



The Morgan Le Fay Center for Advances in Economics, Business, and Entrepreneurship Education at Landmark College

College Economic Faculty Survey of Best Practices

Spring 2016

Landmark College
19 River Road South • Putney, Vermont
www.landmark.edu

Executive Summary

According to the *National Center on Education Statistics (NCES)* over 20.2 million Americans were enrolled in college in 2015. The profiles of these college students is highly diverse. A criticism often ascribed to postsecondary institutions is their hyper-focus on content and knowledge dissemination at the cost of effective teaching practices. In part, to address this perception of lack of pedagogical rigor, the Morgan Le Fay (MLF) Center for Advances in Economics, Business, and Entrepreneurship Education at Landmark College sponsored a nationwide survey of economics faculty, to gain better understanding of current teaching practices for diverse learners.

The online survey was distributed through direct outreach to a select number of 25 colleges, as well as, distributed to the membership of the American Economic Association (AEA). The survey highlighted the following findings:

- Most economics faculty report having “some” experience teaching students who learn differently, such as those with Learning Disabilities, including dyslexia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and Autism Spectrum Disorders.
- The vast majority of faculty address learning differences among students by providing Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) mandated accommodations, such as extra time for a test, use of a note-taker in the classroom, or distraction reduced environment for exams.
- Very few of the faculty polled noted that they were aware of inclusive teaching practices such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL).
- Best teaching practices used by the faculty to engage diverse learners were mostly intuitive approaches devised by individual faculty and/or accommodations.
- Majority of the respondents noted that they had not taught a fully online course.

The results of this survey clearly highlight the need for professional development and training of faculty beyond traditional accommodations and self-designed teaching practices. In particular, the survey speaks to the strong need for professional training on practices of universal design.

As a follow up to this survey, Landmark College will contact all the individuals who indicated their email addresses and their affiliated institutions to offer online interactive training opportunities on pedagogical practices grounded in the principles of universal design. Landmark College and its Landmark College Institute for Research and Training (LCIRT) have an established record for implementation of and presentations on UDL, and will offer this professional training opportunity through the auspices of the Morgan Le Fay Center to large a national audience. These training modules will become part of growing repository on inclusive economics instruction available to all faculty around the country.

I believe this survey of economics and business faculty can help establish a baseline of teaching practices that are inclusive of diverse learner needs. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA, 1990) and its amendment (2008), we owe those gifted and talented students equal access to information and knowledge. But we know that the ADA alone is not enough. It is faculty and academic leadership at institutions like yours that can excite and inspire great discoveries, disrupt traditional models, and mitigate against considerable risk to students.

Paul McCulley

Retired Managing Director and Chief Economist
Pacific Investment Management Company (PIMCO)

Introduction

Founded in 2014 through a \$1 million grant to Landmark College by noted economist Paul McCulley and his Morgan Le Fay Dreams Foundation, the MLF Center seeks to advance evidence-based pedagogical practices for postsecondary instruction in economics, business, and entrepreneurship that is inclusive of diverse learners, such as students with learning disabilities (LD) including Dyslexia, ADHD, ASD, twice exceptional or gifted LD, and other learning differences.

In spring 2016, the MLF Center launched a nationwide survey of postsecondary economics faculty to gauge faculty awareness of learning differences among college students and use of best practices for inclusive instruction. The objectives of this survey were to:

- Identify the current baseline of pedagogical practices used by economics faculty to address the learning needs of diverse students.
- Assess awareness and use of principles of universal design in learning by economics faculty at the postsecondary level.
- Determine what economic faculty consider to be “best teaching practice”.
- Identify areas of need for professional development on universal design and inclusive teaching practices.

Survey Development

A six item survey was created by the MLF Center task force at Landmark College for distribution to economics faculty around the country. Item responses were both Likert scale and open-ended responses. Additionally, the survey included queries on respondent demographics, such as years of experience teaching economics, online vs. face-to-face teaching experience, type of institution, and number of courses taught per year and so on. For the complete survey, see *Appendix A*.

