

ECON 3540 - 001

CURRENT ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

MIKE MARTINEAU, Ph.D.

PARK 110K

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Monday + Wednesdays

BUC 303

11:50am – 1:10pm

OFFICE HOURS:

In most cases, my office hours are by appointment only. Feel free to email me, or come speak to me before or after class. My office is in the Park building, office 110K.

REQUIRED TEXT:

There is no required text for this course. Since this course is focused on current economic issues, we will draw upon up-to-date news articles, academic journal articles, and other publications.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

There are very few relevant issues today that are isolated from economic principles. The discipline of economics is more than a trivial collection of supply and demand charts, but rather encompasses the very behavior of individuals. Economic principles can be helpful in viewing nearly all aspects of society, from the market structure of education to the ticket pricing of Formula One racing. It is imperative that well-informed individuals understand the role of incentives and that there exist multiple frameworks through which we can view current issues. This course will cover some basic economic concepts and principles, and then examine how they can be used in understanding current and important issues. Seeing that there are various theoretical and philosophical perspectives regarding these issues, participation and involvement is essential.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

The primary objective of this course will be to explore various current issues through the lens of economic principles. Throughout the course, a secondary objective will be to develop abilities of inquiry and analysis. This involves identifying issues, exploring evidence and research, performing analysis, drawing conclusions, and communicating them in both a verbal and written manner. In short, this course will help develop the ability to think like an economist. Through quizzes and exams, students will be exposed to a variety of writing and communication methods, and will improve on these skills throughout the semester. Evidence of improvements and abilities will be provided through a term paper at the end of the semester.

COURSE COMPONENTS:

Readings / Quizzes – Weekly

Readings will be drawn from a variety of sources, including news articles, peer-reviewed academic journals, and other research papers. These readings are to be read before class and will prepare you for discussion and the occasional short quiz. The purpose of these readings is to familiarize yourself with the various economic principles found throughout current events and issues. Moreover, it allows students to gain exposure to the material beforehand rather than solely relying on the instructor's lectures. A key objective of this course is to learn how to view various current issues through different economic frameworks, and reading many articles is the most efficient and worthwhile way of accomplishing this.

Mid-Term Exam (3/23/15)

A short in-class midterm exam will be given on which students will respond to a few short essay questions. A review will occur on the class prior to the exam date.

Research Paper (5/4/15) and Optional Presentation

After becoming familiar with the general issues studied in the course, students will choose a topic on which to write a research paper. This should be a topic of interest to the student that will be grounds for considerable research. Students will become well acquainted with important aspects of their research topic, including background, history, economic effects of enacted policies, and overall economic/societal outcomes. The purpose of the paper will be to explore the current issue in question from an economic framework and analyze the effects of the aspects involved.

The Paper:

The paper will contain the following 3 components:

1. A brief introduction and history on the issue.
2. A review of the literature.
3. An incorporation of economic principles and methodology than can aid in analyzing the current issue.

The paper should be 10-12 pages in length (double-spaced, 1 inch margins, 12 pt font). To ensure that the paper is done in a timely manner, 3 important dates should be noted:

1. Paper Proposal (Due 3/9/15)

- An informal single-page proposal describing the topic of interest and potential associated economic principles. This proposal serves the purpose of getting students started early, as well as making sure the topic is worthwhile and appropriate for the course.

2. Paper Outline (Due 4/1/15)

- A more thorough outline of what your paper will entail, including economic areas of interest and specific data sources. About 2 pages in length.

3. Final Paper (Due 5/4/15)

Optional Presentation:

To provide incentives for greater participation, students have the option of presenting their research in class for extra points (10% of grade) and shorter required paper (8 page minimum in place of 10). Presentations should achieve the following:

- Present the background and history of the issue
- Explain the economic effects associated with the issue and any enacted policies
- Open up the topic for questions and facilitate ensuing discussion

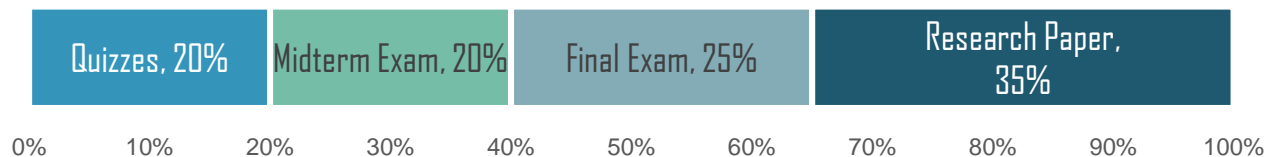
Depending on the number of students interested, group presentations may be warranted, but will be left to the instructor's discretion. Class presentations should be about 15 to 20 minutes in duration and will be scheduled for the last 3 weeks of class.

Final Exam (4/27/15)

A short and comprehensive exam, in essay format, will be issued on which students will present their compiled knowledge of the economic principles and issues discussed during the semester.

Grading:

Components as a percentage of final grade



Grade Scale

< 55%	55% to 59%	60% to 64%	65% to 69%	70% to 72%	73% to 76%	77% to 79%	80% to 82%	83% to 86%	87% to 89%	90% to 92%	93% +
E	D-	D	D+	C-	C	C+	B-	B	B+	A-	A

Course Schedule

Pre-determined schedules always change depending on students' interests and timing. The following schedule represents a topical framework, to which the instructor reserves the right to make any changes.

DATE	TOPIC
12-Jan	Course Overview
14-Jan	Economic Principles
19-Jan	Martin Luther King Jr. Day Holiday
21-Jan	Economic Principles
26-Jan	Market Structure & Competition
28-Jan	Poverty & Inequality
2-Feb	Poverty & Inequality
4-Feb	Education
9-Feb	Education
11-Feb	Energy & Environment
16-Feb	President's Day
18-Feb	Energy & Environment
23-Feb	Financial Crisis & Housing
25-Feb	Tax & Budget
2-Mar	Tax & Budget
4-Mar	Healthcare
9-Mar	Healthcare
11-Mar	Midterm Review
16-Mar	Spring Break
18-Mar	Spring Break
23-Mar	Midterm Exam
25-Mar	Foreign Policy & National Security
30-Mar	Regulations
1-Apr	Monetary Policy & Banking
6-Apr	Labor & Immigration
8-Apr	International & Development
13-Apr	Presentations
15-Apr	Presentations
20-Apr	Presentations
22-Apr	Final Exam Review
27-Apr	Final Exam

IMPORTANT DATES, NOTES, & POLICIES:

Dates

- Last day to drop: 1/21/2015
- Last day to withdraw: 3/6/2015
- Classes end: 4/28/2015

Disability Policy:

The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in the class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability Services, 162 Olpin Union Building, 801-581-5020. CDS will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations.

All written information in this course can be made available in alternative format with prior notification to the Center for Disability Services.