

Rationale for Introducing a New Admission Criteria

Students applying to the competitive major must now write an essay to assess their reading comprehension, their analytical thinking, and their writing skills (RTW).

There is a consensus that students admitted in our department should be able to intelligently analyze economics issues in addition to having a strong quantitative background. We can easily evaluate the quantitative ability of our applicants by scrutinizing which courses they took and the grades obtained; we have done so, admitting students with good quantitative skills.

We now feel that our admission process has been biased towards quantitative skills and that our students also need good RTW skills to be successful: however a student's ability to read, comprehend, and write about a basic economic issue can only be assessed through formal testing where a student read a basic economic article and write a thoughtful essay about the article. Students with lesser quantitative skills, but able to write a good essay will now have a better chance to be admitted in the major since good RTW skills play an significant part in the successful completion of a degree in economics. On the other hand, students with strong quantitative skills will still be welcomed, and they can improve the RTW skills while in the major.

From the point of view of the major overall, a student body where strong quantitative skills are complemented with good RTW skills will enrich the overall experience of all the students in the major. Students with stronger quantitative skills will have the opportunity to interact with students with stronger RTW skills: they will all acquire a broader understanding of the discipline, becoming more inquisitive and interested; this should result in more active contribution to class discussion. By altering our admission requirements, we will be able to admit a more balanced group of students and improve the quality of the major.

Eventually, our students will be in a stronger position when looking for jobs – they will be able to convey their analysis of main economic issues in a coherent manner to potential recruiters. Finally, their contribution to society, as economists, will be reinforced thanks to the fact that they will have learned to be critical thinkers.