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TA: Cassiano Alves, CassianoAlves@u.northwestern.edu, office hours Fridays 1:10-2:40
Cassiano's Zoom link: <https://northwestern.zoom.us/j/93198921303>

Class meets: Monday, Wednesday 1:10-2:40 online

Office Hours: After class on Mondays & Wednesdays 2:40-3:30, and also at other times by appointment.

Readings: Web notes: <https://sites.google.com/site/markwitteeconomics/home/economics-309-public-finance>
Public Finance and Public Policy, by Jonathan Gruber, 6th ed. (2019), Worth Publishers (5th edition is fine though)

Class Date	Lecture Topics	<i>Partial</i> list of readings
Sept. 16-18	Introduction, Market Failures, Externalities Class will meet on Wednesday, Sept. 16, and Friday, Sept. 18 for this first week.	G 1,2,5,6, Baddies?
Sept. 21-25	Public Goods, Tiebout, Political Economy, Collective Choice	G 7, 9, Shepsle & Bonchek Ch.5 & 7, Maskin & Sen 1 , Maskin & Sen 2 , Ranked Choice Video , Agenda Setting , Minhaj 1 , Landsburg
Sept. 28-Oct. 2	Tools, Luck & "Lotteries", Taxation - Basics	G, 3, 8, 19, IRS Gutted , Scott Page Segregation
Oct. 5-9	Taxation - Optimal	G 18, 20, Tax Brackets , Minhaj 2 ,
Oct. 12-16	Taxation - Labor Supply, Savings, Wealth	G 21-23
Oct. 19-23	Taxation - Risk, Business	G 23, 24, S-Corps
Friday, Oct. 23	Midterm - 35% of class grade	
Oct. 26-30	Catch-up	
Nov. 2-6	Taxation - Consumption, Reform	G 25 (Drop Deadline Fri. Nov. 6)
Nov. 9-13	Social Insurance - Social Security, Health, Income	G 12 - 16 (P/N Deadline Fri., Nov. 13)
Nov. 16-20	Social Insurance - Inequality, Welfare	G17, Mullainathan , Poverty
Nov. 23-25	Education, Conclusion	G 11, Kidder , College
Mon. Dec. 7	Final Exam - 45% of class grade - 9:AM-11:AM	

Learning Objectives: What does Economics say about the role of government in society? What social choices should be left to markets? When might government interventions give better outcomes? How are such collective choices made? How should resources (tax revenues) be collected? How should they be spent? What can go wrong?

Grading	Share of Class Grade
Homework	20%
Midterm	35%
Final Exam	45%

The following are questions that many of you will have about the class.

Q: Where should I look for posted Zoom recordings, slides, readings, and things like that?

A: The best place is on Canvas under “Pages.” I’ll try to put everything there in an organized way.

Q: I am not now nor have I ever taken the prerequisites. Am I in trouble in here?

A: Probably; this class uses the tools of Econ 310-1 Intermediate Microeconomics I a lot, 281 Econometrics and 310-2 Intermediate Microeconomics II some as well.

Q: What is the deal with these homeworks?

A: There will be a bunch of these over the course of the quarter and they will usually follow what we did in lecture, and have some predictive value for what will be on the exams. Your first homework will be to get you familiarized with the use of Piazza, so you will need to post an interesting article relating to public finance in the “post_to_piazza_homework “ on Piazza (in “Modules” in Canvas). When you post your article, don’t send it to the whole class but rather only to me, and be sure to put your last name in the header so I know it’s from you.

I will post questions and you will submit answers through Canvas. The computational problems will be graded by Canvas, and you will get three chances to get them right. You can collaborate with your peers on these and ask questions through Piazza (anonymously if you wish). Some of the homework will involve you submitting hand drawn graphs or hand written summaries of the lecture contents through Crowdmark. [Piazza is a discussion forum that allows anonymous posts. The story about [its creation](#) is pretty cool.]

Q: What are the basic work expectations for the class?

A: I hope that you will do about two hours of study for every hour of lecture, and that you will get read the material assigned for the lecture before class (and catch up on the first lecture assigned reading too).

Q: What is your electronics communication policy?

A: **(1)** I expect you to have your preferred e-mail address entered into Canvas so that I can send messages to the class, and I expect you to check that e-mail on a daily basis. **(2)** Use Canvas’s **Piazza** discussion forum (found in Canvas’s “Modules”) to post questions that would be of general use to your classmates. (Yes: “What does MR stand for?” No: “I got 11 points on the midterm; does that mean I’m going to flunk the class?”) When you post on Piazza about specific homework or exam questions, it’s very helpful if you cut-and-paste the actual question into what you write in Piazza.

Q: What happens if I fall suddenly ill and am unable to make it to a test?

A: If you do not reach me or leave a message on my e-mail (mwitte@northwestern.edu), your misfortune will be doubled. You will get a zero on the test for a grade of F that cannot be made up. Any problem that causes you to be physically unable to take a test must be carefully documented by an independent source who can confirm that you were incapacitated.

Q: Can I expect any leniency if I’m caught cheating or engaging in any unethical behavior?

