

ECON 465: Contemporary Economic Issues

Term: Spring 2025

Instructor: Neil Duzett, nduzett@tamu.edu

Office hours: I will hold virtual office hours via Zoom on Mondays between 1pm-3pm, or by appointment. If you wish to attend office hours, send me an email shortly before or during this time. Otherwise, schedule appointments by email.

Meeting time and location:

Section 501: Monday and Wednesday 11:30 am – 12:45 pm in ALLN 1006

Course Description: Economic theory provides a versatile framework for answering important questions in many aspects of the modern world. In this course, we will apply tools of causal inference to better understand contentious policy questions and evaluate the best evidence provided by empirical research in economics. In particular, we will place an emphasis on understanding how these ideas and research are discussed in modern media. We will cover six topics: minimum wage and its effect on the labor market, student debt relief and forgiveness, the returns to education, diversity and its effect on group behavior in government, and two topics of the students' choice determined during the course.

Prerequisites: ECON 323 with a “C” or better, and ECON 410 with a “C” or better.

Student Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to:

- Identify important economic questions relevant to the modern world.
- Understand causal evidence both in favor of and against economic policies related to those questions.
- Evaluate the accuracy of how that evidence is reported in modern media.

Online class materials and resources

CANVAS: You will submit your homework assignments and view your grade on Canvas.

Teaching Assistant: Samuel Meng, sammeng@tamu.edu. The TA will not hold office hours, but you may contact him to ask questions about the content of the class or a grade you received on a quiz or assignment.

Textbook and lecture notes

No textbook is required for this course. *Causal Inference: The Mixtape* by Scott Cunningham is recommended reading for students who wish to dive deeper into the content we discuss in class.

Academic papers, news articles, and book chapters that are required reading for the course will be posted on Canvas before they are discussed in class.

Lecture slides will not be posted online.

Course Policies:

Late work will not be accepted.

Grading:

Grades will be distributed as follows: A: 90%-100%; B: 80%-89.99%; C: 70%-79.99%; D: 60%-69.99%; F: below 60%.

Quizzes: 10%

Policy briefs: 30%

Midterm: 20%

Final: 20%

Presentation proposal: 5%

Presentation: 15%

Quizzes: Each class period (with the exception of the first and second classes and days with reviews, exams or presentations), there is a 33% chance a short, open-note quiz will be administered, with questions based on previous class discussions or the reading for that day. Each student's lowest quiz score will be dropped.

Policy brief: For each of the six topics covered in class, students will write a 2 to 3 page policy brief. Students will take a stance on the assigned topic and argue in favor of that stance by presenting and critically-assessing evidence. Students will be graded on their ability to correctly use and evaluate the evidence on each topic. Submitted policy briefs must be typed, double-spaced, and twelve-point font. A rubric and example policy brief will be provided on Canvas. Each student's lowest policy brief score will be dropped.

Exams: This class will have two exams: a midterm and a cumulative final. Content covered on these exams will be reviewed the class period before the exam is held.

Presentation: At the end of the semester, each student will present on an economic topic of their choosing (first proposed to and approved by the instructor), providing and assessing evidence on that topic, and providing a policy recommendation. The precise requirements for the proposal and the presentation itself (presentation length, format, time slots, etc.) will be provided on Canvas during the semester.

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA) POLICY STATEMENT

Texas A&M University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. If you experience barriers to your education due to a disability or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Resources office on your campus (resources listed below) Disabilities may include, but are not limited to attentional, learning, mental health, sensory, physical, or chronic health conditions. All students are encouraged to discuss their disability related needs with Disability Resources and their instructors as soon as possible. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact Disability Services, located in the Student Services Building or call 979-845-1637. For additional information, visit <http://disability.tamu.edu>.

Title IX and Statement on Limits to Confidentiality

Texas A&M University and the College of Liberal Arts are committed to fostering a learning environment that is safe and productive for all. University policies and federal and state laws provide guidance for achieving such an environment. Although class materials are generally considered confidential pursuant to student record policies and laws, University employees — including instructors — cannot maintain confidentiality when it conflicts with their responsibility to report certain issues that jeopardize the health and safety of our community.

As the instructor, I must report (per Texas A&M System Regulation 08.01.01) the following information to other University offices if you share it with me, even if you do not want the disclosed information to be shared:

- Allegations of sexual assault, sexual discrimination, or sexual harassment when they involve TAMU students, faculty, or staff, or third parties visiting campus.

These reports may trigger contact from a campus official who will want to talk with you about the incident that you have shared. In many cases, it will be your decision whether or not you wish to speak with that individual. If you would like to talk about these events in a more confidential setting, you are encouraged to make an appointment with Counseling and Psychological Services (<https://caps.tamu.edu/>).

Students and faculty can report non-emergency behavior that causes them to be concerned at <http://tellsomebody.tamu.edu>.

STATEMENT ON MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Texas A&M University recognizes that mental health and wellness are critical factors that influence a student's academic success and overall wellbeing. Students are encouraged to engage in proper self-care by utilizing the resources and services available from Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS). Students who need someone to talk to can call the TAMU Helpline (979-845-2700) from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. weekdays and 24 hours on weekends. 24-hour emergency help is also available through the National Suicide Prevention Hotline (800-273-8255) or at suicidepreventionlifeline.org.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Texas A&M University has identified student learning outcomes that describe our institutional commitment to your education goals. These include the ability to demonstrate critical thinking, effective communication, and social, cultural, and global competence. Please see

http://provost.tamu.edu/essentials/pdfs/copy_of_UndergraduateLearningOutcomesFinal.pdf/view

Academic Integrity

Note that plagiarism is a type of academic dishonesty and will not be tolerated. Students caught plagiarizing will receive an F on their paper and will fail the course.

For additional information on the Aggie Honor Code and academic integrity, please visit:
<http://aggiehonor.tamu.edu>

“An Aggie does not lie, cheat, or steal or tolerate those who do.”

Course Topics, Calendar of Activities, Major Assignment Dates

This schedule is intended as a rough outline to help students gauge how the class is structured. I will keep you informed as we (inevitably) deviate from the schedule. Class topics and assignment due dates may change over the course of the semester.

Class day	Topic	Due dates
January 13	Syllabus, course overview	
January 15	Introduction to causal inference	
January 22	Empirical methods 1	
January 27	Empirical methods 2	
January 29	Empirical methods 3	
February 3	Labor: Minimum wage and employment	
February 5	Labor: Minimum wage and employment	
February 10	Labor: Minimum wage and employment	
February 12	Public: Student debt forgiveness	Policy brief #1 due before class
February 17	Public: Student debt forgiveness	
February 19	Public: Student debt forgiveness	
February 24	Midterm exam prep/review	Policy brief #2 due before class
February 26	Midterm	

March 3	Education: The returns to education	
March 5	Education: The returns to education	Presentation proposal due
March 17	Education: The returns to education	
March 19	Political economy: Diversity and group behavior in government	Policy brief #3 due before class
March 24	Political economy: Diversity and group behavior in government	
March 26	Political economy: Diversity and group behavior in government	
March 31	Student-chosen topic 1	Policy brief #4 due before class
April 2	Student-chosen topic 1	
April 7	Student-chosen topic 1	
April 9	Student-chosen topic 2	Policy brief #5 due before class
April 14	Student-chosen topic 2	
April 16	Student-chosen topic 2	
April 21	Presentations 1	Policy brief #6 due before class
April 23	Presentations 2	
April 28	Final exam prep/review	