

**Microeconomics for Public Policy 1**  
**PPPA 6007, Sections 10**  
**Spring 2024 Syllabus**

**Time and Location**

Thursdays, 6:10pm-8:00pm  
1957 E Street, Room 316

**Instructor**

Professor: Mary Sullivan

E-mail: [msull@gwu.edu](mailto:msull@gwu.edu)

Office: MPA 602

Office Hours: Three options:

- Tuesday 7:00pm – 8:30pm via Zoom (email to make an appointment)
- Thursday 4:00pm – 6:00pm in person in MPA 602 (just stop by)
- Make an appointment for a Zoom meeting outside regular office hours

Contact policy: I will do my best to answer emails within 24 hours during weekdays, or within 24 hours on the soonest weekday if you email on the weekend. If you do not hear from me within this time frame, you should assume that your email has been lost and you should re-send.

**Graduate Assistant**

Takuya Wakimoto

E-mail: [takuwaki1228@gwmail.gwu.edu](mailto:takuwaki1228@gwmail.gwu.edu)

Office Hours: Thursday between 1:00pm – 3:00pm (email to make an appointment)

**Course Description**

Policy decisions are usually motivated by economic conditions, mediated by economic conditions, or yield economic consequences. To be a policy-maker or offer coherent policy advice, you must understand the likely motivations for and consequences of policy actions. This course is the first step toward analyzing the economic factors that motivate decisions, and gives you a framework to anticipate likely consequences of policy choices.

**Learning Objectives**

As a result of completing this course you should be able to

- Appreciate the role of economics in policy
- Understand how the market arrives at a price
- Understand market efficiency and market imperfections
- Use the graphic logic of supply and demand to trace out economic consequences of policy choices

- Predict how a new tax will impact the equilibrium price and the distributional consequences for market participants
- Critically evaluate economic arguments in media and policy sources
- Understand microeconomic theory at an intermediate level

### Course Prerequisites

None. If you are an MPP student and have never taken economics, this course is required. If you have taken a course in intermediate microeconomics elsewhere, I suggest that you enroll directly in Microeconomics for Public Policy II (PPPA 6014). Intermediate microeconomics is the “2<sup>nd</sup>” course in economics one would take after principles of economics if one majored or minored in economics. What if the only econ course you have taken was the first introductory principles course? As a general matter you should be in PPPA 6007. If you have any questions about whether you should take 6007, email me.

PPPA 6007 is most definitely about economics not math. However, this course requires a basic knowledge of linear algebra. Specifically, you need to know how to graph linear equations of the form  $y = mx + b$ , and how to solve two linear equations for two unknowns (this means find  $y$  and  $x$  in terms of  $a$ ,  $b$ ,  $c$ , and  $d$ , given  $y = ax + c$  and  $y = d - bx$ ). If you have not mastered these skills before the beginning of class, it will substantially hinder your ability to understand the economics. I want to be sure that you spend the class thinking about how math helps you tell an economic story, and not trying to understand how to manipulate algebra.

If you are concerned about your algebra abilities, or if you would like a refresher, you have multiple options. If you have not already taken the Trachtenberg School math assessment, I advise you to do this as soon as possible here [math assessment](#). If you feel you'd like a refresher, use the links [math refresher](#) to work on these subjects.

### Course Requirements

#### Class Participation (10%)

- The class sessions will be more interesting to all of us, and you are sure to learn more, if you participate in class. You can ask questions or bring up topics in class. There are no dumb questions. Rest assured that if you are uncertain about something, others in the class will probably have similar questions. If you need to miss class, be sure to get notes from one of your classmates.

#### Problem Sets (15%)

- There will be 10 problem sets due throughout the semester. They are due by 5pm on the due date.
- You will need to turn in solutions electronically in pdf form, so you may want to download a scanning app on your phone (e.g., iScanner, Adobe Scan) if you don't have a scanner.
- Solutions will be posted on Blackboard after grading. Please check them carefully.
- Doing all the problem sets is a good strategy for success in this course.

- I do not accept late assignments.
- You are welcome and encouraged to work with others, but you must each turn in your work, in your own words.
- Work that is not in your own words will receive a grade of zero and a report to the office of academic integrity.

#### Midterm Exam (30%)

- This is a closed-book, in-class exam covering all material in the course through this point.
- You are free to use a calculator for the exam, but you are not allowed to use the programming function if your calculator has one.
- Do not plan to use your mobile phone as a calculator.

#### Group Assignment (15%)

- Evaluation of article: One goal of this course is for you to become a literate consumer of policy research. Toward that goal, you will work in groups of 3 or 4 to prepare a presentation to the class consisting of a critique of an article that presents an economic analysis of a policy issue. In addition to making a presentation, each group will read the article that another group is presenting and prepare questions to ask after their presentation. You may form your own groups, and anyone not in a group will be assigned by me. More explanation will be provided in class.

