

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

College of Business Faculty Publications

Business, College of

May 1996

Teacher Training Programs in Economics: Past, Present, and Future

Michael K. Salemi

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC

Phillip Saunders

Indiana University, Bloomington, IN

WILLIAM WALSTAD

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, wwalstad1@unl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cbafacpub>



Part of the [Business Commons](#)

Salemi, Michael K.; Saunders, Phillip; and WALSTAD, WILLIAM, "Teacher Training Programs in Economics: Past, Present, and Future" (1996). *College of Business Faculty Publications*. 35.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cbafacpub/35>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Business, College of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in College of Business Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Teacher Training Programs in Economics: Past, Present, and Future

By MICHAEL K. SALEMI, PHILLIP SAUNDERS, AND WILLIAM B. WALSTAD*

There has been, of late, renewed interest in and criticism of the quality of undergraduate instruction (Lewis B. Mayhew et al., 1990). Colleges and universities have responded by placing more emphasis on teaching, and faculty are under increasing pressure to improve their teaching performance. Economics departments are particularly concerned about enrollment trends and recognize that effective teaching stimulates student interest and willingness to major in a subject (John J. Siegfried et al., 1991).

It is not surprising that there is room for improvement in college teaching. Graduate programs emphasize development of advanced knowledge and research skills. Few provide teacher education. Because teaching is a basic responsibility of most economics faculty, the Committee on Economic Education (CEE) of the American Economic Association and the National Council on Economic Education (NCEE) created the Teacher Training Program (TTP) for college and university economics faculty. The most recent phase of the TTP has been a series of six workshops offered between 1992 and 1994. This paper puts these workshops in historical context, describes their content, reports on the results of workshop evaluations, and makes recommendations for the future.

I. The Past as Prologue

The first phase of the TTP program was funded by a five-year grant from the Sloan Foundation. It started with a pilot workshop

* Department of Economics, CB 3305, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC 27599; Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47405; and University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE 68588, respectively. The authors were faculty for the 1992-1994 Teacher Training Program (TTP) workshops; Salemi was the workshop director. We are grateful to Robert Highsmith who, as vice-president of the National Council on Economic Education, was director of the TTP project.

at Indiana University in 1973 and led to the development and publication of a *Resource Manual for Teacher Training Programs in Economics* (Phillip Saunders et al., 1978). The success of the pilot led to a five-year grant from the Lilly Endowment, Inc., to conduct a series of workshops that used the *Resource Manual* as the text and provided training to teams of graduate students and faculty from research universities (W. Lee Hansen et al., 1980). The workshops were held at Indiana University in 1979, the University of Wisconsin in 1980, the University of North Carolina in 1981, Harvard University in 1982, and the University of Colorado in 1983. The workshops had their intended effect: 21 participating departments either established or renewed their support for a TTP at their institutions (William D. Lastrapes and Salemi, 1985).

Publication of *The Principles of Economics Course: A Handbook for Instructors* (Saunders and Walstad, 1990) stimulated new interest in undergraduate economics teaching. The *Handbook* replaced the *Resource Manual*, which was ill-suited for use by individual instructors and, by 1990, somewhat dated. The *Handbook* offers a comprehensive, stand-alone guide for both new and experienced teachers, with an emphasis on teaching the principles courses. It contains 20 chapters (four adapted from the *Resource Manual*) written by 17 economists from 14 universities and covers topics such as course goals, learning objectives, classroom climate, teaching methods, textbooks, evaluation of instruction, and research on the teaching of economics. The *Handbook* has been both useful and popular. To date, McGraw-Hill has shipped about 6,000 copies to faculty, graduate students, and economics departments.

II. TTP Workshops, 1992-1994

The most recent phase of TTP activity has been the 1992-1994 workshop series funded by the Lilly Endowment, Inc. These work-

shops were designed to improve the teaching skills of both novice and experienced faculty but were not targeted toward departments at research universities. Two workshops per year for a total of six were offered: Harvard University and Northwestern University (1992); University of North Carolina and Stanford University (1993); and Temple University and the University of Colorado (1994). With the exception of that at Harvard, the workshops were held at residential conference facilities on or near campus, and participants were charged between \$100.00 and \$400.00 to defray the cost of board and lodging.

The application process began with a program announcement and solicitation for applicants in October 1991. The announcement was mailed to every department of economics in the United States and Canada known to the American Economic Association. The announcement contained an overview of the program, a description of the curriculum, particulars for the first two workshops, application procedures, and a detailed explanation of our expectations for participants. The application deadline was mid-February, and applicants were notified of our decision by March 1. The publicity and application processes were repeated in autumn 1992 and 1993. A total of 302 applications were received.

