

# ECON 3540-01: Current Economic Problems

Spring 2021

Instructor: Ansel Schiavone  
Email: ansel.schiavone@utah.edu  
Office Hours: By appointment (Zoom)

Class meeting: MoWe, 11:50AM – 1:10PM  
Classroom: Canvas

## Course Description

There is no “correct” approach to economics. There are benefits and drawbacks to every theory and school of thought, none of which capture the true state of the economy in its entirety. As such, this course explores the various applications of economic theories and methods of analysis to contemporary issues in society, with a particular focus on comparisons between different lines of thought. We will focus primarily on problems within the US, however, world economic issues will also be incorporated into our discussions. This course has been designed such that students with no prior exposure to economics can fully comprehend the material and excel in the class. There are no prerequisites for this course.

## Textbooks

*Required:*

Chang, Ha-Joon (2015) *Economics: The User’s Guide*, New York: Bloomsbury Press.

*Recommended:*

Bowles, S., R. Edwards, F. Roosevelt, M. Larudee (2018) “Understanding Capitalism: Competition, Command, and Change,” NY: Oxford University Press.

Additional readings will be posted on Canvas. Textbooks are available in the University bookstore or online.

## Course Objectives

After completion of this course, students will be able to critically analyze and discuss various current issues in the US and world economy from a variety of different points of view. Students will be familiar with various forms of economic analysis, and how data can be used to support or refute hypotheses. Finally, students will be well-versed in different forms of policy that are employed to confront current issues.

## Teaching Methods & Grading

Students will be graded based on performance in the following categories (grade weight in parenthesis):

- Class participation (20%)
- Reaction papers (30%)

- Midterm (25%)
- Final (25%)

In the past, this course has consisted of a combination of lectures, in-class discussions, reaction papers, and exams. Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, the course has been adapted to a hybrid IVC online format.

The three major sources of information required for success in the course are lectures, discussions, and readings. I will post prerecorded lectures and slides at the beginning of each week. Students will be able to choose when they view these lectures, however, they must be viewed within the week that they are posted. Students will then be required to engage in weekly Zoom discussions related to the previous week's lectures and readings. These discussions will take place during the scheduled Monday meeting time (11:50 AM – 1:10 PM). Active participation in these discussions is required. Failure to do so will impact your course grade significantly via the participation component detailed above. It is therefore essential that students complete the readings and lectures *before* engaging in online discussions. Students who actively participate every week should expect full credit on their participation grade. If you are unwilling or unable to attend or engage in these live discussions, please email me at the beginning of the semester so that accommodations can be made. Wednesdays will serve as office hours or time for further discussion, but attendance is not mandatory.

You will be required to write three reaction papers based on particular topics. These reaction papers should incorporate aspects from readings and discussions, as well as students' personal thoughts and experiences. Each paper should be no less than 1000 words in length, and should be submitted via Canvas. These papers will be due on 2/8, 3/1, and 4/12.

Midterm and final exams are opportunities for you to demonstrate what you have learned (and frankly, how well you have prepared). There is no collaboration on these exams, but I do encourage group studying. Students can expect exam questions to refer directly to particular readings or class discussions. These exams will be made available for a 48 hour period, and students will have 80 and 120 minutes to complete and submit their midterm and final exam, respectively. The midterm and final exam periods are 3/10-3/12 and 5/3-5/5, respectively.

No late work will be accepted. No makeup exams for illness will be given without a physician note. On very rare occasions I will grant extensions/makeup exams, but I reserve the right to make this determination on a case-by-case basis.

