

**Economics for Public Decision-Making
PPPA 6003, Sections 10 & 11 – Online
Fall 2020 Syllabus**

Professor: Stephanie Riegg Cellini

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Group office hours and synchronous sessions:

Wednesdays, 11:10am-1:00pm (section 10 original time)

Wednesdays, 6:10pm-8:00pm (section 11 original time)

Individual office hours:

Thursdays, 10am-noon, in 20 minute slots (<https://srcellini.youcanbook.me/>)

Other times by appointment

Instructional Assistant: Hernando Grueso

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Group office hours:

Mondays, 5-6:30pm

Tuesdays, 12:30-2pm

Other times and individual hours by appointment

Course Description

This course provides an introduction to microeconomics, emphasizing its applications to public management and policy analysis. Decision-making in the public sector involves fundamentally different—and often more complicated—considerations than decision-making in the private sector. This course is designed to help current and prospective professional administrators, managers, and practitioners in the public and non-profit sectors address real-world issues and problems from an economic perspective. No prior experience with economics or mathematics is necessary, although a familiarity with basic graphing, computation, and algebra is assumed. Central questions include: What is the economic justification for government? How should concerns about efficiency and equity be balanced? What policies should we undertake to improve well-being? How can public managers improve the efficiency and effectiveness of organizations?

Learning Objectives

Through lectures, discussions, readings, assignments, and exams, students will develop knowledge and skills that will enable them to:

- Firmly grasp fundamental microeconomic theories and concepts.
- Apply microeconomic principles to real-world public sector problems.
- Conduct graphical and algebraic quantitative analyses.
- Articulate and evaluate opposing economic arguments on a current policy problem.
- Incorporate economic concepts and tools into their own writing, thinking, and work.

Course Requirements

Class Participation (5%)

- I expect you to log in, turn your camera on, and be ready and willing to participate in all synchronous sessions. If you cannot attend your own session, you may attend during the other section's time.
- If you cannot attend either synchronous session, please let me know.
- You are strongly encouraged, but not required, to log in to the optional group office hours on weeks without synchronous sessions.

Problem Sets (10%)

- There will be 10 problem sets due throughout the semester. While you must turn in your own solutions, you are encouraged to work with your classmates.
- Solutions will be posted on Blackboard after the due date. Problem sets will be graded on a rough "grade point" basis where 4 = A, 3.5 = A-/B+, 3 = B, 2.5 = B-/C+, etc. (and 0 if not turned in).
- 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) if you don't have a scanner.
- Problem sets are due by 9am on the due date.

Midterm Exam (20%)

- The open-book midterm will cover all of the course material up to that point.
- I will consider the midterm a no-fault exam—that is, if you do better on the final than on the midterm, I will replace your midterm grade with your final grade when I calculate your overall grade for the course. If you do worse on the final, your midterm grade will stand.

Policy Brief (30%)

- This is your chance to apply what you've learned to a policy problem. You will choose a policy issue from a list that I will provide and write a short (4-page) paper that will require a limited amount of outside research in addition to your knowledge of microeconomic concepts.

Final Exam (35%)

- The final will be open-book and held during finals week. As the course is cumulative, the final will cover all of the course material.

Required Texts

Mankiw, Gregory N. *Principles of Microeconomics*, 8th edition (USA: Thomson South-Western, 2018).

- I strongly encourage you to buy the 8th edition (NOT the 7th edition). However, if you choose to get a different edition, you are responsible for ensuring that you have covered all of the required readings and problem set problems that correspond to the 8th edition.
- You do not need the “access code” for online content or any other supplemental materials.

Wheelan, Charles. *Naked Economics: Undressing the Dismal Science* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2019).

- Simply the best econ book ever. Note that we will use the 2019 edition of the book. Please try to get this version, if possible!

All other readings and occasional podcasts will be posted online, most often organized as “Case Studies” that include a set of articles about a real-world example from a variety of sources and perspectives.

Technology

I previously taught this course online in a 6-week summer session and have some short professional videos (created in 2016) that will be reused for the asynchronous portions of this class. They are listed as “Modules” in the syllabus below and should be viewed before class each week. Please note that some of the examples in the videos will be different than your readings and problem sets, but the key concepts in the videos remain the same.

To access the modules we will be using a tool in conjunction with Blackboard called Versal. You can find all videos on Blackboard, but to view them you will first need to create a free “learner” account in Versal, at <https://versal.com/> or by clicking [here](#). Please use your GWU email address when signing up.

In addition, please ensure that you have the required technology to fully participate in the course. Ideally, you should be able to:

- Access reliable WiFi in a quiet place
- Use your device to connect to Blackboard for most course materials and sessions
- Use a digital camera for synchronous sessions and office hours
- Use a scanner or scanner app on your phone to upload assignments (e.g., iScanner App)
- Be open to learning and registering for new technologies (e.g., Versal, WebEx)
- Be flexible when technological glitches happen
- Seek technological help when necessary. If you have any problems with the software in this course, please reference the Help link in the left navigation menu in our course on

Blackboard. You can also call the Division of Information Technology or the Columbian College IT Help Desk.

