

spotlight

No. 393 – July 6, 2010

SURVEY OF END-OF-COURSE TEST QUESTIONS

Many college and university faculty are concerned about the quality of state standardized tests

Between February and April 2010, the John Locke Foundation asked over 500 college and university faculty to evaluate selected test questions from North Carolina's 2008-2009 end-of-course high school civics and economics and U.S. history tests. This study provides an overview of the responses from both the mailed and online surveys.

KEY FACTS: • **Most economists surveyed (13.3 percent response rate for this group) objected to all six questions in the questionnaire. A majority of political scientists surveyed (8.5 percent response rate for this group) objected to answers provided for two of the six questions in the questionnaire.**

• **If state education officials refuse to adopt a new testing program, DPI staff must consult with subject-area experts throughout the test development process.¹ In addition, state education leaders should create a test question review board consisting of college and university faculty and subject-area experts from the private and public sectors.**

• **The results of this survey substantiate complaints from public school teachers who point out that even a few poorly constructed test questions undermine months of classroom instruction and weeks of test preparation. For students, well-reasoned but incorrect answers to a handful of test questions can be the difference between meeting and not meeting state proficiency standards.**

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In 1996, the General Assembly approved the State Board of Education's plan for a school-based management and accountability program, called the ABCs of Public Education. Since its implementation, many have questioned the ability of North Carolina's ABCs testing program to measure student achievement and assess teacher performance adequately. More importantly, parents find it difficult to hold schools accountable.

For students, well-reasoned but incorrect answers to a handful of test ques-

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tions can be the difference between meeting and not meeting state proficiency standards. Public school teachers complain that poorly constructed test questions undermine months of classroom instruction and weeks of test preparation. Until the release of the 2008-2009 end-of-grade and end-of-course tests, it was impossible to substantiate or refute either concern.

The results of this survey suggest that some of these complaints may have merit.

Survey Process

After a thorough review of all end-of-course test questions, scholars in economics and political science compiled a list of questions with either no definite correct answer or answers subject to multiple interpretations. Each evaluator chose six questions to include in the survey.² The survey, cover letters, and return envelopes were mailed to 517 college and university economics and political science professors from public and private institutions of higher education in North Carolina.³ As a followup, postcards were mailed to faculty members directing those who had not yet returned a survey to complete an online version of the survey specific to their discipline (see Appendices A through D).

The questions were taken directly from North Carolina’s end-of-course high school civics and economics and U.S. history tests.⁴ Survey recipients were asked to check the option A-D if they believed that one of the answers accurately reflected the answer to the question. If they believed that the A-D responses were faulty in some way, they were asked to indicate the reason by checking “None of the above,” “Two or more of the above,” or “Defective or misleading question.” We informed participants that only answers A-D were included in the original end-of-course test.

This non-random process of question selection means that these questions are not representative of all test questions on North Carolina’s end-of-course civics and economics and U.S. history tests. While suggestive, a handful of flawed test questions are not sufficient to condemn the entire ABCs of Public Education testing program. Nevertheless, how such test questions survived the Department of Public Instruction’s 22-step, four-year test development process is certainly worth questioning.⁵

Response Rates

Response rates ranged from a high of 15.5 percent for economics professors at public colleges and universities to a low of 6.0 percent for political science faculty at public institutions of higher education (see Tables 1 and 2). Nearly the same percentage of economics and political science faculty at private institutions responded to the survey.

Table 1: Economics Survey Response Rates

<i>Economics</i>	<i>Surveys Mailed</i>	<i>Mailed Responses Received</i>	<i>Online Responses Received</i>	<i>Percentage Responding</i>
Public Institutions	116	18	N/A	15.5%
Private Institutions	132	14	N/A	10.6%
Total	248	32	1	13.3%

Table 2: Civics/Political Science Survey Response Rates

<i>Civics / Political Science</i>	<i>Surveys Mailed</i>	<i>Mailed Responses Received</i>	<i>Online Responses Received</i>	<i>Percentage Responding</i>
Public Institutions	149	9	N/A	6.0%
Private Institutions	110	11	N/A	10.0%
Total	259	20	2	8.5%

Table 3. Distribution of Answers from the JLF Economics Survey

	<i>DPI Answer A</i>	<i>DPI Answer B</i>	<i>DPI Answer C</i>	<i>DPI Answer D</i>	<i>Option 1: None of the above</i>	<i>Option 2: Two or more of the above</i>	<i>Option 3: Defective or misleading question</i>	<i>Option 4: No answer</i>
Question 1	9%	42%	-	-	3%	24%	21%	-
Question 2	-	-	39%	-	3%	36%	21%	-
Question 3	-	-	-	30%	9%	48%	12%	-
Question 4	39%	-	-	-	-	42%	18%	-
Question 5	33%	-	-	-	18%	12%	33%	3%
Question 6	-	-	-	30%	21%	3%	45%	-

Note: The shaded box represents the answer deemed correct by the NC Department of Public Instruction.

