Instructor: Dr. Susan Dadres (sdadres@unt.edu)

Class Meetings: TTH 2:00 – 3:20, RTFP 135

Office: 283-F Hickory Hall (office 940-369-7984, cell 469-682-0767)

Office Hours: TTH 10:15 – 10:45 and 1:15 – 1:45, or by appointment

Course Objective

The goal of Public Economics is to evaluate the proper role of government in the economy. In the U.S., how well would the economy function without government involvement? It is easy to criticize government bureaucracy and incompetence, but would we be better off without government to provide legal protections, infrastructure, national defense, and public education? At the same time, there are ways to reform government and cut down on waste and inefficiency. Determining when and how government should be involved can be challenging, but it is a worthwhile endeavor.

Grade Determination

Your average is based on quizzes and homework (20%), a multi-part research project (20%), and two exams (30% each). All grades are recorded on a 100-point scale. After calculating your average, a letter grade will be assigned according to the following scale:

\[89.5 – 100\% = A, \ 79.5 – 89.4\% = B, \ 69.5 – 79.4\% = C, \ 59.5 – 69.4\% = D, \ and \ 59.4\% \ or \ below = F\]

Important Dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Th February 4</td>
<td>*Research plan DUE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Th February 11</td>
<td>Research Day (no class)</td>
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<td>Th February 18</td>
<td>Research Topic and Overview DUE</td>
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<td>T March 8</td>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
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<tr>
<td>T March 15</td>
<td>Spring Break</td>
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<td>Th March 17</td>
<td>Spring Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>T April 5</td>
<td>Last Day to Drop Class with Instructor Approval</td>
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<tr>
<td>Th April 7</td>
<td>Research Day (no class)</td>
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<td>Th April 14</td>
<td>Research Question and Bibliography DUE</td>
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<td>T May 3</td>
<td>Research Project DUE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Th May 12</td>
<td>Final Exam, 1:30 to 3:30</td>
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*Although you are not required to work in a team on the research project, I strongly encourage you to do so because it reduces the work load and because I think you will learn more if you have someone to talk everything through with. I have set aside two research days (2/11 and 4/7) to make sure everyone has an opportunity to meet within teams and work on the project (you may work in the classroom or in the library). You may partner with one or two other students or you may work alone, it is your choice. You must let me know what you plan to do by Thursday, February 4th.*
Class Policies

Access readings, notes, grades and other class materials at [https://learn.unt.edu/](https://learn.unt.edu/). Class notes must be printed and brought to class. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to obtain missing information from another student and discuss the situation with me right away if you missed graded work.

See [http://registrar.unt.edu/registration/spring-registration-guide](http://registrar.unt.edu/registration/spring-registration-guide) for detailed information about dropping or withdrawing. Go to the department office (Hickory Hall, room 254) before Tuesday, April 5th to obtain a drop slip which I have already signed, or see me to discuss your options. If you stop attending and do not drop the class, you may receive an “F” in the course.

If you must miss the midterm exam with a university-approved excuse, be prepared to provide proof that the absence was excused before requesting a makeup exam. I will determine the format and schedule a makeup exam date, if needed. If you miss an exam with no university-approved excuse, a grade of 0 is recorded and the option of dropping the class should be carefully considered. If you are not able to take the final exam on the date scheduled by the university, provide documentation as soon as possible in order to reschedule the exam or request an Incomplete in the class.

You may request a grade of Incomplete only if at least one-half of the work has been completed with a passing grade and an emergency (illness, family emergency, etc.) prevents you from completing the rest. If you meet these requirements, request a grade of Incomplete on or before May 12th (you can make the request by email if you aren’t able to see me).

You will be given opportunities to apply class material by completing in-class quizzes (these usually involve problems with graphs/calculations and you are allowed to work in small groups during class), online quizzes (these usually involve multiple choice and/or true/false questions and must be completed outside of class), and homework (these assignments typically involve outside readings and short answer responses and must be completed outside of class). All of these opportunities are designed to help you prepare for the midterm and final exams.