A: No. Weinberg’s policy is that students who are suspected of cheating are reported *immediately*. In recent years, I’ve sent the names of students to the dean; some were expelled and those who were not did not enjoy the experience.

Q: In studying for the tests, should I stress studying the notes, the book, or the readings?

A: All of the above, but particularly the notes. I’ll make sure that I don’t inflict any math problems on the exams that I haven’t already given you in the homework. Note however, that not everything that is important for the class, or that I cover in lecture or the readings will make it onto the test. Some material is important for you to learn, but does not lend itself to good test questions. I’m also inclined to have you

do math on homework to build that level of understanding there, and then use graphs on exam questions so as to minimize the chance of algebra mistakes causing you to miss points on something where you had a good level of understanding.

Q: I can see that half of the people in this class are harder working than I am and the other half of the students are lazier than I am. What grade will I get in here?

A: B-. You are the median or middle student. Half the class will get grades of B- or better and the other half will get grades of B- or worse. However, this doesn't hold exactly in a small class. In smaller classes, I usually end up grading by the method of "significant differences." I compute weighted points for everyone in the class. Some of you will do really well, then there will be a bit of a gap in the scores, then there will be another bunch, and then a gap in the scores, then another bunch, then, a gap, etc. The top bunch will be the A's, the next bunch the B's, etc., with the minus/plus grades falling in between. The grades on the midterms give guidance toward where you are likely to be in this distribution (where midterm points matter, but grade breaks don't). The points from the homeworks and quizzes move you up or down in that distribution.

Q: Averaging my grades, I come out very close to a higher grade. How about if you give it to me?

A: No...unless you are deserving of special consideration.

Q: Am I deserving of special consideration?

A: That depends. I may feel you deserve a higher grade than you earn on the tests if I feel that your comments in class, Piazza, and office hours improve the education of your fellow students and show you are able to and have been thinking intelligently about the material.

Q: What will the tests be like?

A: Some problem solving, some graphing, some essays. On the homeworks I'll give you examples of the sorts of problems I am apt to ask. Also, you are expected to *go to the bathroom before the exam and then hold it until the exam is over*. Interesting fact: On the tests, *we will give you points for leaving questions blank*. On any given problem or graded sub-problem, we will give you 20% of the points if you leave the question completely blank. This is intended to remove the incentive to pursue "pity points" on questions where you really don't know what I'm asking, and instead allow you to devote your time to doing the best you can on the material you know best. Of course...you'll probably just choose to write complete and perfect answers to every question on every test, but we wanted you to have the option.

Q: How will the exams be given?

A: You will take the exam in front of your computer while logged into Zoom with your camera and audio on, and also with your smartphone logged into Zoom and attached by a rubber band to a tall water bottle or similar stand and arranged so that I can see what's on your computer screen and what you're working on. Hmm...that doesn't seem any less crazy now that I've written it out. I'd really rather be able to give you the exams while we're all together in one room, but that's not our current reality. Unfortunately, some people cheat; they are bad and should not do this; and I'm trying to minimize this.

Q: Wait, what?! Will this class be recorded?

A: "This class or portions of this class will be recorded by the instructor for educational purposes. These recordings will be shared only with students enrolled in the course and will be deleted at the end of the Spring Quarter. Your instructor will communicate how you can access the recordings.

Unauthorized student recording of classroom or other academic activities (including advising sessions or office hours) is prohibited. Unauthorized recording is unethical and may also be a violation of

University policy and state law. Students requesting the use of assistive technology as an accommodation should contact AccessibleNU. Unauthorized use of classroom recordings – including distributing or posting them – is also prohibited. Under the University’s Copyright Policy, faculty own the copyright to instructional materials – including those resources created specifically for the purposes of instruction, such as syllabi, lectures and lecture notes, and presentations. Students cannot copy, reproduce, display or distribute these materials. Students who engage in unauthorized recording, unauthorized use of a recording or unauthorized distribution of instructional materials will be referred to the appropriate University office for follow-up.”

Q: What are the math requirements for this class?

A: You will need to be able to do basic calculus, graphing, and algebra. I'll expect you to be able to use basic economic tools like present values, expected values, non-competitive market structures, hypothesis testing, and regression analysis. I will do some more complicated math for the purposes of exposition but I will not ask you to reproduce it on the exams although you should understand the underlying ideas. As a guide, I will try to preview any math or exposition you might need in the homework.

Q: When the class is over, what will I wish that I had known at its start?

A: Beyond the obvious things, in the past, some students wrote on their course evaluation forms that they wish they had known my tests would be so hard. I agree that my tests tend to be a bit long and I try to make them hard. Also, I'll admit there's some reading so be careful not to fall too far behind. Now you've been warned.

Q: What is the most important thing?

A: Please be assured that I want students to learn and to receive the good grades they deserve. So please make an appointment with me should you have undue difficulty with your work in the course.

Any student with a documented disability needing accommodations is requested to speak directly to the [Accessible NU](#) (847-467-5530) and the instructor, as early as possible in the quarter (preferably within the first two weeks of class). All discussions will remain confidential. For resources on safety and mental and physical health, please visit the [NUhelp](#) website or phone app.