

ECON 2883 (WI01) - Contemporary Economic Issues

Department of Economics
Acadia University
Winter 2024

Lead Instructor	Dr. Andrew Davis
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Office Location	BAC 340
Office Hours	3-4:30pm Monday, 1-2:30 Wednesday, or by appointment, BAC 339/340.
Class Location	BAC 238
Class Times	Tue/Thu, 2:30 - 3:50pm

Course Description

This course applies basic concepts from introductory microeconomics and macroeconomics to a variety of contemporary issues in economics. The course curriculum is co-taught across faculty members in the Department of Economics to expose students to a wide range of research topics. Past examples of topics covered have included tourism, the environment, finance, health and urban issues.

Course Learning Objectives

The primary objective of this course is to expose students to research on contemporary economic issues and to prioritize the development of public speaking skills. Students will analyze a series of policy issues and engage in discussion and debate to develop understanding of how economists approach real-world research problems.

Course Format

This course will be taught collectively by a group of economics faculty, as outlined below. Each faculty member will take turns presenting on a different self-contained topic. The course follows a seminar format, and students are expected to read materials in advance and proactively discuss in class.

Prerequisites

In general, completion of ECON 1013/1023 and ECON 2613 (or approval of the instructor). It is expected that students in the class will have varying levels of experience in economics; if you are unsure about your preparation for the course, you are encouraged to speak with the instructor(s) as soon as possible to discuss.

Course Materials and Websites

Moodle is the primary source for class announcements and will contain all course materials: syllabus, class notes/slides, readings, and the assignments.

Office Hours

Each of the instructors will hold office hours by appointment (email addresses are included in the topic outlines below).

Should any issues or concerns arise throughout the course, you are encouraged to consult with the lead instructor and/or any of the other instructors as soon as possible so that we can work together to find the resources to help you succeed.

Textbook

There is no assigned textbook for this course, since it adopts a seminar style. Any required/suggested readings (such as academic journal articles or chapters from other sources) will be provided by the instructors prior to the discussions for each topic.

Evaluation

Course evaluation is primarily based on grades awarded for the assignments for each topic. Depending on the instructor, the assignments may be completed during class time or outside of class; instructions and due dates will be communicated to students as the course proceeds.

Students are expected to attend the classes regularly. Given the seminar style of the course, it is imperative that students read any assigned articles in a timely manner and participate in class discussions to foster their understanding of the subject matter.

Assignments (5 @ 16%)	80%
Discussion Participation	20%

No extra credit opportunities will be offered. The grade scale for the course is below:

Letter Grade	GPA	% Range	Rating
A+	4.33	90 - 100%	Excellent
A	4.0	85 - 89%	
A-	3.67	80 - 84%	
B+	3.33	77 - 79%	Good
B	3.0	73 - 76%	
B-	2.67	70 - 72%	
C+	2.33	67 - 69%	Average
C	2.0	63 - 66%	

C-	1.67	60 - 62%	
D+	1.33	57 - 59%	
D	1.0	53 - 56%	
D-	0.67	50 - 52%	Pass
F	0.0	0 - 49%	Failure

Class Topics

Topic #1: “How can we use household balance sheets to understand inequality?”

Presenter: Dr. Andrew Davis (andrew.davis@acadiau.ca)

Dates: Tue, January 5 – Tue 21 , January

Evaluation: Take-home assignment, due January 26

Income and wealth inequality are major current debates, and often characterized by statistics, for example citing what fraction of income or wealth are held by the top 1%. How do we measure income and wealth inequality, and do we agree on how it should be measured? How can we use data on household finances to infer the causes and nature of modern economic inequality? What lessons does this hold for policymakers?

Topic #2: “Calculating economic value for non-market recreational goods – the travel cost method”

Presenter: Dr. Brian VanBlarcom (brian.vanblarcom@acadiau.ca)

Dates: Thu, Jan 23 – Thu, Feb 6

Evaluation: In-class test, February 6

The travel-cost method (TCM) is used for calculating economic values of non-market recreational goods. For example, TCM can estimate part of economic benefits of coral reefs, beaches or wetlands stemming from their use for recreational activities (diving and snorkeling/swimming and sunbathing/bird watching). TCM is based on the notion that travel costs represent the price (or a significant part of the price) of access to a recreational site. Peoples’ willingness to pay for visiting a site is thus estimated based on the number of trips that they make at different travel costs. This module reviews the steps involved in using the travel cost method in evaluating the economic value of a recreational resource and examines relevant examples and extensions.

Topic #3: “Is Public Transit’s ‘Green’ Reputation Deserved? Evaluating the Effects of Transit Supply on Air Quality”

Presenter: Dr. Justin Beaudoin (justin.beaudoin@acadiau.ca)

Dates: Tue, Feb 11 - Thu, Feb 27

Evaluation: Take-home assignment, due March 2

This topic focuses on measuring the effectiveness of investing in public transit as a policy tool to reduce air pollution. We will discuss the ideas of market failure in urban transportation, provide a brief sense of cost-benefit analysis and first-best vs second-best policies, go through the intuition of a theoretical model of how public transit could reduce pollution, and then discuss how I use data to try to answer this question.