Table 4. Distribution of Answers from the JLF Civics Survey

	<i>DPI Answer A</i>	<i>DPI Answer B</i>	<i>DPI Answer C</i>	<i>DPI Answer D</i>	<i>Option 1: None of the above</i>	<i>Option 2: Two or more of the above</i>	<i>Option 3: Defective or misleading question</i>	<i>Option 4: No answer</i>
Question 1	-	-	73%	-	-	18%	4%	4%
Question 2	68%	-	-	-	9%	5%	14%	4%
Question 3	23%	-	-	-	4%	27%	41%	4%
Question 4	-	-	-	-	-	82%	9%	9%
Question 5	-	-	64%	-	9%	4%	14%	9%
Question 6	-	-	-	64%	-	14%	18%	4%

Note: The shaded box represents the answer deemed correct by the NC Department of Public Instruction.

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Many factors could have lowered the participation rate, but disagreement with the mission of the John Locke Foundation appeared to play a significant role. A handful of faculty returned their survey materials, apparently without opening the envelope and examining the materials inside. A political science professor from a private institution returned a survey with the comment, “Stop your ideological attack on public education!”

Other faculty members actively discouraged their colleagues from completing the survey. J. Oliver Williams, Professor Emeritus of Political Science at NC State, informed his colleagues,

I believe all six of these questions are faulty [sic] in some manner. Several are vague and leave no clear response; two do not have mutually exclusive choices; and one does not seem to me to have a correct answer option. However, I have decided not to respond to the foundation’s request for a professional opinion until I have more information about the total battery of questions....Until I am convinced that the test in its entirety is faulty, I think the responsible thing for me to do is to point out to DPI that these questions could be improved and to thank the John Locke Foundation for finding six faulty needles in a hay stack.⁶

Further, Dave Ribar, Professor of Economics at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, discussed methodological concerns about the survey on his blog, Applied Rationality. He wrote, “I strongly recommend that my economics colleagues not participate.”⁷

Economics Results

In general, economists surveyed were not pleased with any of the six questions, although they objected strongest to questions three, five, and six (see Table 3). Question one was the only question in both the economics and political science surveys in which some respondents chose the “wrong” answer (answer A). Approximately 70 percent of respondents believed that there were fundamental problems with questions three and six.

Question three asked students the following:

3. What important economic concept is evident when a student wears a shirt made in Malaysia, drives a car made in Germany, and eats fruit produced in Mexico? (Note: DPI answer in bold.)

- A. Stock exchange
- B. Exchange of money
- C. Marketplace economics
- D. Global interdependence**

One economist wrote, “C and D are not concepts, they are economic forces that work through markets. If students learn to think of concepts rather than processes they will be unable to connect causes and effects.” Another commented, “The desired answer is ‘Global Interdependence,’ but that is not an ‘important economic concept.’ Comparative advantage is an important concept that also is relevant, but that was not offered.” A handful of respondents agreed that the state should have explicitly identified Theory of Comparative Advantage or included it as one of the answer choices (see Appendix E).

Many economists also strongly objected to question six. The question asked students to answer the following question:

6. Which evidence showed that the prosperity of the 1920s was an illusion? (Note: DPI answer in bold.)

- A. Prices on consumer goods decreased.
- B. Overseas investments declined.
- C. The income gap between workers and managers decreased.
- D. Many people increased their debt.**

A respondent pointed out, “The prosperity of the 1920s was quite real. Real GDP rose by about 50% over the period 1920-1929.” Another economist agreed, “Odd question. Was the prosperity an illusion? I don’t think so.” Nearly all comments about this question objected to the premise that the prosperity of the 1920s was an illusion. In addition, economists questioned the use of the vacuous term “prosperity” in this context.

Political Science Results

Most political scientists did not object to answers provided for questions one, two, five, and six (see Table 4). A vast majority of faculty did not approve of the answers provided for questions three and four.

In fact, no respondents believed that the Department of Public Instruction provided a correct answer for question four. Question four asked students the following:

4. Which action is a civic responsibility? (Note: DPI answer in bold.)

- A. Voting in national elections**
- B. Obeying laws
- C. Registering for the draft
- D. Serving on a jury

One political scientist commented, “Two or more of the above – according to the commonly accepted understanding of “civic responsibility.” Another wrote, “‘A’ could be considered correct, but is usually considered [a] right rather than a responsibility. ‘ B’ clearly appears to be correct. ‘D’ is correct in our system if and when called and if not dismissed. ‘C’ is correct for anyone covered when a registration law is in effect.”