*"Everything in life is cumulative... so study hard."*

- a wise professor in my undergrad

# Tentative Schedule<sup>1</sup>

Date (Month/Day)	Topic	Reading
1/19	Introduction; what is economics?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Chang, chapters 1 &amp; 2</li> <li>- Chang, chapter 5</li> <li>- Bowles <i>et al.</i>, chapter 1</li> <li>- Chang, chapters 3 &amp; 4 (optional)</li> </ul>
1/25	Growth, happiness, fickle data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Chang, chapter 6</li> <li>- De Graaf &amp; Batker, chapter 2</li> <li>- <i>The Economics of Happiness: Crash Course Econ #35</i></li> </ul>
2/1	Healthcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- De Graff &amp; Batker, chapter 4</li> <li>- Bodenheimer &amp; Grumbach, chapters 2-4</li> </ul>
2/8	COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Schiavone et. al, (2020)</li> <li>- Patterson (2020)</li> </ul>
2/15	Saving and Investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Fed, Report on Economic Well-being</li> <li>- Bernanke, The Global Saving Glut</li> <li>- Wray, The basics of macro accounting</li> <li>- Wray, The Perfect Fiscal Storm</li> <li>- <i>Vlogbrothers: Understanding the National Debt and Budget Deficit</i></li> </ul>
2/22	Inequality and Poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Piketty, Capital in the Twenty-First Century, Chapter 1 &amp; 2</li> <li>Milkman, Women, Work, &amp; Protest, Chapter 1 - Chang, chapter 9</li> <li>- Bowles et al., chapter 14</li> <li>- AAUW, The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap</li> </ul>
3/1	Affordable Housing and Gentrification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Schelling, Micromotives, Macrobbehavior, Chapter 4</li> <li>- Wood et al., What Rapidly Rising Prices Mean for Housing Affordability</li> <li>- Ewing, A Mixed Picture of Gentrification</li> <li>- Evans, Improving Salt Lake City</li> </ul>
3/8	Midterm Review	
3/10-3/12	Midterm	
3/15	Globalization and International Trade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Chang, chapter 12</li> <li>- Bowles et al., US Capitalism Today is Transnational</li> <li>- Warren, Trans-Pacific Partnership</li> <li>- Rodrik, Brexit and the Globalization Trilemma</li> <li>- <i>CoreEcon, Dani Rodrik: Globalization, the trade-offs</i></li> <li>- Palley, The Challenge of Corporate Globalization (optional)</li> </ul>
3/22	Financialization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Chang, chapter 8</li> <li>- Bowles et al., Chapter 18</li> <li>- Epstein, From “boring” banking...</li> <li>- Litan, Enhanced competition in financial services...</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup>Videos are indicated by italics. See “Video Links” section for access.

Date (Month/Day)	Topic	Reading
3/29	Higher Education and Student Debt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Baum, Understanding College Affordability</li> <li>- Fulwiler et al., The Macroeconomic Effects of Student Debt Cancellation</li> </ul>
4/5	Innovation and Deindustrialization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Chang, chapter 7, btw “industrialization and deindustrialization” to “running out of the plant”</li> <li>- Chang, chapter 10</li> <li>- The Economist, Automation and anxiety</li> <li>- The Economist, Coming to an office near you Globalization, Robots, and the Future of Work</li> <li>- Mazzucato, Building the Entrepreneurial State (optional)</li> </ul>
4/12	Environmental Economics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Chang, chapter 7, “running out of the plant”</li> <li>- Bowles et al., “Market Failure” and “The Tragedy of the Commons”</li> <li>- Hardin, Tragedy of The Commons</li> <li>- Jiang et al., Smith, Malthus and Recent Evidence in Global Population Dynamics</li> <li>- Boyce, Not Just for Future Generations</li> </ul>
4/19	Monetary and Fiscal Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Chang, chapter 11</li> <li>- Chang, chapter 4 (classical, neoclassical, Austrian, Keynesian)</li> <li>- Bowles et al., chapter 19</li> <li>- Edwards, Washington’s largest monument - government debt</li> <li>- Wray &amp; Tymoigne, Modern Money Theory 101</li> <li>- Mankiw, A Skeptic’s Guide to MMT</li> </ul>
4/26	Review	PLEASE FILL OUT COURSE EVALS!!
5/3-5/5	Final exam	

## Citations

It is of the utmost importance that you cite your work. Including ideas, quotes, images, etc. of other authors in your work without proper citation is *plagiarism*, and will be treated as such by me. Students may use any citation format with which they are comfortable. In economics we use APA, so if you are indifferent or unsure about which style to use, please refer to the APA Formatting & Style Guide online.

