

## Economics 349(L01) The Economics of Social Problems

### REVISED DUE TO COVID-19

Instructor: Rob Oxoby  
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**Lecture Location: online via D2L**  
Lecture Days/Time: TR 14:00 – 15:15

Office: SS402

**Office Hours: MW 14:00 – 16:00 via Skype (username: robbyoxoby)**

Winter 2020

#### Course Description:

Due to the changes enacted in response to COVID-19, please see the revisions to the course outline. Changes have been bolded for ease of identification.

This course will use the tools of economic analysis to contribute to our understanding of various social problems. Using the economic model of the rational agent, we will explore how individuals behave in social context and evaluate policies addressing the issues in question. Topics to be covered include discrimination, crime, health care, income inequality, and poverty.

#### Course Learning Outcomes:

1. Develop skills around the use and interpretation of economic methods, particularly in the use of economic models.
2. Introduction to the application of various economic measures of growth and development, with an emphasis on broader socio-economic measures and distributional measures (e.g., health measures, poverty measures, Gini coefficient, World Value Survey measures).
3. Introduced to the economic research on the causes and effects of income inequality; introduced to different theories of economic allocations (Utilitarian, Rawlsian, Kantian equilibria) and the underlying philosophies of these theories (e.g., inequality of opportunity).
4. Know and understand the various measures of poverty (LICO, means-based measures) and economic theories (human capital, social identity, opportunity-based approaches) as to the causes of poverty; know and understand the distributional and social components of poverty and their underlying theories.
5. Know and understand the theories of taste-based and statistical discrimination; understand the consequences of each type of discrimination; introduction to other theories of discrimination from other fields (e.g. expectation states, social identity)
6. Know and understand the economic theories underlying criminal behaviour and the judicial system; develop familiarity with the workings of the criminal justice system in Canada and the distributional aspects of crime.

7. Know and understand the concept of externalities as applied to environmental problems; develop an understanding of the various methods used to mitigate environmental problems (e.g., carbon taxation, cap-and-trade systems).
8. Know and understand the economic theory of human capital as applied to population health and develop a familiarity with the Canadian (single payer) and United States' (private insurance) health care systems.
9. Develop the skills necessary to conduct research. This includes developing a research question, choosing an appropriate methodology, reviewing relevant literature, and communicating results. Included in this outcome are professional skills developed by giving written feedback on others' work through a peer review exercise.

**Course Outline:**

This is only a tentative schedule. If there are any topics you would like to see covered, please let me know.

1. Review of Economic Principles
2. The Income Distribution
3. Poverty
4. Discrimination
5. Crime and Punishment
6. Drugs and Addiction
- 7. Aging, Health Care, and Pensions**
- 8. The Environment**

**Given the cancellation of face-to-face lectures, pre-recorded lectures and PowerPoint slides will be uploaded to D2L each Tuesday and Thursday morning. You can view these at any time. I will also tentatively have Zoom open during lectures times (TR 14:00-15:15) to answer questions. These materials will be recorded and uploaded to D2L. I will also be providing regular Tuesday and Thursday mornings about uploaded materials and lectures.**

**Prerequisites/corequisites:**

Econ 201

**Required Textbook(s):**

There is no required textbook for this class. Course readings will include articles and book chapters that will be available on D2L.

**Books on Reserve:**

Schiller, *Economics of Poverty and Discrimination*, Prentice Hall  
 Miller, Benjamin and North, *The Economics of Public Issues*, Norton, 2001  
 Sharp, et al., *Economics of Social Issues*, Irwin/McGraw Hill, latest edition  
 Becker & Becker, *The Economics of Life*, McGraw Hill  
 Lowenstein & Elster, *Choice over Time*, Sage, 1992  
 Aaron, *Behavioral Dimension of Retirement Economics*, Russell Sage, 2000  
 Elster, *Addiction: Entries & Exits*, Russell Sage  
 Blau et al, *Economics of Women, Men & Work*, Prentice Hall  
 Frank, *Economics & Behavior*, McGraw Hill

**Desire2Learn:**

This course will make use of the Desire2Learn (D2L) platform. Students who are registered in the course can log on at <http://d2l.ucalgary.ca> through their student centre. Please note that D2L features a class e-mail list that may be used to distribute course-related information. These e-mails go to your University of Calgary e-mail addresses only.

**Grade Determination and Final Examination Details:**

Final grades will be based on a midterm exam (25%, February 13<sup>th</sup>), a final exam (30%, date set by the Registrar's office), problem sets (20%), and a term paper (25%). Late work will not be accepted.

**The final exam will be a comprehensive, take-home, open book exam. The exam will be posted on D2L at least 24 hours before the due date set by the Registrar. All final exams must be uploaded to the D2L dropbox. Please make sure to take a screen shot of your submission confirmation**

Problem sets will involve the analysis of a specific social problem using the methods developed in class. You are encouraged to work together on these problem sets, although each person must turn in their own assignment. Grading of problem sets will be based on completeness rather than accuracy. Exams will be of a similar nature.

A term paper will comprise 25% of your final grade. You should choose a social problem of interest and analyze it using the tools discussed in class. All topics must be cleared with me by submitting a one-page summary of your intended paper topic due February 25<sup>th</sup> listing at least two references you have consulted. The final draft (due April 15<sup>th</sup>) must be typed, double-spaced, and include a list of references. **The term paper must be submitted by 6pm on April 15<sup>th</sup> through the D2L dropbox. The peer-review component of the term paper has been cancelled. That said, I encourage you to have your friends and colleagues provide feedback on your paper. I will also review and provide feedback on drafts provided at least one week in advance of the due date (i.e., by April 8<sup>th</sup>).**

MIDTERM EXAM	25%
PROBLEM SETS	20%
FINAL EXAMINATION	30%
TERM PROJECT	25%
	<hr/>
	100%

The official grading system will be used. See <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/f-1-1.html>.