#### Final Exam (30%)

- The final is a closed-book exam and will be held in class during the exam period. As the course is cumulative, the final will cover all the course material.
- You are free to use a calculator for the exam, but you are not allowed to use the programming function if your calculator has one.
- Do not plan to use your mobile phone as a calculator

#### Grades & Expectations

- A (Excellent): Exceptional work for a graduate student. Shows a strong command of the material.
- A- (Very Good): Very strong work for a graduate student. Shows signs of a strong understanding of appropriate analytical approaches and meets professional standards.
- B+ (Good): Sound work for a graduate student. This grade indicates the student has fully accomplished the basic course objectives.
- B (Adequate): Competent work for a graduate student with some evident weaknesses. Demonstrates competency in the key course objectives but the understanding or application of some important issues is less than complete.
- B- (Inadequate): Weak work for a graduate student. Understanding of key issues is incomplete. A cumulative GPA of B- will lead to academic probation.
- Grades of below B- indicate extremely weak performance and insufficient grasp of the material.

## Course Material

- Required textbook: Goolsbee, Levitt and Syverson, *Microeconomics* Third Edition

The textbook is available at the bookstore. You are welcome to use earlier editions of the Goolsbee et al textbook, but it is your responsibility to figure out which sections in the first and second editions correspond to those in the third.

All other readings and occasional podcasts will be posted online.

## Class Schedule & Outline

### Week 1 (Jan. 18)

- Intro, Supply and Demand
  - GLS, Chapters 1 and 2 [skip 2.5 for now]
  - Additional readings

### Week 2 (Jan. 25)

- Supply and Demand and Policy
  - GLS, Chapter 3 [skip 3.3 - 3.5 for now], skim Chapter 2, section 2.5 (will cover in more detail Week 3)
  - Additional readings
    - ➔ Due in class: Problem Set 1

### Week 3 (Feb. 1)

- Supply and Demand and Policy (continued); Elasticities
  - GLS, Chapter 3, section 3.3; Chapter 2, section 2.5
  - Additional readings
    - ➔ Due in class: Problem Set 2

### Week 4 (Feb. 8)

- Consumer behavior
    - GLS, Chapter 4
      - ➔ Due in class: Problem Set 3
- ➔ Email me by today's class if you want me to assign you to a group, or if you need an extra person in your group

Week 5 (Feb. 15)

- Individual and market demand
  - GLS, Chapter 5. Omit Engel curves from section 5.1 and inferior goods and Giffen goods at the end of 5.3.
  - ➔ Due in class: Problem Set 4

Week 6 (Feb. 22)

- Tax incidence
  - GLS, Sections 3.4 and 3.5 from Chapter 3.
  - Additional readings
  - ➔ Due in class: Problem Set 5
  
- ➔ Email me the list of your group members and your top 3 choices of articles. (from the “Articles for Group Project” subfolder under Files in Blackboard)

Note: I will give you a problem set (and solutions) that covers the material from week 6, which will be covered on the midterm exam. You do not need to turn it in.

Week 7 (Feb. 29)

- In-class midterm exam

Week 8 (Mar. 7)

- Producer Behavior
  - GLS, Chapter 6

**No Class March 14 –Spring Break!**

Week 9 (Mar. 21)

- Costs
  - GLS, Chapter 7
  - Additional readings
  - ➔ Due in class: Problem Set 6

Week 10 (Mar. 28)

- Competition, Market Power, and Monopoly
  - GLS, Chapter 8: pp. 257 – top of 269; pp. 278-282.
  - GLS Chapter 9: pp. 287 – 315; pp. 324 – 329.
  - Additional readings on antitrust
  - ➔ Due in class: Problem Set 7

Week 11 (Apr. 4)

- Imperfect Information
  - GLS Chapter 16 (skip 16.3 and 16.4)
  - Additional readings
  - ➔ Due in class: Problem Set 8

Week 12 (Apr. 11)

- Externalities and Public Goods
  - GLS Chapter 17
  - Additional readings
  - ➔ Due in class: Problem Set 9

Week 13 (Apr. 18)

- Presentations
  - ➔ Due in class: Problem Set 10

Week 14 (Apr. 25)