## Grade Scale

A  $\geq$  93%  
 93%  $>$  A-  $\geq$  90%  
 90%  $>$  B+  $\geq$  87%  
 87%  $>$  B  $\geq$  83%  
 83%  $>$  B-  $\geq$  80%  
 80%  $>$  C+  $\geq$  77%  
 77%  $>$  C  $\geq$  73%  
 73%  $>$  C-  $\geq$  70%  
 70%  $>$  D+  $\geq$  65%  
 65%  $>$  D  $\geq$  60%  
 60%  $>$  D-  $\geq$  50%  
 50%  $>$  E

## **Workload**

This is a 3 credit hour course. According to the University of Utah's Policy 6-100 III Sec. C6, (see <http://regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-100.php>), "at the University of Utah we assume that there is at least one hour in class and two hours outside of class per week [or the equivalent combination] connected to every credit hour" (brackets added). So you should expect to study/read about 6 hours outside of class each week.

## **Academic Integrity**

Excerpt from the University of Utah's Student Code:

"Academic misconduct" includes, but is not limited to, cheating, misrepresenting one's work, inappropriately collaborating, plagiarism, and fabrication or falsification of information, as defined further below. It also includes facilitating academic misconduct by intentionally helping or attempting to help another to commit an act of academic misconduct.

Punishment of academic misconduct as previously defined will be pursued by me in accordance with University policy. Possible sanctions may take the form of expulsion from the class, failure of the class, or more severe penalties such as dismissal from the University. If I suspect you of academic misconduct, I am required to send a letter to your dean, which will be permanently placed in your student file. Subsequent disciplinary measures will then be pursued if deemed necessary by the office of the dean of the accused student. Don't cheat, it's really not worth it.

## **Americans with Disabilities Act 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 this 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 an alternative format with prior notification to the Center for Disability Services.

## **Wellness Statement**

Personal concerns such as stress, anxiety, relationship difficulties, depression, cross-cultural differences, etc., can interfere with a student's ability to succeed and thrive at the University of Utah. For helpful resources contact the Center for Student Wellness at [www.wellness.utah.edu](http://www.wellness.utah.edu) or 801-581-7776.

## **Personal Pronouns**

Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name as well as "Preferred first name" (if previously entered by you in the Student Profile section of your CIS account). While CIS refers to this as merely a preference, I will honor you by referring to you with the name and pronoun that feels best for you in class, on papers, exams, group projects, etc. Please advise me of any name or pronoun changes (and update CIS) so I can help create a learning environment in which you, your name, and your pronoun will be respected. If you need assistance getting your preferred name on your UIDcard, please visit the LGBT Resource Center Room 409 in the Olpin Union Building, or email [bpeacock@sa.utah.edu](mailto:bpeacock@sa.utah.edu) to schedule a time to drop by. The LGBT Resource Center hours are M-F 8am-5pm, and 8am-6pm on Tuesdays.

## **Addressing Sexual Misconduct**

Title XI makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender (which includes sexual orientation and gender identity/expression) is a civil rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, color, religion, age, status as a person with a disability, veteran's status or genetic information. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you are encouraged to report it to the Title IX Coordinator in the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, 135 Park Building, 801-581-8365, or the Office of the Dean of Students, 270

Union Building, 801-581-7066. For support and confidential consultation, contact the Center for Student Wellness, 426 SSB, 801-581-7776. To report to the police, contact the Department of Public Safety, 801-585- 2677(COPS).

## **General Statement of Respect**

I expect our (virtual) classroom to be a place of acceptance and inclusion. I will not tolerate any form of discrimination, harassment, or general disrespect towards any member of our course. I urge students with any concerns regarding violation of this statement to come and speak with me, or contact the offices listed in above sections for additional guidance and support.

## **Video Links**

The Economics of Happiness: Crash Course Econ #35

Vlogbrothers: Understanding the National Debt and Budget Deficit

CoreEcon, Dani Rodrik: Globalization- the trade-offs (documentary)

Fiscal Policy and Stimulus: Crash Course Economics #8