A respondent observed, “[The question] confuses legal requirements with civic responsibility. [One] could reframe around civic “duty” with one being to follow laws and uphold Constitution” (see Appendix F).

Recommendations

1. The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) should not be in the testing business. State education officials should replace end-of-year and end-of-course tests with an independent, field-tested, and credible national test of student performance, such as the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, the Stanford 10, or the California Achievement Test.⁸
2. If state education officials refuse to adopt a new national or norm-referenced testing program, DPI should create a test question review board consisting of college and university faculty and subject-area experts from the private and public sectors.
3. The release of the 2008-2009 state tests is a good start. DPI should continue to conduct a more transparent and accountable testing program, including an online data tool that allows users to analyze test questions based on student responses.

*Terry Stoops is Director of Education Studies at the John Locke Foundation.
This project would not have been possible without the help of research interns
Jacob Burgdorf, Kamen Nikolaev, and Amanda Vuke.*

End Notes

1. There are a number of norm-referenced tests available for students in grades K-12, including the Basic Achievement Skills Individual Screener (BASIS), Metropolitan Achievement Tests (MAT 8), and the Stanford Achievement Test Series, 10th Edition (Stanford 10).
2. Released test forms can be found on the Department of Public Instruction website. See NCDPI, Accountability Services Division, “2008-09 Released Forms” (accessed February 2, 2010), <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/accountability/testing/releasedforms>.
3. Surveys were color coded according to type of institution. Surveys were sent to faculty employed at the following institutions:

Economics			
Institution	Type	Institution	Type
Belmont Abbey	Private	Meredith	Private
Bennett	Private	Methodist	Private
Brevard	Private	Pfeiffer	Private
Catawba	Private	St. Andrews	Private
Chowan	Private	Wake Forest	Private
Davidson	Private	Wingate	Private
Duke	Private	UNC-Greensboro	Public
Elon	Private	Appalachian State	Public
Gardner-Webb	Private	ECU	Public
Guilford	Private	UNC-Charlotte	Public
High Point	Private	UNC-Chapel Hill	Public
Lenoir-Rhyne	Private	NC State	Public
Meredith	Private		

Political Science			
Institution	Type	Institution	Type
Barton	Private	Meredith	Private
Belmont Abbey	Private	Methodist	Private
Bennett	Private	Peace	Private
Campbell	Private	Queens	Private
Catawba	Private	Shaw	Private
Davidson	Private	Wake Forest	Private
Duke	Private	Wesleyan	Private
Elon	Private	Appalachian	Public
Gardner-Webb	Private	ECU	Public
Guilford	Private	UNC-Greensboro	Public
High Point	Private	NC State	Public
Lenoir-Rhyne	Private	UNC-Chapel Hill	Public
Mars Hill	Private	UNC-Charlotte	Public

4. Permission to reproduce the test questions was granted by Dr. Lou Fabrizio, Director of Accountability Policy & Communications, Division of Accountability Services, NC Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI). Documentation available from the author.
5. NCDPI, “North Carolina Testing Program: Multiple Choice Test Development Process Flow Chart,” March 3, 2005. See also NCDPI, “Revised

Test Development Process,” April 20, 2003. The process includes multiple field tests and reviews of test questions. The test development process includes the following steps:

Curriculum Adoption

1. Develop Test Specifications (Blueprint)
 2. Develop Test Items
 3. Review Items for Tryouts
 4. Assemble Item Tryout Forms
 5. Review Item Tryout Forms
 6. Administer Item Tryouts
 7. Review Item Tryout Statistics
 8. Develop New Items
 9. Review Items for Field Test
 10. Assemble Field Test Forms
 11. Review Field Test Forms
 12. Administer Field Tests
 13. Review Field Test Statistics
 14. Conduct Bias Reviews
 15. Assemble Equivalent and Parallel Forms
 16. Review Assembled Tests
 17. Final Review of Tests
 18. Administer Test as Pilot
 19. Score Tests
 20. Establish Standards
 21. Administer Tests As Fully Operational
 22. Report Test Results
6. J. Oliver Williams (owilliams@gw.ncsu.edu) email correspondence, Friday, March 12, 2010.
 7. <http://appliedrationality.blogspot.com/2010/03/shady-economics-survey-from-john-locke.html>.
 8. Our state tests are not norm-referenced, meaning that we do not know how North Carolina stacks up against other states. State-by-state comparisons are essential because they are a much more accurate gauge of grade-level proficiency than the in-state comparisons provided by the ABC tests. More importantly, norm-referenced tests would permit North Carolinians to compare student and district performance to state, national, and, possibly, international averages. There are a number of norm-referenced tests available for students in grades K-12, including the Basic Achievement Skills Individual Screener (BASIS), Metropolitan Achievement Tests (MAT 8), and the Stanford Achievement Test Series, 10th Edition (Stanford 10).

