

ECON 3540-070: Current Economic Problems

Spring 2017: M 6-9 pm, Sandy Campus, Rm 104

Instructor: Jacki Strenio

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Course Website: utah.instructure.com

Office: Old Law Library (Bldg 72), Desk 16

Office Hours: Before and after class and by appointment

Course Catalog Description: A focus on central problems in the domestic and world economy, with an emphasis on continuing problems, such as the budget and trade deficits, up-to-the-minute issues and the health of the current economy.

Course Overview: You just paid your college tuition and your bank account is empty. Do you consider yourself poor? Does the US government classify you as living in poverty? Or, is poverty more multidimensional than what is captured by your bank account balance? Poverty is only one of the central economic problems we will explore this semester and we will expand our conception of it to include measures such as time and capabilities. We will also place special emphasis on inequality, health and healthcare, unpaid work, and labor market discrimination. We will motivate these topics by first exploring the current extent of the problem and its historical context, using both quantitative and qualitative evidence, before moving on to examine economic theory, looking to both classical and alternative theoretical explanations. Though this class will look to the US for many of our examples and evidence, the learning methodologies and theories we cover can be applied globally. Knowledge of principles-level economics is useful, but not required, for successful completion of this course.

Credit Hours: 3

Texts:

- Gosling, James J., Eisner, M. A. (2013). *Economics, Politics, and American Public Policy*. 2nd ed. Routledge. ISBN-13: 978-0765637703
- Sen, Amartya (2000). *Development as Freedom*. Reprint edition. Anchor. ISBN-13: 978-0385720274
- Stiglitz, Joseph E., (2013). *The Price of Inequality: How Today's Divided Society Endangers our Future*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1st ed. ISBN-13: 978-0393345063
- Additional course readings will come from a variety of sources including, but not limited to: peer-reviewed journals, reports, and newspaper articles. All readings not from our course texts will be posted on Canvas.

Course Outcomes:

At the completion of this course, you will be able to:

1. explain the key economic problems facing Utah, the US, and the world.
2. apply economic principals, tools, and logic to examine these current economic problems and propose potential solutions.
3. interpret and compare and contrast the various measures of economic wellbeing, including poverty, inequality, time use, and health.
4. distinguish between types of discrimination, and explain the importance of the accounting project for unpaid work.
5. explain and critically evaluate media coverage on current economic events.
6. summarize and critically evaluate textbooks and peer-reviewed academic articles from a variety of academic disciplines and journals.

Assignments and Grading:

| | |
|-------------------------------|-----|
| Assignments | 20% |
| Scribe | 5% |
| Current Events | 5% |
| Yellowdig Board | 5% |
| Research Project Presentation | 20% |
| Midterm Exam | 20% |
| Final Exam | 25% |

Assignment and Exam Details:

- **Assignments:** Mix of weekly in-class and take-home assignments and quizzes, including both individual and group work. I drop your lowest score.
- **Scribe:** In teams of two, you will be responsible for summarizing the main points of the last class's lecture at the beginning of the class you sign up for as well as uploading a brief, bulleted list of *things you should have learned* to the Canvas scribe discussion board. Sign-ups will occur in the third week of class.
- **Current Events:** You will be responsible for providing a brief summary of a current event as well as explaining how it relates to the course readings and lectures. Sign-ups will occur in the third week of class.
- **Yellowdig Board:** The nerdier cousin of Pinterest, linked to our course Canvas page. Each week, you will be required to pin at least one web-based resource (articles, videos, etc.) related to our weekly class topic and readings. You are also required to comment on at least one other pinned resource. The goal of using Yellowdig is to encourage you to start paying attention to the ideas we cover in class as they present themselves in the "real world." This will also be a helpful resource to draw on when deciding on an event to present for your current events assignment.
- **Presentation** In groups of two-three, you will be responsible for presenting the results of a group research project on a current economic problem of your choice. Groups and topics will be assigned in the third week of class and presentations will occur in the last week of class, Monday April 24th. More information, including a rubric, will be discussed out in class and posted on Canvas.
- **Midterm Exam:** In-class exam on March 6, mix of short answer and essay questions.