Topic #4: “Environmental Inequity and Neighbourhood Characteristics in Ontario, Canada”

Presenter: Dr. Burç Kayahan (burc.kayahan@acadiau.ca)

Dates: Tue, March 4 – Tue, March 18

Evaluation: Take-home assignment, due March 23

Environmental justice literature in USA shows that low-income and minority neighbourhoods have disproportionate exposure to environmental hazards (siting large industrial facilities and hazardous waste sites, air pollution concentrations, etc.). This topic focuses on measuring the empirical relationship between the pattern of toxic pollutant releases and neighbourhood characteristics in Ontario. In particular, using data from the Canadian Census and the National Pollutant Release Inventory, we will conduct an empirical investigation of environmental inequity in Ontario.

Topic #5: “A Growing Child Needs their Lunch”

Presenter: Dr. Barry Watson (barry.watson@acadiau.ca)

Dates: Thu, March 20 – Thu, April 3

Evaluation: Take-home assignment, due April 6

There are many ways to measure poverty and deprivation. Perhaps the most compelling metric, food insecurity, concerns the inability of a family to consume a basic diet. Food insecurity has been linked with several concerning outcomes such as increased levels of depression, anxiety, and suicide ideation. Among children, it has also been found to impact both cognitive and social development. While the prevalence of food insecurity in Canada is about 12 percent, rates in Northern Canada are much higher. For instance, in Nunavut, approximately 57 percent of households are food insecure. And, this value increases to almost 80 percent for Indigenous families with young children. Consequently, we will examine policies that have addressed food insecurity in the Canadian North, with particular emphasis on Nutrition North Canada - a policy that inevitably increased rates of severe food insecurity among the most economically marginalized households.

Class Schedule

The following is a preliminary schedule for the course topics that may be updated as the course proceeds. Each instructor will communicate the specific due date for their assignment, which will be completed at the end of each topic.

Class #	Date	Notes
..... Week 1		
1	Tue, Jan 7	Class Introduction & Davis #1
2	Thu, Jan 9	Davis #2
..... Week 2		
3	Tue, Jan 14	Davis #3
4	Thu, Jan 16	Davis #4

..... <i>Week 3</i>		
5	Tue, Jan 21	Davis #5
6	Thu, Jan 23	VanBlarcom #1
..... <i>Week 4</i>		
7	Tue, Jan 28	VanBlarcom #2
8	Thu, Jan 30	VanBlarcom #3
..... <i>Week 5</i>		
9	Tue, Feb 4	VanBlarcom #4
10	Thu, Feb 6	VanBlarcom (test)
..... <i>Week 6</i>		
11	Tue, Feb 11	Beaudoin #1
12	Thu, Feb 13	Beaudoin #2
..... <i>Week 7</i>		
-	Tue, Feb 18	No class (study break)
-	Thu, Feb 20	No class (study break)
..... <i>Week 8</i>		
13	Tue, Feb 25	Beaudoin #3
14	Thu, Feb 27	Beaudoin #4
..... <i>Week 9</i>		
15	Tue, Mar 4	Kayahan #1
16	Thu, Mar 6	Kayahan #2
..... <i>Week 10</i>		
17	Tue, Mar 11	Kayahan #3
18	Thu, Mar 13	Kayahan #4
..... <i>Week 11</i>		
19	Tue, Mar 18	Kayahan #5
20	Thu, Mar 20	Watson #1
..... <i>Week 12</i>		
21	Tue, Mar 25	Watson #2
22	Thu, Mar 27	Watson #3
..... <i>Week 13</i>		
23	Tue, Apr 1	Watson #4
24	Thu, Apr 3	Watson #5

Accessibility

Acadia University is dedicated to improving access to campus life for all students with disabilities. While we attempt to ensure that all courses are accessible, we recognize that there are barriers that need to be addressed on an individual basis. Students who require accommodations to complete coursework or otherwise fully participate in class should contact Accessible Learning Services directly as soon as possible.

Please visit the Accessible Learning Services website (<https://www2.acadiau.ca/student-life/accessiblelearning.html>) or email them at accessible.learning@acadiau.ca for more information.

Academic Ethics

It is the responsibility of students to familiarize themselves with the University's policy on academic ethics. Copying, plagiarism and other academic offenses will not be tolerated. Penalties are severe and may result in suspension from a program/course and expulsion. A complete list of Academic Regulations can be found on the Policies page of the University's website. I strongly recommend that all class members review the sections in the 2023-24 academic calendar dealing with Academic Policy and Regulations. It is a serious offense to engage in academic misconduct.

Last updated: January 7, 2025