Appendix A: Economics Questions from the 2008-2009 North Carolina Test of Civics and Economics and the 2008-2009 North Carolina Test of U.S. History

Directions: The questions below are taken directly from North Carolina's end-of-course tests. Circle the option A-D that you believe accurately reflects the answer to the question **OR** if you believe the A-D responses are faulty in some way, please indicate the reason by using the comment boxes. Written comments would also be appreciated. No information about your participation in this study will be released to the public. Thank You.

1. A person opened a booth at a flea market to sell paintings. This is an example of which factor of production?

- A. Capital
- B. Entrepreneurship
- C. Natural resources
- D. Machinery

- None of the above
- Two or more of the above
- Defective or misleading question
- Comment (optional) _____

2. Which factor determines the wage or salary of a new employee?

- A. The worker's physical health status
- B. The length of a commute to work
- C. The availability of workers with similar skills
- D. The worker's credit history

- None of the above
- Two or more of the above
- Defective or misleading question
- Comment (optional) _____

3. What important economic concept is evident when a student wears a shirt made in Malaysia, drives a car made in Germany, and eats fruit produced in Mexico?

- A. Stock exchange
- B. Exchange of money
- C. Marketplace economics
- D. Global interdependence

- None of the above
- Two or more of the above
- Defective or misleading question
- Comment (optional) _____

4. How would an extended recession in the United States likely affect international economies?

- A. International economies may also fall into recession.
- B. Foreign stock markets would crash.
- C. International economies would experience prosperity.
- D. Foreign stock markets would benefit.

- None of the above
- Two or more of the above
- Defective or misleading question
- Comment (optional) _____

5. Which factor contributed to the stock market crash of 1929?

- A. Overspeculation
- B. Government regulation of big business
- C. Decreased investment in business
- D. Increased agricultural prices

- None of the above
- Two or more of the above
- Defective or misleading question
- Comment (optional) _____

6. Which evidence showed that the prosperity of the 1920s was an illusion?

- A. Prices on consumer goods decreased.
- B. Overseas investments declined.
- C. The income gap between workers and managers decreased.
- D. Many people increased their debt.

- None of the above
- Two or more of the above
- Defective or misleading question
- Comment (optional) _____

General Comments (optional)

Appendix B: Civics Questions from the 2008-2009 North Carolina Test of Civics and Economics

Directions: The questions below are taken directly from North Carolina’s end-of-course high school civics test. Circle the option A-D that you believe accurately reflects the answer to the question **OR** if you believe the A-D responses are faulty in some way, please indicate the reason by using the comment boxes. Written comments would also be appreciated. No information about your participation in this study will be released to the public. Thank You.

1. Which process is used to change the U.S. Constitution?

- A. Eminent domain
- B. Initiative
- C. Amendment
- D. Judicial review

- None of the above
- Two or more of the above
- Defective or misleading question
- Comment (optional) _____

2. Why are national party conventions held by the two major U.S. political parties?

- A. To select a presidential candidate
- B. To survey public opinion
- C. To recruit new electors
- D. To install new legislators

- None of the above
- Two or more of the above
- Defective or misleading question
- Comment (optional) _____

3. How do communities settle disagreements about locations for new businesses?

- A. The citizens hold a public hearing to discuss proposed locations for the company.
- B. The community asks the courts to determine the best location.
- C. The community passes an ordinance to limit pollution by the company.
- D. The citizens picket and protest outside the company’s construction site.

- None of the above
- Two or more of the above
- Defective or misleading question
- Comment (optional) _____

4. Which action is a civic responsibility?

- A. Voting in national elections
- B. Obeying laws
- C. Registering for the draft
- D. Serving on a jury

- None of the above
- Two or more of the above
- Defective or misleading question
- Comment (optional) _____

5. How does the Electoral College limit the voting power of citizens?

- A. The Electoral College must approve campaign contributions to each candidate or political party.
- B. Because of the design of the Constitution, the Electoral College is comprised in each state of the political party in the minority.
- C. Because of the Electoral College system, sometimes a president is elected who did not receive a majority of popular votes.
- D. The Electoral College fails to properly educate American voters.