National Distribution

The survey was distributed in two stages. Initially, 25 select institutions were identified to receive the survey. Following the initial distribution, the survey was sent to the membership of the *American Economic Association* (AEA). The AEA has a policy where members can opt in to indicate their willingness to respond to research surveys. This sub-sample consisted of approximately 500 faculty. The sample also included international members. The survey was sent out in early February and kept active for a month.

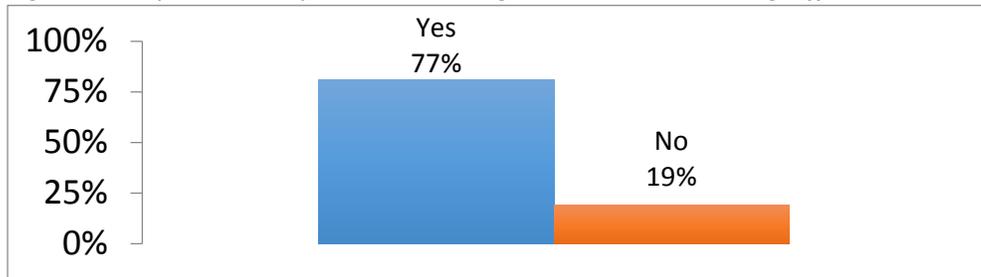
Survey Findings

A total of 151 economics faculty responded to the survey. The following section describes the findings for each of the survey questions:

➤ **Experience Teaching Students who Learn Differently (n=151)**

A majority of the respondents (n=116) indicated that they had experience teaching students with learning differences. A smaller number (n=35) indicated they did not have any experience working with students who learn differently.

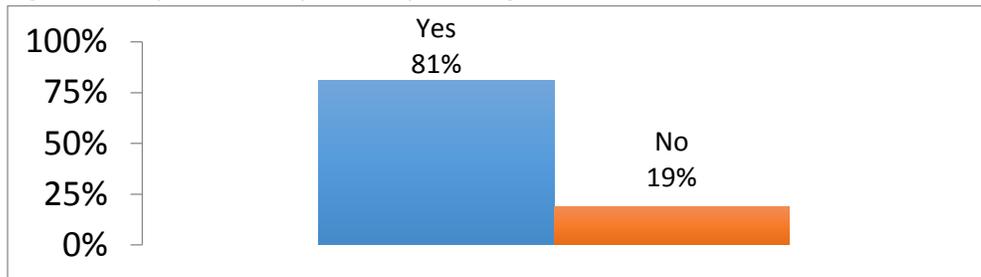
Figure 1. Respondents experience teaching students with learning differences



➤ **ADA Accommodations (n=148)**

When asked if they had provided any Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accommodations to students, a large number (n=120) of the respondents indicated that they had provided accommodations such as extended time for exams, use of note-takers and so on to students who learn differently.

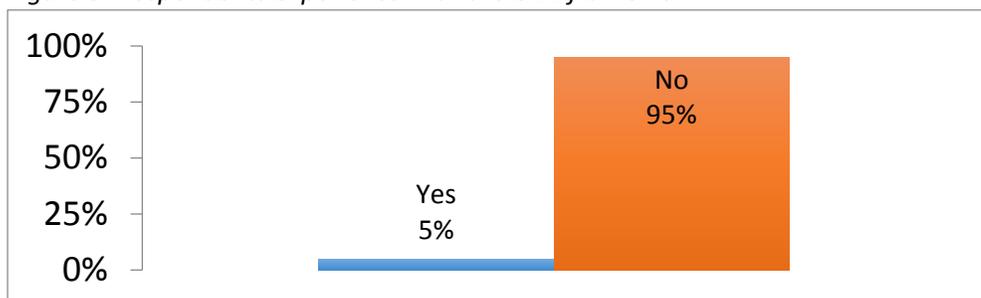
Figure 2. Respondents experience providing ADA accommodations to students



➤ **Universal Design for Learning (n=148)**

An overwhelming majority of respondents (n=140) indicated that they lacked familiarity with the framework of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and its principles for pedagogy. A very small number (n=8) said that they had experience with UDL.