Total enrollment for the workshop series was 236 from approximately 180 different colleges and universities. Participants came from all regions of the country: 72 from the East, 48 from the South, 69 from the Midwest, and 41 from the West. Five participants came from Canadian universities and one from Russia. Participants were equally divided between public and private institutions, and both small and large economics departments were well represented. Participants came from all academic ranks, including several department chairs and a college dean.

A. Workshop Content

Each workshop contained 20–22 hours of instruction and was held over a three-day period (Thursday noon–Sunday noon). Sessions covered learning strategies, teaching methods, testing, evaluation of teaching skills, and conducting teaching seminars at home in-

stitutions. Participants were given a copy of the *Handbook* and a set of assignments to complete in advance of the workshops. For each session, the workshop faculty distributed exercises and materials that participants could use both in their own teaching and in their teaching seminars.

Learning Strategies.—An initial session on *learning theory* presented an overview of what educational psychology has to say about how students learn and encouraged participants to think about specific learning outcomes as they plan teaching activities. The session on *active learning* explained why students master course concepts at higher cognitive levels and maintain interest and motivation when active-learning teaching strategies are used.

Teaching Methods.—Four sessions were devoted to teaching methods. The session on *discussion* showed participants how to write interpretive questions and use them to engage students in higher-level thinking. The session on *lecturing* explained the advantages and disadvantages of lectures and demonstrated techniques to improve lectures. The *collaborative learning* or *group-work* session illustrated how group activities can be used in principles classes to produce desired learning outcomes. The *writing* session demonstrated how writing exercises can be used to give feedback to the instructor, the student, or to peers without requiring extra class or grading time.

Testing.—The testing sessions covered both multiple-choice and essay testing. Participants were given an overview of the relative merits of various testing strategies. In the *multiple-choice* session they learned how to write good multiple-choice questions and how to analyze statistical data from multiple-choice tests. In the *essay* session they learned how to use essay tests to assess higher-order cognitive skills and to strengthen the ability of students to craft arguments.

Faculty Evaluation.—The session on *evaluation of teaching* reviewed the major research findings on student and peer evaluation. Participants learned how to interpret data from evaluations and to identify the most important

characteristics of a good teacher. The *self-improvement* session provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on the workshop and create a plan for self-improvement.

Teaching Seminar.—All phases of the TTP program have been designed to benefit teachers beyond those who participate directly in the workshops. To that end, participants in the 1992–1994 workshops agreed to present a teaching seminar for their colleagues within the year following their participation. The workshop application process required the participant to provide a written commitment and required the participant's chair to pledge support for the seminar. The teaching seminar session provided suggestions on how to conduct a teaching seminar. Participants met in groups with others from similar institutions to discuss options and formulate their own plans. An annual newsletter provided an opportunity for participants to report on their teaching seminars.

B. Workshop Evaluations

At the end of a workshop, 223 of a potential 236 participants completed a detailed survey. Table 1 reports the results. The participants provided a striking endorsement of the workshops: 83 percent rated their workshop to be a better use of their time than their next best alternative; 13 percent judged their workshop to be as good a use of their time as their next best alternative.

Table 1 shows that most participants rated all workshop sessions to be of solid or better value. When ratings for all the sessions are pooled, 27 percent of participants judged the sessions to have *exceptional* value, 36 percent *high* value, and 23 percent *solid* value. Five sessions received an *exceptional* or *high* rating from at least 60 percent of participants: questioning and discussion (87 percent), active student learning (82 percent), group work (83 percent), learning theory (65 percent), and writing (62 percent). Participants thought that the work loads before and during the workshop were about right and that the quality of the reading materials was high.

In the fall of 1994, participants received a follow-up survey that asked them to reevaluate

TABLE 1—EVALUATION SUMMARY OF AEA-NCEE-LILLY TEACHER TRAINING WORKSHOPS FOR ECONOMICS FACULTY, 1992–1994

	Evaluation				
	5	4	3	2	1/0
Learning theory	64	81	57	15	4
Active student strategies	100	83	34	5	1
Multiple-choice testing	46	73	77	21	12
Essay testing	32	98	62	30	5
Questioning and discussions	119	75	25	5	1
Lecturing	58	73	49	32	17
Group work strategies	93	93	37	10	2
Student writing	44	95	74	18	1
Conducting a TTP	21	57	75	56	8
Evaluation of teaching	34	76	55	30	8
Plan for self-improvement	46	73	57	25	5
Overall evaluation:	184	30	8	1	
	B	AG	SV	W	

Notes: The scale was defined as follows: 5 = exceptional value, 4 = high value, 3 = solid value, 2 = some value, 1 = marginal value, 0 = no value. In the overall evaluation, B = better use of time than best alternative, AG = as good use of time as best alternative, SV = some value, but I had better use for my time, and W = almost a complete waste. Of the 236 participants, 223 completed the detailed survey.

each workshop, assess its lasting effects, and make suggestions for future programs. Responses were received from 123 participants (52-percent response rate).