Class Schedule & Outline

Week 1 (Sept. 2) – Synchronous session

- Module 1A: Overview of Economics: Why the dismal science may be worthwhile...
- Synchronous discussion: Introductions, course info & understanding today's economy
 - Wheelan, Foreward & Introduction & Ch. 12, add Ch. 9 if you have time!
 - Mankiw, Ch. 1 & 2 (including Ch. 2 appendix), add Ch. 3 if you have time!
 - Case Study: Tariffs, Trade & the Economy

~~~~~ Unit I: The Power of Markets ~~~~~

Week 2 (Sept. 9) – Optional office hours

- Module 1B: How Markets Work: Who feeds D.C?
  - Wheelan, Ch. 1 & 9
  - Mankiw, Ch. 3 (again) & 4
  - Case Study: Avocados
  - **Problem Set #1 due 9am**

Week 3 (Sept. 16) – Optional office hours

- Module 2A: Consumers & Demand: Shopaholics Unite!
  - Mankiw, Ch. 4 (again) & 5
  - Case Study: Congestion Pricing & Uber
  - **Problem Set #2 due 9am**

Week 4 (Sept. 23) – Optional office hours

- Module 2B: Firms & Supply: What Average Joe's Hot Dog Stand & Pepsi Co. have in common
  - Wheelan, Ch. 2
  - Mankiw Ch. 13 & 14
  - Case Study: Airline Costs & Competition
  - **Problem Set #3 due 9am**

Week 5 (Sept. 30) – Optional office hours

- Module 3A: Why Markets Work: Efficiency—not just for washing machines
  - Mankiw, Ch. 7
  - Case Study: Cost-Benefit Analysis
  - **Problem Set #4 due 9am**

~~~~~ Unit II: The Role of Government ~~~~~

Week 6 (Oct. 7) – Synchronous session

- Module 3B: Government Interference in Efficient Markets: What's so bad about taxes (aside from having to pay them)?
- Synchronous discussion: Price floors, ceilings & taxes
 - Mankiw, Ch. 6 & 8
 - Case Study: Minimum Wage
 - **Problem Set #5 due 9am**

Week 7 (Oct. 14) – Midterm – No office hours

- Optional Problem Set #5.5 (not turned in) covers Week 6 material that will be on exam.
- **Midterm Exam: the exam will be available online at 9am and due before midnight (11:59pm, Oct. 14).** You should be able to complete the exam during your designated class session time.

Week 8 (Oct. 21) – Optional office hours

- Module 4A: Market Failure: Monopoly & Oligopoly—gaining a new appreciation for board games.
 - Mankiw, Ch. 15 & 17
 - Dixit & Skeath, “Simultaneous-Move Games with Pure Strategies I: Discrete Strategies,” Ch. 4 of *Games of Strategy*.
 - Case Study: Antitrust
 - **Policy brief assignment available online**

Week 9 (Oct. 28) – Optional office hours

- Module 4B: Market Failure: Externalities and Public Goods—what's mine is yours
 - Mankiw, Ch. 10 & 11
 - Wheelan, Ch. 3 & 4
 - Case Study: Environmental Economics
 - **Problem Set #6 due 9am**

Week 10 (Nov. 4) – Synchronous session

- Module 5A: Market Failure: Imperfect Information—what you don't know CAN hurt you
- Synchronous discussion: When, why, and how markets fail
 - Mankiw, Ch. 22
 - Wheelan, Ch. 5
 - Stiglitz & Walsh, “Imperfect Information in the Product Market,” Ch. 15 of *Principles of Microeconomics*.
 - Case Study: Health Care & Trans Fats
 - **Problem Set #7 due 9am**

Week 11 (Nov. 11) – No office hours. Please use the time to work on your policy brief.

- Module 5B: The Role of Government in Promoting Equity: It's not the size of the pie, but how you slice it
 - Mankiw, Ch. 19-20
 - Wheelan, Ch. 6
 - Case Study: Income Inequality in Economics
 - **Problem Set #8 due 9am**

Week 12 (Nov. 18) – Synchronous session

- No videos this week.
- Synchronous discussion: Revisiting Equity in Economics
 - Case Study: Race & Gender in Economics
 - **Policy Brief due 9am**