Figure 3. Respondents experience with the UDL framework



➤ **Best Teaching Practices (n=100)**

Responding to the query on best practices for teaching diverse learners, most respondents offered self-generated ideas on inclusive instruction. Many faculty did not appear to be aware of evidence-based practices for teaching this population of college students. Several respondents

noted that they simply follow the ADA requirements articulated by the disability services office on campus.

➤ ***Observation of Special Skill or Talent among Students with LD***

When asked to comment on any special skill or talent they may have observed among students who learn differently, responses were mixed. Examples of participant responses were as follows:

- Rather than noticing special strengths, my impression is that I don't notice any special limitations. Students typically disclose their disability early in the semester, and the striking thing for me is how little these disabilities prevent them from full engagement in the course.
- They appear to have the same distribution of skills as the general student population at my institution.
- Not enough experience - Some are strong students, others struggle.
- No
- No. I've never noticed any strength in this group. If, anything, they struggled more than other students.
- ADDers sometimes relate disparate ideas. Some OCD students develop strong diagramming skills or learn a great deal of material from actually doing their homework. Bipolar students are often very productive in their manic phase but difficult to properly credit for their understanding or work. Some dyslexics develop strong memory for verbal information.
- Yes! Some of these students have a solid grasp of ideas from economics BUT their ability to express themselves maybe he hindered by the type of disability. For example, I've had scribes assigned to several students and the scribe her/himself was unable to adequately express the ideas of the student.
- They learn better when given a lot of ideas and then asking them what is the common thread. Induction not deduction. They are not linear thinkers. So teaching them a math model is a very difficult approach for them. I must teach them ideas first and let them play with data and ideas.
- Good classroom participation, but low test performance; Good verbal skills, but poor problem solving skills; Hardworking, but making frequent careless mistakes.
- Great attention to detail. Not as good communication and articulation of ideas.

➤ ***Respondent Recommendations for Best Teaching Practices***

Participants were asked to provide examples of teaching practices they use to be inclusive of students who learn differently. Several repeated the ADA accommodations they provide the students. Following are selected examples of best pedagogical practices provided by the respondents:

- Offer frequent individual meeting outside of class. Offer free tutoring.
- Varying teach style throughout each class following a consistent lecture pattern.
- Usually I respond as requested, including: Provision of notes/PowerPoint slides more time for exams/separate room.
- Extra spacing on homework and tests post class notes.

- Each semester, for each student with a learning disability, I receive a letter from that states that the particular students has a medical condition. I am NOT told what that medical condition is. I am told I am to do the following (e.g., extra time during exams, quiet separate room, perhaps a note taker). I have no discretion. Other than what I am told to do, I am instructed to treat this student just like every other student.
- Teach and test ideas using multiple techniques: e.g. supply or demand changes diagrammatically, written description, and formulas. Repetition of key concepts: e.g. marginal benefit balances marginal cost -- at some-decision maker's best.
- Have not employed any practices specifically aimed at students with disabilities -- only followed institutional guidelines for exams as determined by the University's Office of Student Disabilities Services.
- Full disclosure of all content online for students to print. Group/team building. At least in my experience, all students have responded well to work with their peers. NOTE: I am never told the nature of the disability.

Participant Demographics

In all, 151 participants responded to the survey, which is about 30 percent return rate. Given an industry return rate of approximately 16 percent, this was considered to be a good rate of responses. Not all the respondents answered all the questions. The following diagrams provide information on the demographics of the respondents, and more information regarding individual institutions responding can be found in *Appendix B*.