A passing grade on any particular component of the course is not required for a student to pass the course as a whole.

If a student's letter grade on the final exam exceeds their midterm(s) letter grade, the weight of the midterm(s) is (are) transferred to the final exam. The student must have written the midterm(s) or provided supporting documentation for the absence(s) such as a medical note or statutory declaration.

As per the Writing Across the Curriculum Statement in the Calendar, writing and grading thereof will be a factor in the evaluation of student work. See <https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/e-2.html>.

Any student work which remains undistributed after the last day of classes will be available to students through the instructor's office during the instructor's office hours.

The final examination will be an open-book, take-home exam. The exam will be available on D2L 24 hours before the end of the Registrar's scheduled final exam time. Students will hand in their exam in pdf format on D2L prior to the end of the scheduled completion time of their final exam using DropBox. If a student cannot write their final exam during this interval, they need to apply for a deferred exam at [www.ucalgary.ca/registrar/exams/deferred\\_final](http://www.ucalgary.ca/registrar/exams/deferred_final). Under no circumstance will this be accommodated by the Department.

Tests and exams will not involve multiple choice questions

Programmable calculators, cellphones, textbooks, course notes, and other electronic devices will not be allowed during the writing of tests or final examinations. Students are reminded that being able to access their cellphone during an exam is academic misconduct.

THERE WILL BE NO MAKEUP OR DEFERRED QUIZZES/TESTS/EXAMS under any circumstances, nor may the quizzes/tests/exams be written early. Students unable to write the quizzes/tests/exams because of documented illness, family emergency, religious observance, or university-sanctioned event will have the weight shifted to the final examination; otherwise a grade of zero will be assigned.

**Reappraisal of Grades and Intellectual Honesty:**

*For Reappraisal of Graded Term Work, see Calendar I.2*

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/i-2.html>

*For Reappraisal of Final Grade, see Calendar I.3*

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/i-3.html>

*Statement of Intellectual Honesty, see Calendar K.4*

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k-4.html>

*Plagiarism and Other Academic Misconduct, see Calendar K.5*

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k-5.html>

**Academic Accommodations:**

Students seeking an accommodation based on disability or medical concerns should contact Student Accessibility Services. SAS will process the request and issue letters of accommodation to instructors. Students who require an accommodation in relation to their coursework based on a protected ground other than disability should communicate this need in writing to their Instructor. The full policy on Student Accommodations is available at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/student-accommodation-policy.pdf>.

**Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act:**

Personal information is collected in accordance with FOIP. Assignments can only be returned to the student and will be accessible only to authorized faculty and staff. For more information, see <http://www.ucalgary.ca/legalservices/files/legalservices/faq-students.pdf> and [http://www.ucalgary.ca/legalservices/files/legalservices/faq-faculty\\_0.pdf](http://www.ucalgary.ca/legalservices/files/legalservices/faq-faculty_0.pdf).

**Internet and Electronic Communication Device information:**

The use of cell phones for any purpose in class is prohibited. Computers and tablets may be used for note taking only unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.

**Copyright Legislation:**

See the University of Calgary policy on Acceptable Use of Material Protected by Copyright at [www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/acceptable-use-of-material-protected-by-copyright.pdf](http://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/acceptable-use-of-material-protected-by-copyright.pdf). Students who use material protected by copyright in violation of this policy may be disciplined under the Non-Academic Misconduct Policy.

**Recording of Lectures:**

Recording of lectures is prohibited, except for audio recordings authorized as an accommodation by SAS or an audio recording for individual private study and only with the written permission of the instructor. Any unauthorized electronic or mechanical recording of lectures, their transcription, copying, or distribution, constitutes academic misconduct. See <https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/e-6.html>.

**Important Dates:**

Please check: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/academic-schedule.html>.

**Student Organizations:**

Faculty of Arts Students' Association (F.A.S.A.):

Economics Department Representative

Office: SS 803, E-mail: [econrep@fasaucalgary.ca](mailto:econrep@fasaucalgary.ca) and Web: [www.fasaucalgary.ca](http://www.fasaucalgary.ca).

Society of Undergraduates in Economics:

<https://www.ucalgarysue.com/>.

Society of Undergraduates in Economics is a student run organization whose main purpose is to assist undergraduate economics students to succeed both academically and socially at the University of Calgary. Services include access to the exam bank, career events such as Industry Night and information sessions, mentorship programs, and social events for members. They invite you to join by contacting SUE at [societyofundergradsineconomics@gmail.com](mailto:societyofundergradsineconomics@gmail.com).

**Faculty of Arts Program Advising and Student Information Resources:**

- Have a question, but not sure where to start? The Arts Students' Centre is your information resource for everything in Arts! Drop in at SS102, call them at 403-220-3580, or email them at [artsads@ucalgary.ca](mailto:artsads@ucalgary.ca). You can also visit the Faculty of Arts website at <http://arts.ucalgary.ca/undergraduate>, which has detailed information on common academic concerns, including program planning and advice.
- For registration (add/drop/swap), paying fees and assistance with your Student Centre, contact Enrolment Services at 403-210-ROCK [7625] or visit them in the MacKimmie Library Block.

**Student Support and Resources:**

- See <https://www.ucalgary.ca/registrar/registration/course-outlines> for information on campus mental health resources, the Student Ombuds' Office, Student Success Centre, Safewalk, and Emergency Evacuation and Assembly.
- Online writing resources are available at <https://ucalgary.ca/student-services/student-success/writing-support>.

**Notes:**

1. Students are responsible for all assigned material, e.g., supplementary material posted on D2L, regardless of whether or not the material was covered in class.

