that are published in this issue of the *Papers and Proceedings*. The paper by Michael Salemi, John Siegfried, Kim Sosin, William Walstad, and Michael Watts discusses the five projects to stimulate more research on the teaching and learning of economics that were outcomes from the Research Projects Conference. The paper by William Becker and Michael Watts provides new survey data on the teaching practices of economics faculty members and compares the results to past survey findings. The paper by William Walstad and Ken Rebeck reports the results from a national testing of the economic understanding of high-school students in the United States. Daniel Hamermesh, Carol Johnston, and John Taylor served as discussants.

The second session focused on "Distance Learning in Economics" and was chaired by William Walstad. The first paper by Dennis

Coates and Brad Humphreys presented the findings from a national survey on the use of technology to teach college economics. The second paper by Rajshree Agarwal, Dennis Coates, Edward Day, Brad Humphreys, John Kane, and Michelle Vachris evaluated the effectiveness of using face-to-face and online instruction for teaching economics to undergraduates. The third paper by Charles Holt, Susan Laury, and David Lucking-Reiley describes web-based classroom experiments in economics. The discussants were Robert Connolly, Michael Murray, and Denise Hazlett. Those interested in these papers are encouraged to contact William Walstad via e-mail (wwalstad1@unl.edu).

The Committee continues to believe that teaching-methods workshops provide a valuable service to Association members, so for the fifth year, the Committee sponsored a one-day teaching workshop as part of the AEA program at the ASSA meetings. There were three sessions. In the first session, William Becker and William Greene conducted a workshop on the teaching of statistics and econometrics to undergraduates. The second session arose from a grant from the Calvin K. Kazanjian Economics Foundation, Inc., to sponsor regional workshops at colleges and universities during the coming year. Michael Salemi, William Walstad, and Paul Haas conducted a workshop to explain how economics faculty members can organize such workshops at their universities and apply for funding.

The third session was devoted to poster presentations of teaching techniques that promote active learning. It was organized by Mark Maier and included many interesting contributions from 17 economics professors: Jim Bryan ("Asking Good Questions in Microeconomics"); Tom Creahan ("Using Animation for Teaching Economics"); Stephen DeLoach and Steven Greenlaw ("Teaching Critical Thinking with Electronic Discussion"); K. K. Fung ("An Online Journal for Undergraduate Research"); David Gay ("Learning Threads in Active Learning in Economics"); Rae Jean Goodman ("Using Jigsaw Procedures To

Teach Macroeconomics”); Frank Howland and Humberto Barreto (“Monte Carlo Simulations for Teaching Econometrics”); Manfred Keil, Kelly Bedard, and Gary Smith (“Learning Statistics by Doing Statistics”); Robby Moore (“An Active Learning Review Session”); Robert Rycroft (“Labor Union History in Multimedia Format”); Peter Schuhmann and KimMarie McGoldrick (“Web-Based Student Competitions for Principles Courses”); and, Andrea Ziegert (“Using Economic Theory To Understand the Decisions of Firms”).

The Committee continues to track the number of bachelor’s degrees conferred in economics. The data that John Siegfried collects from the AEA Universal Questionnaire show that the number of economics majors continues to rise above the trough-levels reached in 1995–1996. The number of B.A. degrees in economics awarded in 1999–2000 was 7.0-percent higher

than in 1998–1999, 22.1-percent higher than in the 1995–1996 trough, but only 90.0 percent of the total in 1991–1992, the date of the cycle’s peak. More detailed information on the survey results is available in a forthcoming article (Siegfried and Round, *Journal of Economic Education*, Summer 2001).

Finally, I thank Cecilia Conrad for her six years of service on the Committee. I also greatly appreciated the help I received from Michael Salemi in making the transition to chair.

Information about the Committee on Economic Education and its activities is available on the World Wide Web by connecting to the American Economic Association web page at (www.vanderbilt.edu/AEA) and choosing the “Committee” option.

WILLIAM B. WALSTAD, *Chair*