Figure 5. Type of institution

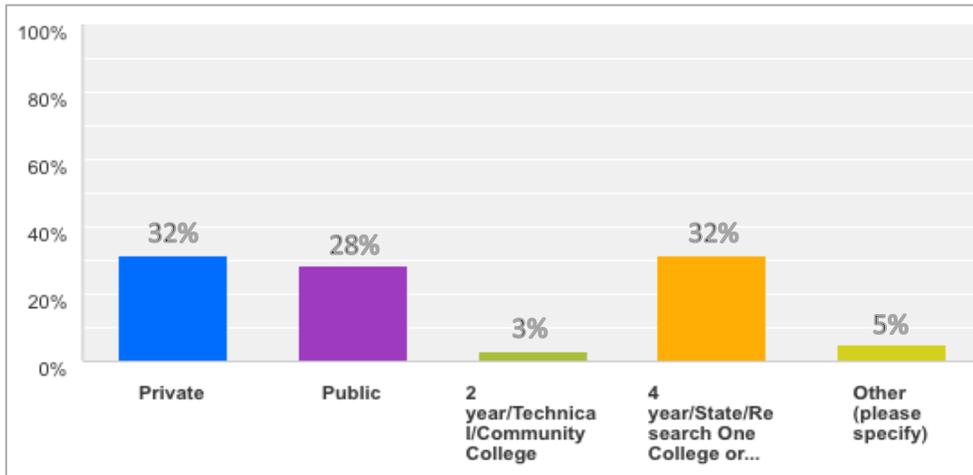


Figure 6. Years of teaching economics

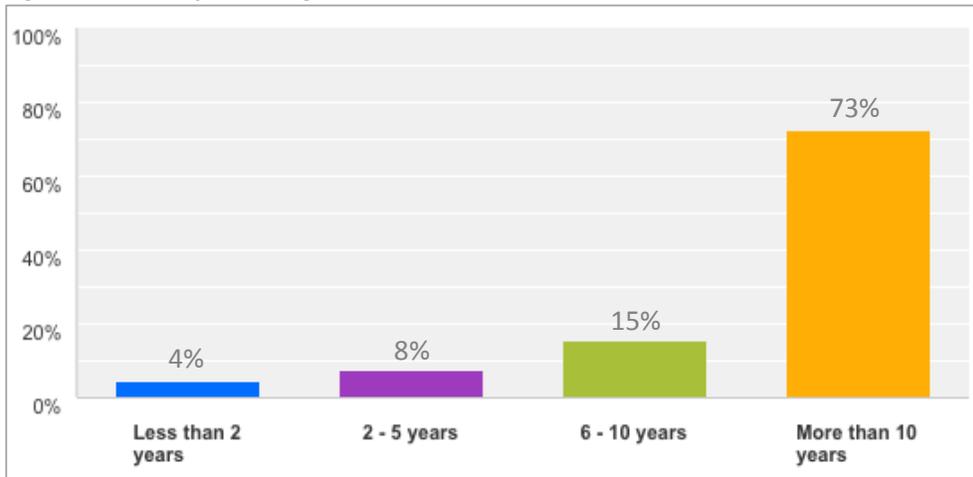


Figure 7. Economics courses taught per year

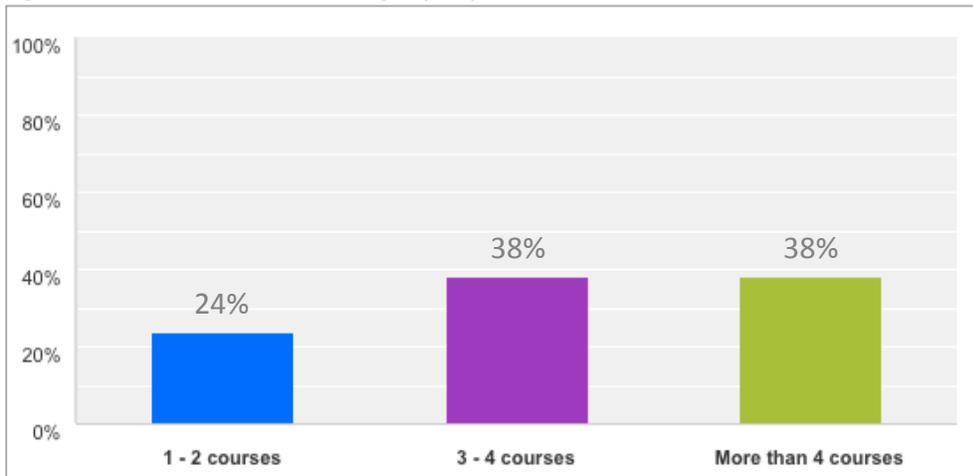


Figure 8. Experience in teaching fully online economics courses

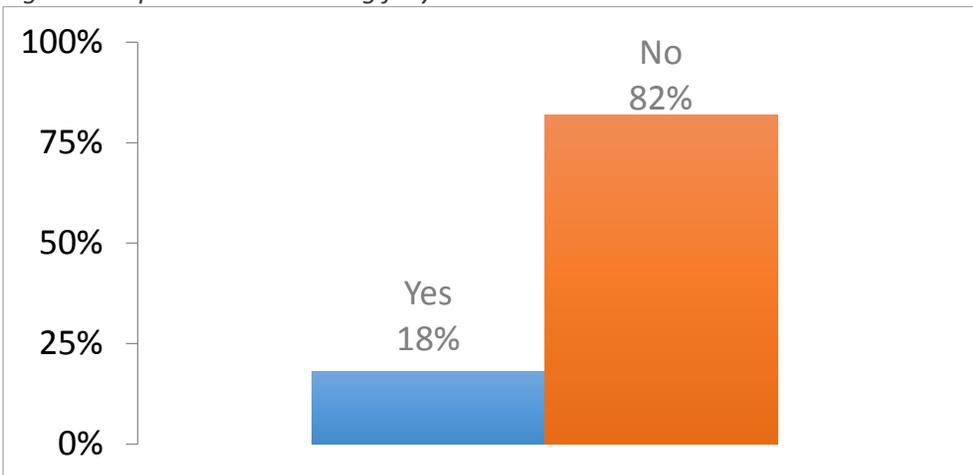
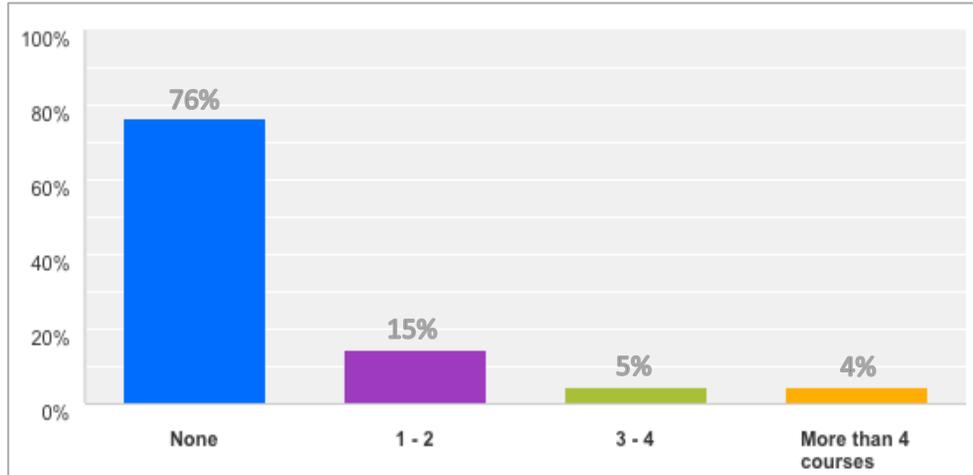


Figure 9. Average number of fully online economics courses taught, per year



Summary and Recommendations

The national survey of economics faculty awareness and implementation of best teaching practices for addressing the needs of students who learn differently reveals that such knowledge and practice is not widespread. While some faculty have a better understanding of inclusive ways to address the needs of diverse learners, most of the faculty surveyed were not aware of research-based pedagogical practices that address diverse learning needs. Most faculty seemed to comply with ADA mandated accommodations, but were unaware of the principle of UDL as they apply to teaching and learning.

A clear recommendation of these results is both a need and an opportunity to provide better awareness of learning differences; and professional development for postsecondary faculty on the principles of Universal Design. Landmark College is uniquely positioned to disseminate such information to college economics faculty, nationwide.