- None of the above
- Two or more of the above
- Defective or misleading question
- Comment (optional) _____

6. What is the primary responsibility of the U.S. Department of Justice?

- A. To collect federal taxes
- B. To develop foreign policies
- C. To protect public lands
- D. To investigate violations of federal law

- None of the above
- Two or more of the above
- Defective or misleading question
- Comment (optional) _____

General Comments (optional)

Appendix C: Civics/Political Science Survey Cover Letter

February 15, 2010

NAME
INSIDE ADDRESS
INSIDE ADDRESS
INSIDE ADDRESS

Dear NAME,

In an effort to improve high school civics and economics education in the state, we are asking you and other experts from colleges and universities across North Carolina to assess the quality of selected questions from the state's high school civics test. To these test questions, we have added question evaluation options for you to consider. We respectfully request that you assist in this effort by completing and returning the short, two-page survey included with this letter.

All completed and returned surveys will be kept strictly confidential. Details about your participation will not be released to the public. The information collected in the enclosed survey will be used only to draw general conclusions.

Over 100,000 public high school students took the North Carolina end-of-course civics and economics test last year. According to the NC Department of Public Instruction, seven out of ten students passed the test. Unfortunately, pass rates say little about what high school students know and the testing instruments used to assess that knowledge.

We sincerely appreciate your participation in this important research project. If you have any questions or concerns about the survey, please contact me by phone at 919-828-3876 or by email at tstoops@johnlocke.org.

Sincerely,

Terry L. Stoops
Education Policy Analyst
John Locke Foundation

Appendix D: Economics Survey Cover Letter

February 15, 2010

NAME
INSIDE ADDRESS
INSIDE ADDRESS
INSIDE ADDRESS

Dear NAME,

In an effort to improve high school economics education in the state, we are asking you and other experts from colleges and universities across North Carolina to assess the quality of selected questions from the state's high school civics and economics and U.S. history tests. To these test questions, we have added question evaluation options for you to consider. We respectfully request that you assist in this effort by completing and returning the short, two-page survey included with this letter.

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Sincerely,

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Education Policy Analyst
John Locke Foundation

Appendix E: Economics Written Responses

Economics Question 1.

- The question was written by someone who does not know economics. All four are relevant, in one sense or another.
- Presumes that only one factor is relevant.
 - a) The table at the booth as well as material used to display the paintings are capital as is the inventory.
 - b) I assume this is the answer. There are legitimate discussions about the role of labor, too. Also it ignores the financial capital involved in buying the inventory.
- “B” I prefer the term “entrepreneurial ability”
- The booth itself is capital. The individual is an entrepreneur (under a broad definition of the term).. If he/she painted them it’s also (mainly) labor.
- I don’t know what entrepreneurship is in this context
- I suppose “B” is sought, but I can make a case for all of them.
- Not a good question—focus it on the factor, not on the action!
- Economists view capital and labor as factors of production, and labor is not listed here.
- Is the question focused on “person opening” (entrepreneurship) or “the booth” (Capital?)
- The use of “this” without an object is upsetting! Assuming the question is: “The booth is an example of...” the appropriate answer is A perhaps. But, to the extent that this “booth” is just space (to which the person simply brings his goods) and free, then it is unclear what “factor of production” is implied.
- I suspect the writer mean for the answer to entrepreneurship. But some capital and natural resources would almost unavoidably be involved.
- But we do not know if he owns the booth or is an employee. Who’s paintings? His or someone else’s?
- Entrepreneurship is not a factor of production (=argument of the production function), but it is the only possible answer here.
- a bit ambiguous as other factors also involved
- (In reference to the “This” in the question) are they referring to the person, the booth, or the idea of selling painting? // This is a vague example of any factor of production
- Booth, if new, would be capital but some would consider this a new small business also (A&B)
- This question is poorly written and has two answers (entrepreneurship and capital) Also, the example is an example of employment of a factor

Economics Question 2.

- It would be nice to remember ceteris paribus. Seriously issues of demand and supply are relevant.
 - a) Affects jobs someone can apply for
 - b) Affects jobs someone can apply for
 - c) Presumed answer
 - d) Now used to screen many potential employees.

