

ECON 309: Economic Problems and Public Policies

George Mason University

Summer 2020

Instructor:	Aisha Yusuf
Email:	ayusuf3@gmu.edu
Office Hours:	Available via email or zoom (with appointment)
Class time:	Asynchronous Online Class
Class Duration:	June 1 – August 8
Prerequisites:	ECON 103 and ECON 104

Course Description

Are foreigners stealing our jobs? How much should we trust the government? Who benefits from a pandemic? The answers to these questions can be found in public policy. The goal for this course is to take what you have learned in your economic principles courses and combine them to analyze problems and current events happening around you. We will use the “economic way of thinking” to evaluate public policy issues.

I love this course and I hope that by the end of the summer term, you will not only be able to make sound judgments on policy issues but also have a deep appreciation for the subject matter.

Learning Outcomes

1. Apply the economic way of thinking in evaluating current events and public policies.
2. Identify common economic myths/fallacies and make sound judgments on public policy issues.
3. Develop an economic imagination by coming up with innovative solutions to complex problems.
4. Understand how to conduct research, analyze technical policy papers, and how to check the credibility of their sources.

Required Texts

1. Henry Hazlitt, Economics in One Lesson. (New and used copies available online).
2. Steven Landsburg. The Armchair Economist. (New and used copies available online).
3. In addition to these, I will post other reading materials which are available for free on Blackboard.

Recommended Texts

1. Tyler Cowen and Alex Tabarrok. Modern Principles: Microeconomics (any Edition).
2. James D. Gwartney, Richard L. Stroup, Russell S. Sobel, David A. Macpherson. Economics: Private and Public Choice (any edition).
3. [Friedman, David D. \(1986\). Price Theory: An Intermediate Text. South-Western Publishing Co.](#)
4. Strunk and White. The Elements of Style.
5. William Thomson. A Guide for Young Economist

Grading

Your final grade in the class will be determined as follows:

Class Discussion:	25%
4 Quizzes:	40%
Final Paper:	35%

Weekly Class Discussion

Students are required to post one open-ended question related to the topic covered in the week on the Blackboard discussion board. Also, students must reply to at least one question on the discussion board every week. Guidelines on discussion questions and answers will be posted on Blackboard.

Quiz

There are four quizzes in the course. These quizzes are bi-weekly starting from week 3 and will be based primarily on the lecture notes and readings. If you miss a quiz without a valid reason, you will get a zero. There are no make-ups.

Final Paper

Students will write a 1500-word essay that focuses on a specific public policy problem. They will make a brief economic argument for how the problem should be viewed and addressed. The final paper is due **6th August**. More information on your paper will be provided on Blackboard. Students are encouraged to discuss their paper with me regularly.

Late Submission

I **do not** accept late submissions. If you turn in your final project after the due date, you will get a zero.

Course Tentative Schedule¹

Dates	Topics
Week 1 - June 1	Introduction •Review of Syllabus •How to Read Economics Papers
Week 2 - June 8	Welfare Economics •Efficiency •Cost and Benefits Analysis
Week 3 - June 15	Monopoly and Competition •Price Discrimination •Quiz 1
Week 4 - June 22	Public Choice •Economics of Politics •Voting
Week 5 - June 29	Trade Policy •Free Trade •Fair Trade •Comparative Advantage •Protectionism •Tariffs •Quiz 2
Week 6 - July 6	Migration Policy
Week 7 - July 13	Education and Health •Human Capital and Signaling •Moral hazards and Adverse Selection •Quiz 3
Week 8 - July 20	Labor Policy •Demand and Supply of Labor •Price Control: Minimum Wage •Occupational Licensing
Week 9 - July 27	Environmental Policy •Public Goods •Externalities •Pollution •Natural Resources •Quiz 4
Week 10 - August 3	TBA: Topic to be decided by class vote

¹ I reserve the right to alter the schedule as deemed appropriate.

Disability Services

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please contact me, and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474, <http://ods.gmu.edu>. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS.

Academic Honesty

It is expected that students adhere to the George Mason University Honor Code as it relates to integrity regarding coursework and grades. The Honor Code reads as follows:

To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University community and with the desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the student members of the University Community have set forth this: Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal and/or lie in matters related to academic work.

More information about the Honor Code, including definitions of cheating, lying, and plagiarism, can be found at the Office of Academic Integrity website at <http://oai.gmu.edu>

Feedback: You are encouraged to provide me with regular feedback on your experience with the course.