No class Nov. 25 – Happy Thanksgiving!

~~~~~ Unit III: The Economics of Human Behavior ~~~~~

Week 13 (Dec. 2) – Optional office hours

- Module 6A: Managerial Economics: How to get someone to do what you want them to
  - Dixit & Skeath, "Games with Sequential Moves," Ch. 3 of *Games of Strategy*.
  - Case Study: Behavioral Economics
  - **Problem Set #9 due 9am**

Week 14 (Dec. 9) – Optional office hours – Review session

- Module 6B: Choice Architecture, Nudges, & Public Administration
  - Wheelan, Ch. 8
  - Case Study: Nudge
  - **Problem Set #10 due 9am**

**Final Exam: Available online on Sunday, Dec. 13 at 9am and due before midnight (11:59pm, Dec. 13).**

- I expect the exam to take roughly 3-4 hours. If this day does not work for you, please let me know as soon as possible.

#### **Class Policies & Information**

- **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 video modules, non-textbook readings, problem sets, and solutions organized by week.

- **Versal:** The first time you link to a video module, you will need to create a free account on the Versal website. Please sign up with your GWU email. Please note that each module typically contains several short videos and often text in between. Check the menu on the left side of your screen to ensure you have covered all module materials each week.
- **Synchronous sessions and office hours:** Please see the link on the main menu for Blackboard's "Collaborate" tool to join sessions and office hours. You can view recorded sessions here too.
- **Pacing:** I will post textbook readings, case study materials, and video modules about one week in advance of the date listed on the syllabus. Please complete all readings and video modules on your own time in advance of the listed office hours or synchronous session, so we can be ready to discuss them and answer your questions. Your problem set based on that week's topic will be due the following week before class. I recommend doing all readings before watching the module, but you can, of course re-watch and re-read anytime.
- **Turning Things In:** Problem sets, exams, and the policy brief 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.
- **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. Late policy briefs will be marked down for each day they are late. Please let me know ahead of time if you need an extension.
- **Collaboration:** You are welcome to work together on the problem sets, but you must write up and turn in your own set of solutions. The policy brief and both exams must be done completely on your own!
- **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 (Virtual) 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.
- **Netiquette:** 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 of your online posts

and interactions are professional, respectful, and courteous at all times. Consider your words carefully and proofread posts to avoid misinterpretation. I reserve the right to delete any posts that I deem inappropriate or offensive without prior notification to the student. Please keep discussions on-topic.

- **Extra Help:** Please be sure to contact me or Hernando if you are struggling with course materials. I encourage you join office hours or schedule an appointment early in the semester if you are having trouble. Also, please first contact Hernando 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 (virtually) 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 score a 3 or lower on problem sets, you are strongly urged to contact Deneé Bottoms ([dbottoms@gwu.edu](mailto:dbottoms@gwu.edu)) to sign up.
- **Feedback:** I welcome your feedback on my teaching and the course in general. I am particularly interested in your thoughts on how the content of the class fits in with your other MPA courses. Also, 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

- **Use of Electronic Course Materials and Class Recordings:** Students are encouraged to use electronic course materials, including recorded class sessions, for private personal use in connection with their academic program of study. Electronic course materials and recorded class sessions 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. Please contact the instructor if you have questions regarding what constitutes permissible or impermissible use of electronic course materials and/or recorded class sessions. Please contact [Disability Support Services](#) if you have questions or need assistance in accessing electronic course materials.
- **Academic Integrity Code:** Academic Integrity is an integral part of the educational process, and GW takes these matters very seriously. Violations of academic integrity occur when students fail to cite research sources properly, engage in unauthorized collaboration, falsify data, and in other ways outlined in the Code of Academic Integrity. Students accused of academic integrity violations should contact the Office of Academic Integrity to learn more about their rights and options in the process. Outcomes can range from failure of assignment to expulsion from the University, including a transcript notation. The Office of Academic Integrity maintains a permanent record of the violation.

More information is available from the Office of Academic Integrity at [studentconduct.gwu.edu/academic-integrity](http://studentconduct.gwu.edu/academic-integrity). The University's "Guide of Academic Integrity in Online Learning Environments" is available at [studentconduct.gwu.edu/guide-academic-integrity-online-learning-environments](http://studentconduct.gwu.edu/guide-academic-integrity-online-learning-environments). Contact information: [rights@gwu.edu](mailto:rights@gwu.edu) or 202-994-6757.



- **University policy on observance of 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)
- **Student Support:** For help with GW technology, GWorld, and other support service during fall 2020, go here: <https://online.gwu.edu/student-support>.
- **Virtual academic support:** A full range of academic support is offered virtually in fall 2020 here through Academic Commons <https://academiccommons.gwu.edu/>. Although it is focused on undergraduates, Academic Commons offers several short videos addressing different virtual learning strategies for the unique circumstances of the fall 2020 semester, [academiccommons.gwu.edu/study-skills](http://academiccommons.gwu.edu/study-skills). They also offer a variety of live virtual workshops to equip students with the tools they need to succeed in a virtual environment, see [tinyurl.com/gw-virtual-learning](http://tinyurl.com/gw-virtual-learning).
- **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 (DSS):** Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact Disability Support Services to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. [disabilitysupport.gwu.edu](http://disabilitysupport.gwu.edu) 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). In an active violence situation: Get Out, Hide Out, or Take Out. See [go.gwu.edu/shooterpret](http://go.gwu.edu/shooterpret). Stay informed: [safety.gwu.edu/stay-informed](http://safety.gwu.edu/stay-informed).