Participants continued to view the workshop as a very valuable experience. When asked "Do you believe that the TTP Workshop in which you participated will have a lasting effect on your own teaching?" 96 percent of the respondents answered yes. Those who answered yes often mentioned new efforts to employ active-learning strategies, and many indicated that the workshop motivated them to change. When asked "Do you believe that the TTP Workshop in which you participated will have a lasting effect on the quality of teaching in your department?" 63 percent of the respondents said yes, 15 percent were not sure, and 18 percent said no. Many who responded affirmatively mentioned their own and their department's ongoing efforts to promote the quality of teaching. These responses suggest that TTP workshops have a lasting effect on

the quality of teaching. Making the most pessimistic assumption about the views of non-respondents implies that at least half of the participants think this faculty-development program had lasting effects.

Most participants fulfilled their contract to conduct a TTP seminar at their home institutions. When asked "Have you conducted a TTP seminar or a similar program at your home institution?" 69 percent of the respondents said yes, 11 percent had definite plans to do so, and 21 percent said no. Of those answering yes, about 60 percent indicated that they had conducted a formal workshop or seminar, while 40 percent indicated that they shared materials and held informal discussions with colleagues. Of those responding no, only 10 said that they had no plans to disseminate the workshop information. Others indicated that they still intended to hold a workshop or communicate with colleagues informally. Even if all nonrespondents failed to fulfill their contracts, the 85 participants who did so represent a substantial multiplier effect.

III. Future Directions

Participants judged the sessions on active learning to be the most valuable part of the workshop. They rated these sessions highly and often reported that they chose active-learning strategies as the subject of their own teaching seminars. Over 80 percent of respondents said they would like to participate in an advanced workshop and that they wanted to learn more about active learning. Given this interest, work is underway to design materials and a new workshop series that will help economics instructors use active-learning strategies.

In previous workshops we have found it difficult to demonstrate how instructors implement active-learning strategies in actual classrooms. Realistic teaching situations are difficult to create in the workshop environment, where no students are present. For the new workshop series, we will produce several instructional videotapes using footage from actual economics classes. Each tape will illustrate a teaching skill that promotes active learning and is adaptable to a variety of classroom settings. The tapes will contain examples from both a principles course and an upper-

level course to illustrate how economics instructors can adapt these strategies to different course levels and material.

We are planning to offer a new series of workshops that focus on active-learning teaching strategies to economics faculty across the nation. Funding for the first workshop to be offered in 1996 has been secured. Additional workshops will be conducted as funding becomes available.

Two initiatives are under way to provide updated materials for the new workshop series. First, the Center for Teaching and Learning at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has given preliminary indication that it will produce the first instructional videotape in the spring of 1996. Second, the *Handbook* is currently being revised, with new chapters covering active learning and the teaching of intermediate and advanced courses.

One anticipated outcome from the next series of workshops is a set of active-learning instructional materials. Each participant will be responsible for creating an activity requiring active learning. These activities will be field-tested with students and revised with the help of the workshop staff. The materials will be published as a guide to active learning for use by economics faculty nationwide.

The Teacher Training Programs have been a valuable part of the work of the Committee on Economic Education of the American Economic Association during the past 25 years. They stimulated and supported the creation of department-based programs to improve graduate-student teaching. They encouraged new and experienced economics faculty to improve their teaching skills or renew their commitment to effective instruction. They spread new ideas and enthusiasm for teaching by encouraging workshop participants to offer departmental teaching seminars. They inspired the preparation of a written manual and a handbook on the teaching of economics. The future promises more of the same.

REFERENCES

- Hansen, W. Lee; Saunders, Phillip and Welsh, Arthur L. "Teacher Training Programs in College Economics: Their Development, Current Status, and Future Prospects."

- Journal of Economic Education*, Spring 1980, 11(2), pp. 1-9.
- Lastrapes, William D. and Salemi, Michael K. "The Lasting Effects of Teacher Training Program Workshops." Unpublished manuscript, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1985.
- Mayhew, Lewis B.; Ford, Patrick J. and Hubbard, Dean L. *The quest for quality: The challenge for undergraduate education in the 1990s*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990.
- Saunders, Phillip and Walstad, William B., eds. *The Principles of Economics course: A handbook for instructors*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1990.
- Saunders, Phillip; Welsh, Arthur L. and Hansen, W. Lee, eds. *Resource manual for teacher training programs in economics*. New York: Joint Council on Economic Education, 1978.
- Siegfried, John J.; Bartlett, Robin L.; Hansen, W. Lee; Kelley, Allen C.; McCloskey, Donald N. and Tietenberg, Thomas H. "The Status and Prospects of the Economics Major." *Journal of Economic Education*, Summer 1991, 22(3), pp. 197-224.