Detailed information about the research project is provided on the last several pages of this document.

Exams will include multiple choice, true/false, short answer questions, and problems with graphs/calculations and will cover material presented in class and/or required readings. Practice exams and review sheets will be posted on blackboard about one week prior to each exam.

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation.

Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the Office of Disability Accommodation website at [http://www.unt.edu/oda](http://www.unt.edu/oda). You may also contact them by phone at 940.565.4323.
The UNT Department of Economics adheres to the University’s Policy on Cheating and Plagiarism. View the complete policy at https://vpaa.unt.edu/academic-integrity.htm.

Cheating: The use of unauthorized assistance in an academic exercise, including but not limited to:
1. use of any unauthorized assistance to take exams, tests, quizzes or other assessments;
2. dependence upon the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems or carrying out other assignments;
3. acquisition, without permission, of tests, notes or other academic materials belonging to a faculty or staff member of the University;
4. dual submission of a paper or project, or re-submission of a paper or project to a different class without express permission from the instructor;
5. any other act designed to give a student an unfair advantage on an academic assignment.

Plagiarism: Use of another’s thoughts or words without proper attribution in any academic exercise, regardless of the student’s intent, including but not limited to:
1. the knowing or negligent use by paraphrase or direct quotation of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgement or citation.
2. the knowing or negligent unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or by an agency engaged in selling term papers or other academic materials.

Additional Information

Public economics is a very interesting class, especially because each person is likely to have their own strongly-held beliefs and opinions about the topics covered in this class. The material presented in class over which you will be tested focuses on specific terms, economic theories and models, institutional facts, and widely-held views (for example, the belief that people who have a good education are more likely to achieve economic success). No student should feel that they are being penalized because their personal views differ from the views of the instructor or fellow students. Please arrange to discuss any concerns you have with me and/or with the department chair if you feel your grade has been affected by personal or political views.

Aristotle said “It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.” I hope you will learn a lot of new information in this class, and I hope you will entertain some new ideas, but as you evaluate the costs and benefits of various government policy options, you should reach your own conclusions and stand by your own beliefs.

The class will begin with an examination of government’s role in the economy and a comparison of conservative and liberal views on the role of government. You may want to express your opinions during class, but you are not required to do so since no part of your grade will be determined by your personal views.

If you need additional assistance with the class material, please visit the Help Center, located in Wooten Hall, room 320. Mr. C.J. Lee is the Academic Assistant for this class and he is available to help Tuesday and Thursday, 12:00 – 2:00 and 3:30 – 4:30, or Wednesday, 10:00 – 12:00.
Research Project

Step 1  Let me know (in writing) if you are working alone or in a group (if working in a group, provide the names of each person) no later than the end of class Thursday, February 4th. Failure to provide this information before the deadline will result in a 5 to 10 point deduction from your research project grade. There may also be a deduction if you later decide to change your decision, so put some thought into your choice. If one student withdraws from a group or from the class, the remaining student(s) will not be penalized for this change.

Step 2  Choose a research topic that fits into one of these eight broad categories:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Goods</th>
<th>Welfare</th>
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<tr>
<td>Political Decision-making</td>
<td>Social Security</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Health Care</td>
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<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Taxation</td>
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After choosing a topic, compose and type (double-spaced, 1-inch margins, 12-point font, Times New Roman) a **2 to 3 page overview** of the topic. Make sure your topic is specific. For example, if you want a topic from the taxation category, you may want to narrow that down to a particular type of taxation (commodity, income, property, estate, corporate profit, etc.). Identify and define important terms and concepts related to your topic, discuss the economic rationale for government involvement in this area, describe government policies and/or reform proposals related to your topic, and explain why you are interested in this particular area of public economics in your overview paper.

Only one Topic Overview paper needs to be submitted for a team, but make sure each member of the team contributed. If anyone on the team fails to contribute for any reason, inform me when you submit the Topic Overview paper. Anyone who does not contribute is considered to be working alone on the project. This also applies to the other parts of the research project.