- Determined by both D and S [sic] ****perhaps “C”****
- A, B, & D have very important roles in starting salary- & D may too.
 - a) Affects MRP_L (D side)
 - b) Compensating wage differential
 - c) Supply side
- C is the most straight-forward answer, but in certain jobs ones health would affect their productivity and thus their salary or wage.
- I suppose “C” is sought, but if the pay is bargained, then all are correct or could be.
- Do you teach difference between correlation and causation?
- Productivity is what matters most.
- Mainly C, but possibly also B, though the employer, IF considering B, is choosing sequentially, which he/she may well do.
- I’m not a big fan of “None of the above” questions
- A and C seem to be possible influences. D is potentially misleading as the state of NC is considering making credit checks illegal in the process of hiring.
- C is only ONE factor
- C is the best answer, but A would have an influence.
- C is the best answer, D is worst. A could matter.
- Do they mean “when an applicant is hired” (answer is “none” in that case) or “in market equilibrium” (answer is “two or more” in that case)?
- The correct answer is C
- again ambiguous – B will matter as well in equilibrium in the aggregate (marked A and C as correct)
- Items B & D are often used by employees to deny employment but that is not the issue being examined here
- possibly both B & C
- Question implies only one of these factors is enough to determine wage
- Workers physical health is a [illegible] of human [illegible]. So A&C are arguable [illegible]

Economics Question 3.

- B – for goods/services; C – I assume goods/services traded in a market; D – Presumed answer, but “dependence” assumes that the student has no substitutes available for the shirt, car, or fruit.
- “Interdependence” is a strong term, “globalization” more neutral. Of course several answers could be correct but it’s obvious what they are getting at with this question.
- C or D is correct. I would add comparative advantage as the next choice.

- Either “D” is sought or C and D both are.
- C is also possible (D was given)
- Trivial question—why bother asking?
- Really refers to Theory of Comparative Advantage
- C and D are not concepts, they are economic forces that work through markets. If students learn to think of concepts rather than processes they will be unable to connect causes and effects.
- “D” is probably the best answer, however, doesn’t the marketplace offer global products?
- A and B could be right- my guess is A is the preferred answer
- What does “is evident” mean?
- All except A are correct.
- The desired answer is “Global Interdependence,” but that is not an “important economic concept.” Comparative advantage is an important concept that also is relevant, but that was not offered.
- internation(al?) trade would be better term to use
- I prefer gains from trade to the apparent answer (D)
- All of the options should be sentences. // Money is exchanged, markets(?) are used, and nations are interdependent. Terrible Question!

Economics Question 4.

- Presumes a lot of sweeping generalizations that defy the analytical rigor of economics.
 - a) Some
 - b) Some
 - c) Some
 - d) Some
- A is most likely, any are possible
- Probably both [A & B], although it depends on a lot.
- Not a great question as any of these could happen.
- The only cue here is “may” in A as opposed to “would”
- A and B seem quite likely
- Terrible question. Effect on foreign markets could go either way—see Brazil’s 2009 returns.
- Hard for even professional economists to really say what will happen
- This is bizarre. What is “likely” depends on the defining properties of the situation and on what various governments do. Thus in the recent recession China and Australia suffered less than the US, Ireland, and Iceland more.
- “B” is a bit too extreme, but we would expect foreign stock market to suffer.

- It depends! Not enough information given.
- “A” Only if export led economies driven by US economy
- A is correct as a likely result, but B has some merit.
- Terrible wording. The question asks how a US recession would likely affect other economies and then the last answer says that they may fall into recession. Also, depending on the circumstances any or all offered answers could be right.
- Only one answer, A, is reasonable
- ambiguous
- possibly A & B
- A is certainly correct given (“may”) & B is likely from history
- One could argue that both A & B are correct

Economics Question 5.

- Given that everything in an economy is connected to everything else, all four factors could have played a role, at some level. This is a very poorly constructed question.
- The question isn’t clear if the response should be related specifically to the crash or to the building up of events over time. In either case, I can argue for “none of the above.”
- “A” I know it’s controversial (to you guys) but I believe “A” is accurate
- The major likely cause—revised expectations—isn’t one of the answers.
- It is not clear if any of these answers is wholly correct. A is probably the best.
- This is horrible—I suppose “A” is sought but it is a silly answer.
- Why do we even care when this played at best a minor role in precipitating the contraction of ’31-’33?
- Hard for even professional economists to really say what will happen
- This gets worse and worse. [In re: B] or inappropriate reg’s? or manipulated reg’s?
- B is politically loaded and A is too vague; A-perhaps
- Not scientifically conclusive. Even today answer unclear.
- ????
- The 1929 crash was a typical financial bubble bursting “overspeculation” comes closest to the answer, but isn’t entirely correct
- How about the Fed’s contraction of Ms (?)
- possibly none of the above
- “overspeculation” is evidently the right answer, but I don’t know what it means

Economics Question 6.