- **Final Exam:** Take-home final exam, comprised of short essay questions. Open book and open notes. Exam will be posted on Canvas after class on April 24th and will be due on Canvas by 11:59 pm on April 30th.

Letter Grade Distribution:

| | | | |
|---------------|----|---------------|----|
| ≥ 93.00 | A | 73.00 - 76.99 | C |
| 90.00 - 92.99 | A- | 70.00 - 72.99 | C- |
| 87.00 - 89.99 | B+ | 67.00 - 69.99 | D+ |
| 83.00 - 86.99 | B | 63.00 - 66.99 | D |
| 80.00 - 82.99 | B- | 60.00 - 62.99 | D- |
| 77.00 - 79.99 | C+ | ≤ 59.99 | F |

Extra Credit:

Various opportunities will be announced in class and on Canvas.

Expectations:

You can expect me to:

- Grade and provide feedback on assignments within one week of the date they are submitted.
- Reply to emails/Canvas messages within 24 hours, within 48 hours on weekends or holidays.
- Use Canvas to enhance student learning, communication, and convenience.
- Be readily available to meet with students, either before or after class or at any other time that works for both of us.
- Complete final grades and provide students with feedback on final grades within two weeks of the date the last course assignment is submitted.

I expect you to:

- Become familiar with Canvas. It will be heavily utilized in this course. I highly recommend you check Canvas often and **turn on notifications**. Log into Canvas and click Settings in the top righthand corner. Double check that the registered email address is one you use. Then, click Notifications on the left-hand bar. I recommend choosing ASAP for Announcements and Conversations, at the very least.
- Come to class prepared (having completed all assigned readings) and respectfully participate in class discussions and activities.
- Immediately notify me in the event of an emergency that prevents you from submitting an assignment or completing the course.
- Ask questions if any expectations or assignments are unclear.
- Be courteous of your instructor and fellow classmates when using technology. Always give speakers your full attention and make sure that any use of technology during class enhances your learning and does not distract you or others from course content.

University Policies:

- *Academic (Dis)Honesty.* Academic dishonesty of any kind is a serious offense, which undermines both the reputation and quality of the degrees issued by the University of Utah. Plagiarism of any kind, intentional and/or unintentional, will result in strict sanctions against the student per university policy. Please meet with me immediately if you are unclear as to what constitutes plagiarism.
- *The University Code: Section V.A.* Students must adhere to generally accepted standards of academic honesty, including but not limited to, refraining from cheating, plagiarizing, research misconduct, misrepresenting ones work, and/or inappropriately collaborating.
- *Section V.B.* A student who engages in academic misconduct may be subject to academic sanctions including but not limited to a grade reduction, failing grade, probation, suspension, or dismissal from the program or the University, or revocation of the students degree or certificate.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Statement:

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, 581-5020 (V/TDD). 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.

Tentative Course Outline: The topics listed are those that we will be covering in class that day. A companion reading list to this set of topics will be posted on Canvas. This outline is tentative and may change. Check "Modules" in Canvas for most up-to-date topics, assignments, and readings.

| Week | Date | Topic |
|-------------|-------------|--|
| 1 | 1/9 | • Introduction |
| 2 | 1/16 | • No class: MLK Jr. Day |
| 3 | 1/23 | • Poverty & Illbeing: Measurements • Sign up for scribe, current events, and research project assignments |
| 4 | 1/30 | • Poverty & Illbeing: Poverty as capability deprivation |
| 5 | 2/6 | • Social provisioning |
| 6 | 2/13 | • Accounting for unpaid work |
| 7 | 2/20 | • No class: President's Day |
| 8 | 2/27 | • Occupational segregation & labor market discrimination |
| 9 | 3/6 | • In-class Midterm |
| 10 | 3/13 | • No class: Spring break |
| 11 | 3/20 | • Inequality: Earnings inequality |
| 12 | 3/27 | • Inequality: Causes & consequences |
| 13 | 4/3 | • Inequality: & the Great Recession |
| 14 | 4/10 | • Health: Expenditures & coverage |
| 15 | 4/17 | • Health: Reform |
| 16 | 4/24 | • Group research project presentations due |