Your research topic (chosen from the above list) and the typed and edited overview must be submitted no later than the end of class Thursday, February 18th. Failure to submit this component in a timely manner will result in a 10 to 20 point deduction from your research project grade. There will also be a deduction if you later decide to change your topic (forcing you to submit a new Topic/Overview paper), so choose carefully.

Step 3  Identify a specific research question. Examples:

1. Is there empirical evidence to support the notion of a free-rider problem?
2. Are communities sufficiently different to give families the range of choices implied by the Tiebout model?
3. Which variables best explain academic achievement by students in grades K through 12?
4. Were the 1990 amendments to the Clean Air Act sufficient to eliminate the problem of acid rain?
5. Did the 1996 Welfare Reform Act lead to a reduction in the number of people living in poverty?
6. Were the changes enacted by the 1983 Social Security bill sufficient to maintain benefits for baby boomers?
7. Has the Affordable Care Act led to a significant decline in the number of uninsured Americans?
8. How does an increase in the capital gains tax rate affect investment spending?
Step 3 continued. Develop a bibliography with at least three journal articles that closely relate to your topic and/or research question. Find articles from one or more of the top-ranked journals listed below (for best access, search through the UNT Library [http://www.library.unt.edu/]) or use working papers published by the National Bureau of Economic Research ([http://www.nber.org/]).

**Journal of Public Economics**  
**Journal of Economic Theory**  
**Public Choice**  
**American Economic Review**  
**Social Choice and Welfare**  
**Journal of Political Economy**  
**Quarterly Journal of Economics**  
**National Tax Journal**  
**Journal of Economic Literature**  
**Econometrica**  
**Journal of Applied Econometrics**  
**Review of Economic Studies**  
**Journal of Law and Economics**  
**Journal of Economic Perspectives**  
**Economic Inquiry**

In addition to the three required journal articles, you may also include books, periodicals, or websites, but these cannot replace journal articles and you are not required to use additional sources. Keep in mind that you would be violating the cheating and plagiarism policy (resulting in a grade of zero for the project) if you use information from any published source without including a citation. However, you may use information from class lectures or notes without a citation. Below is an example of the format you may use to cite your journal articles. I am not particular about the format, as long as you are consistent and the information is accurate and complete. Helpful Hint: If you find one article that you really like, check the references at the end of that article to identify other sources you might want to use.

**References**


Your research question and bibliography must be submitted no later than the end of class Thursday, April 14th. Failure to submit this component in a timely manner will result in a 20 to 30 point deduction from your research project grade. There will also be a deduction if you later decide to change your research question or any of your three journal articles, although you can add other cited sources during step 4 without penalty.
Step 4 Prepare your final research project, 9 or 10 pages total, including cover page and references.

All pages should be stapled together or submitted in a binder or folder. All text pages should be typed, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins and 12-point Times New Roman font (the font on the cover page can be larger if desired).

The Cover Page should include the title of the project, student name(s), date, and class (Econ 4150 or 5150). You may include art on the cover page if desired (1 page).

Include the overview that was previously submitted at the beginning (2 or 3 pages).

Include a new section detailing the research question you selected. Provide as much background as possible to illustrate why your research question is compelling and deserves attention. Offer your own thoughts on the answers you would expect to obtain and why you have these expectations. Describe an empirical strategy you would use to address your research question and identify sources of data. This section should be at least 2 pages.

Write a summary of each of the three journal articles you identified in your bibliography. Explain what the authors were trying to learn or demonstrate and describe their methodology. Describe the conclusions reached in the article. This section should be at least 3 pages.

Include the Bibliography (list of references previously submitted plus any additional citations) at the end (1 page).

Your final research project must be submitted no later than the end of class Tuesday, May 3rd. Failure to submit the completed project in a timely manner will result in a 30 to 40 point deduction from your research project grade.