Next Steps

The following next steps will be implemented through the MLF Center.

- Respondents who indicated their institutional affiliation will be contacted to see if Landmark College can provide LD orientation and faculty awareness training on their campuses.
- A summary of the survey results and its message for additional awareness of UDL and best teaching practices will be posted on the Landmark College MLF Center website.
- The survey results and its implications for more UDL training will be presented at a one-day symposium hosted by the MLF Center at Landmark College.

Appendix A: College Economic Faculty Survey of Best Practices

1. Welcome to My Survey

Morgan Le Fay Center for Advances in Economics, Business, and Entrepreneurship Instruction at Landmark College

Founded in 2014 through a \$1 million grant to Landmark College by noted economist Paul McCulley and his Morgan Le Fay Dreams Foundation, the Center seeks to advance evidence-based pedagogical practices for postsecondary instruction in economics, business, and entrepreneurship that is inclusive of diverse learners, such as students with learning disabilities (LD) including Dyslexia, ADHD, ASD, twice exceptional or gifted LD, and other learning differences.

Objective: As part of the Center initiatives we are seeking input from postsecondary economics and business faculty around the country on inclusive teaching practices. Our goal is to understand content specific best practices being used nationwide by faculty in Economics and Business studies.

Thank you in advance for your responses.

2. Teaching Experience

1. Have you any experience with students with disabilities, particularly, learning disabilities (LD) including dyslexia, ADHD and/or ASD in your courses?

- Yes
 No

2. Have you provided academic accommodations (e.g. extra time on tests, note-taker requests, testing in a separate room) to students with learning disabilities in your economics and /or business courses?

- Yes
 No

3. Have you noticed any particular strengths or skills in economics, business or entrepreneurship, among this population of students (example: good articulation of ideas but poor attention to detail)? If so, please explain.

4. Are you familiar with the framework of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and the instructional practices predicated by this framework?

- Yes
 No

5. Please describe two best practices, other than Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accommodations, that you adopt in your courses to address the needs of students with LD, ADHD and/or ASD.

6. Why do you consider these approaches to be successful (what is your evidence base)?

3. Respondent Demographics

7. Institution:

- Private
- Public
- 2 year/Technical/Community College
- 4 year/State/Research One College or University
- Other (please specify)

8. Name of College or University

9. Years of teaching economics:

- Less than 2 years
- 2 - 5 years
- 6 - 10 years
- More than 10 years

10. How many economics courses do you teach per year?

- 1 - 2 courses
- 3 - 4 courses
- More than 4 courses

11. Do you currently teach any fully online economics courses?

- Yes
- No

12. How many fully online economics courses do you teach on average, per year?

- None
- 1 - 2
- 3 - 4
- More than 4 courses

4. Additional Information

13. Would you be interested in being contacted to work on research and related initiatives with us through the Morgan Le Fay Center for Advances in Economics, Business, and Entrepreneurship Education?

- No
- Yes
- If Yes, include your e-mail address:

14. Are you interested in receiving a copy of the survey results?

- No
- Yes
- If Yes, include your e-mail address:

If you have any general questions about this survey or want to know more about the Morgan Le Fay Center for Advances in Economics, Business, and Entrepreneurship Instruction at Landmark College, please contact Landmark College at institute@landmark.edu

Appendix B: Names of Participating Institutions

Table 1. 4 Year- Large/State/Ivy League Colleges Responding to Survey

Boston University
Columbia University
Dartmouth College
Keene State
Pennsylvania State University
Rutgers University
Southern New Hampshire University
Stanford University
University of Connecticut
University of Georgia
University of Massachusetts, Boston

Table 2. Two Year and Community Colleges Responding to Survey

Greenfield Community College
Holyoke Community College
Lone Star Community College System
Middlesex Community College

Table 3. Private Colleges Responding to Survey

Amherst College
Bentley College
Brandeis University
Endicott College
Grinnell College
Lesley University
Lynn University
Smith College