- Presentations

**Final Exam: The in-person final exam will take place during final exam week at the scheduled time.**

## Class Policies & Information

- **Course Selection:** This course is intended to be a non-technical introduction to microeconomics. If you majored in economics as an undergraduate or have had substantial training in the subject already, you should consider taking PPPA 6014 (Microeconomics for Public Policy II) instead. If you would like to talk further about which course is appropriate, feel free to contact me.
- **Attendance:** Attendance in class sessions is a fundamental student responsibility and essential for success. If you have to miss class, ask a classmate for notes. If you feel sick, please stay home!
- **Blackboard:** The course website is accessible with your GW email address through GW's Blackboard academic software at <http://blackboard.gwu.edu>. The most important link for this class is the "Course Content" on the main menu. There you will find all non-textbook readings, problem sets, and solutions organized by week.
- **Turning In Problem Sets:** Problem sets should be uploaded as a single pdf document on Blackboard by the due date. Since you will need to draw graphs (and hand drawing is MUCH easier than computer drawing), you will likely need to scan your work. I recommend downloading iScanner, Adobe Scan, or a similar app for your phone if you do not have a scanner. Make sure your hand-drawn material is legible when viewed through Blackboard.
- **Deadlines:** This syllabus provides all relevant due dates for assignments. It is your responsibility to ensure that you upload them in time. Late problem sets and exams will not be accepted.
- **Collaboration:** You are welcome to work together on the problem sets, but you must write up and turn in your own set of solutions.
- **Credit Hours:** Over 15 weeks, students will spend about 2 hours per week on direct instruction. Required readings, problem sets, exam review, and the policy brief are expected to take up about 6 hours of independent work per week. Over the course of the semester, students will spend at least 120 hours on this class.
- **Inclusive Classroom:** It is my intent that students from all backgrounds and perspectives be well-served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength, and benefit. I strive to create an inclusive classroom and present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity including race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, culture, and political affiliation. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated.
- **Etiquette:** Free expression is an integral part of graduate education, at the same time, learning works best when we have empathy and respect for others. I strive to create an

environment where everyone feels comfortable expressing their views and exchanging ideas, while remaining respectful and inclusive. Please ensure that all your interactions are professional, respectful, and courteous at all times.

- **Extra Help:** Please be sure to contact me or Takuya, the TA for our class, if you are struggling with course materials. Please keep in mind that a B- is a failing grade in TSPPPA. I encourage you join office hours or schedule an appointment early in the semester if you are having trouble. Also, please first contact Takuya for all questions related to the problem sets. If he can't answer your question, he will pass it along to me.
- **Peer Tutoring:** Sign up for the peer educator program at any point to work one-on-one with a star MPA student who took this course last year. If you receive a B or lower on the midterm or repeatedly get low scores on problem sets, you are strongly urged to contact Gregory Nelson ([ganelson@email.gwu.edu](mailto:ganelson@email.gwu.edu)) to sign up.
- **Feedback:** I welcome your feedback on my teaching and the course in general. If you happen to come across any interesting articles or other materials that may be useful for future classes, please send them my way!

### University Policies & Information

- **Academic Honesty:** Academic integrity is an essential part of the educational process, and all members of the GW community take these matters very seriously. As the instructor of record for this course, my role is to provide clear expectations and uphold them in all assessments. Violations of academic integrity occur when students fail to cite research sources properly, engage in unauthorized collaboration, falsify data, and otherwise violate the [Code of Academic Integrity](#). If you have any questions about whether or not particular academic practices or resources are permitted, you should ask me for clarification. If you are reported for an academic integrity violation, you should contact the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities (SRR) to learn more about your rights and options in the process. Consequences can range from failure of assignment to expulsion from the university and may include a transcript notation. For more information, please refer to the SRR website [Academic Integrity | Student Conduct | The George Washington University \(gwu.edu\)](#), email [rights@gwu.edu](mailto:rights@gwu.edu), or call 202-994-6757.
- **Use of Electronic Course Materials:** Students may only use electronic course materials and class recordings for private personal use in connection with their academic program of study. These materials should not be shared or used for non-course related purposes unless express permission has been granted by the instructor. Students who impermissibly share any electronic course materials are subject to discipline under the Student Code of Conduct.
- **Religious Holidays:** In accordance with University policy, students should notify faculty during the first week of the semester of their intention to be absent from class on their day(s) of religious observance. For details and policy, see “Religious Holidays” at



[provost.gwu.edu/policies-procedures-and-guidelines](http://provost.gwu.edu/policies-procedures-and-guidelines)

- **Academic Commons:** Academic Commons provides tutoring and other academic support resources to students in many courses. Students can schedule virtual one-on-one appointments or attend virtual drop-in sessions. Students may schedule an appointment, review the tutoring schedule, or access other academic support resources at <http://academiccommons.gwu.edu/>.
- **Writing Center:** GW's Writing Center cultivates confident writers in the University community by facilitating collaborative, critical, and inclusive conversations at all stages of the writing process. Working alongside peer mentors, writers develop strategies to write independently in academic and public settings. Appointments can be booked online. See [gwu.mywconline](http://gwu.mywconline).
- **Disability Support Services:** If you need extra time on exams or assignments due to a disability, let me know in the first week of class. In order to receive accommodations on the basis of disability, you'll need to provide proper documentation to the [Office of Disability Support Services](#) or 202-994-8250.
- **Counseling and Psychological Services:** GW's Colonial Health Center offers counseling and psychological services, supporting mental health and personal development by collaborating directly with students to overcome challenges and difficulties that may interfere with academic, emotional, and personal success. <https://healthcenter.gwu.edu/counseling-and-psychological-services> or 202-994-5300.
- **Safety and Security:** In an emergency call GYPD 202-994-6111 or 911. For situation-specific actions, review the Emergency Response Handbook at [safety.gwu.edu/emergency-response-handbook](http://safety.gwu.edu/emergency-response-handbook). Stay informed: [safety.gwu.edu/stay-informed](http://safety.gwu.edu/stay-informed).