- Prosperity either existed or did not. How can it be an illusion? Expectations of growth can fail to be fulfilled. Perhaps that is what the writer of the question was trying to get at.
- You need to define the term prosperity clearly so that the term illusion has meaning; A-Aren't these "good"? C-Aren't these "good"?
- Illusion is too strong a term, biased.
- The entire premise of the question is WRONG—the prosperity of the 1920s was no illusion—based on big increases in productivity and solid govt policies like tax cuts.
- Odd question. Was the prosperity an illusion? I don't think so.
- It was hardly an illusion in the US
- This is a very strange question—debt is not necessarily bad.
- How do any of these show a decline in prosperity?
- What defines "prosperity?" This is an open-ended question
- Terms of questions need to be specified.
- The 1920s prosperity was not an illusion, but some sectors performed poorly and society became more unequal.
- Nonsense question and answers.
- ????
- The prosperity of the 1920s was quite real. Real GDP rose by about 50% over the period 1920-1929.
- There was nothing illusory about prosperity in 1920s. Its was followed by a government-created depression, but the gain were real!
- Question hard to understand, let alone the answers
- Illusion? Is this fact or opinion?
- debt (D) probably the answer sought but not clear that this makes prosperity an illusion
- I'd quibble with the word "illusion." Prosperity was real, but bought at the cost of future payments. I assume "D" is the correct answer.
- (in reference to "illusion" in the question) what does this mean? This question makes no sense

Economics General Comments:

- On the whole, these questions point to gross incompetence in the teaching of economics in NC Schools
- Hopefully your goal is to improve the test and not just criticize it.
- The questions are some what simplistic

- These questions reflect a woeful ignorance of economics—they leave me speechless!
- These questions are shockingly, frighteningly bad!
- The questions are too open-ended and vague, and it can be debated at length what the correct answers should be.
- This is appalling! I find these questions examples of dumbness. I understand that multiple choice questions may be unavoidable, but they make sense only in the context of a particular type of syllabus:-- One which deals in rights and wrongs, not in terms of complexities that need to be analyzed. Here there is no evidence that students are taught to think or analyze (18th C. sense), only that they are expected to memorize pre-packaged episodes of designated character: no doubts, no process, nothing a citizen needs.
- Wow! These questions are very poorly worded. Perhaps students are taught that there is only one possible answer, but I think economists would agree that additional information is needed to rule out some answers.
- Informal surveys of my introductory economics classes (ie asking in class) indicate that most receive little instruction in economics. Some high school teachers do a nice job with economics, but many seem to fill up the year with civics, teaching economics for just a few weeks.
- Very low level questions.
- These are all macro questions, which is too bad.
- many of these questions seem to be based on opinion or a particular view of events – especially #5 and #6
- All of these questions are seriously sub-divided.

Appendix F: Civics Written Responses

Civics Question 1.

- Which process is used to change the U.S. Constitution?
 - a) Eminent domain
 - b) Initiative → somewhat confusing because starts amendment process
 - c) Amendment
 - d) Judicial review → somewhat confusing in that judicial review drages (?) applications (?) of Constitution which is what mattersComment: consider comments above in offering two different choices

- Comment: obviously C, but D (Judicial Review) drastically changes the meaning of the Constitution. Clearer wording would be “to change the wording of the Constitution”

- only one, C. Amendment

- A & B are clearly incorrect. C is the best answer, though an argument can be made for D

- Either C. or D. could be true. This question is ambiguous. A well-informed student might get it wrong!

- one might argue that D is correct for through interpretation (interpreting?) the meaning of the Constitution has been construed differently

- Amendment (judicial review doesn’t “change” it”)

- it is also “changed” (not the wording but the practice) by informal processes. Partres (?) are an informal development of our “Constitution” if by that is meant the rules of the game

- I hope they don’t think judicial review changes the Constitution!

- This normalized policy making by judicial review, which is of controversy

Civics Question 2.

- Confusing as the platform pieces and use of conventions to organize and promote party exist. Recommend deletion

- To formally affirm the selection of the party’s presidential and vice presidential candidate and to vote on matters of policy

- only one, A. to select a presidential candidate

- A is clearly the best answer. There are other important reasons, but not the one’s listed. The convention often doesn’t really do any of these

- An argument could be made that it is about public opinion...

- It insinuates that other parties hold conventions for different reasons

- Only A is correct

- Most modern party conventions have been “coronation” affairs. No real decisions are made. The candidates already are known.

- A is the correct answer (at least that's what I'd say) though there is subtlety there in that the conventions are a show these days
- Development of a zoning ordinance prior to deeding if their location is suitable
- But, as a practical matter, the presidential nominees are selected before the conventions these days

Civics Question 3.

- Teaches students that business owners have no decision in process to locate their own business and full use of personal assets
- Defective or misleading question: "settle" initial decisions at hearing are challenged
- This question makes no sense at all!! It depends on what the disagreement is, and who disagrees with whom. Is this REALLY on the test in this form? I would assume that A is intended to be the best answer
- This will depend on the location, state and local laws, and in many cases ALL of these actions are used to ultimately settle disagreements
- Could easily be influenced by students own experience
- Two or more are possible answers. Stupid, useless question!
- vague question
- Maybe A is the best answer through the key word is "settle" in my mind. "A" doesn't settle. Hate to tell y'all but I don't think free market is the answer here either! ☺
- These responses seem to normalize the extremes of conflicts over business location decisions, and take an external perspective on business (ie what does the business think?)
- This is extremely vague. What kinds of disagreements? What communities?

Civics Question 4.

- Which action is a civic responsibility?
 - a) Voting in national elections
 - b) Obeying laws
 - c) Registering for the draft
 - d) Serving on a jury (for males)

the law

Comment: confuses legal requirements with civic responsibility. Could reframe around civic "duty" with one being to follow laws and uphold Constitution
- A could be considered correct, but is usually considered right rather than a responsibility. B clearly appears to be correct. D. is correct in our system if and when called and if not dismissed C is correct for anyone covered when a registration law is in effect
- ugh. This is terrible question since the only are not on actual civic responsibility – but after said it is – is voting!
- ALL
- Two or more of the above – according to the commonly accepted understanding of "civic responsibility"
- Which action is a civic responsibility?

- a) Voting in national elections (Knack 1992) → and many others!
 - b) Obeying laws (Tom Tyler)
 - c) Registering for the draft → I'd say yes but it's only selective service and only for men
 - d) Serving on a jury (Knack 94 public choice)
- At least according to my research! All are! (Unless you want to get technical)

- This may be confusing: is there a difference between, responsibility, and law?
- All are responsibilities
- I'd say all of them → The curriculum presumably differentiates between responsibility and legal obligation? A in elections is legitimately the voter dislikes(?) all choices
- Some are not responsibilities (ie voting), some apply only to a certain age group (ie draft registering)

Civics Question 5.

- THIS QUESTION WINS THE AWARD. Electoral College is a positive for states rights/balancing interests and ensuring unity across the various states. Question is biased towards a negative presentation
- ["limit" is circled] 1. "Filter" by this definition of 'limit' any republican model of representation "limits" 2. It's not the college that 'limits' the power of more populous states but rather the apportionment scheme whereby(?)
- A, B, & D are all silly!! C has to be the intended answer. It could well be argued, however, that the Electoral College was responsible for this only in 1888!! The US House made the decision in 1824 The Supreme Court in 2000. It neither of those cases did any candidate have a majority of the vote a special commission decided the 1876 election by changing the apparent electoral college results
- Electoral college question needs to be re-worded
- Only 1 right answer (c)
- Answer "C" is a true statement (all the others are false; but it does not answer the questions asked
- It, the Electoral College, is a means of aggregating votes. It doesn't limit our voting power.
- This is a good question
- But there are after effects of EC that are much more harmful
- The Electoral College does not hinder [or] limit the voluntary voting power of citizens in any of these ways. I'm guessing the answer is C. But this isn't a function of the EC but of the unit rule. And, besides, why is that necessarily bad?
- The emphasis on majority of popular vote is skewed in answering the question, and obviously refers to the 2000 Bush elections (abins?) [?]

Civics Question 6.

- What is the primary responsibility of the U.S. Department of Justice?
 - a) To collect federal taxes → enforces legislation
 - b) To develop foreign policies
 - c) To protect public lands → enforces legislation
 - d) To investigate violations of federal law

Defective or misleading question. Comment: primary responsibility is not investigation but enforcement/ _____ upholding laws and Constitution need all new choices

- D is the best answer here
- D ?
- Only 1 right answer
- The responsibility of the DOJ is changing every day
- None of these are the primary responsibility of DOJ. Many, many federal agencies are involved in investigating violations of federal law.
- I assume D is the correct answer, though I assume there are some public lands over which the DOJ has some authority.
- The homeland security (DHS), the DOJ now takes on extensive foreign policies

Civics General Comments:

- This is certainly not the kind of test I would construct. A significant part of the problem is the difficulty in constructing multiple choice questions on issues of this type. Open ended response would give us better information about what students know
- Add option of answering one response
- I appreciate the opportunity to comment. It is little wonder (?) that the exam scenes are so pitiful.
- looks good to me! (I am a Europeanist by training.)
- 1 & 6 are the clearest. The rest are [illegible]. Happy to help, Terry. [name withheld]
- These “critical thinking questions” are laudable efforts, but need to be more precise in training young minds to look more closely at Constitutional specifics.