

Econ 423: Financial Markets

UNC at Chapel Hill, Department of Economics
Summer 2015



Instructor Information:

Mike Aguilar

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Class Schedule:

M,T,W,R,F 9:45am-11:15am Gardner Hall Rm 009

Communication:

Assignments, announcements, grades, readings, and other information will be posted on sakai. The sakai site will be the primary method of communication for this course, so please check it frequently.

Recommended Prerequisite:

Econ 420 (Intermediate Theory: Money, Income, and Employment)

Econ 400 (Economic Statistics)

Course Materials:

Recommended Texts:

- *Investments* by Bodie, Kane and Marcus; McGraw Hill Publishing.
- *The Economics of Money, Banking, and Financial Markets* - by Mishkin; Pearson Publishing.
- *Modern Investment Theory* by Haugen; Prentice Hall.

Recommended Periodicals: Keeping abreast of the financial and macro news is essential for this course. Although not officially required, reading the *The Wall Street Journal* and/or the *Economist* is highly recommended.

Software: You are not required to purchase additional software for this course. However, many assignments require access to a program that will store and manipulate data. Excel is the usual candidate for such tasks. Other programs such as SAS, Matlab, Stata, etc.. also are acceptable.

Grading	% of Course Grade	Date	Details & Policy
Final Exam	(25%)	07/27/15 8am-11am	Comprehensive exam. Missing the Final Exam without a valid excuse from the Dean will result in a zero exam score.
Midterm	(25%)	07/08/15	Missing the Midterm without an “excused” absence results in a zero score for this Test. If you miss the Midterm with an “excused” absence, the Final Exam will account for 40% of the course grade.
Homework	(25%)	TBD	There will be several homeworks throughout the semester. No late assignments will be accepted. No “make-ups” will be given. If you miss an assignment due to an “excused” absence, your Homework grade will be reweighted among the remaining homework assignments.
Macro-Strategy Portfolio		Semester-long, group portfolio management exercise.	
Report to CIO	(15%)	As per course calendar	A weekly summary of market, macro, and policy activity. Discuss how these events impacted your portfolio, and how you will position your portfolio in the coming week. Submitted electronically via email.
VC Roadshow	(10%)	7/23/2015	Your goal is to acquire venture capital (VC) funding. Each group must prepare a thorough accounting of their team’s activity during the semester, present their outlook to the class, and turn in a full written report. Submitted electronically via email.

Students associated with Disability Services must contact me one week prior to each Test.

Excused Absences: Illness or participation in University sanctioned activities. Documentation from coach or doctor must be provided. You must fill out the “Excused Absence” form found on the course site, and turn it in to me as soon as possible.

Letter grades are computed from the total points earned during the semester and assigned based on the scale nearby. There is no maximum number of A's nor B's awarded. However, in previous courses 15% – 20% of my students have earned in the A range, 30% – 50% have earned in the B range, and 20% – 30% have earned in the C range. Although the grade distribution may change this semester, the past scores should give you a sense of my grading standards.

A	$x \geq 95\%$
A-	$90 \leq x < 95$
B+	$85 \leq x < 90$
B	$80 \leq x < 85$
B-	$75 \leq x < 80$
C+	$70 \leq x < 75$
C	$65 \leq x < 70$
C-	$60 \leq x < 65$
D+	$50 \leq x < 60$
D	$40 \leq x < 50$
F	$x < 40$

Course Goals:

This course examines the roll of financial markets and institutions within the economy. We begin with an overview of the financial system, emphasizing the importance of the financial markets to the health of the macro-economy. We then detail the market for, and pricing of, several financial instruments, including fixed income, equity, and foreign exchange. The course then explores the role of financial institutions as intermediaries and their role in the recent credit crisis. By the end of the course students should i) be able to use the concept of present value to price streams of income, ii) be able to analyze the impact of monetary policy changes upon the economy in general, and financial markets in particular, and iii) have a deeper understanding of the recent financial crisis and the potential impact of proposed remedial actions.

Tentative Course Outline:

- Days 1 - 7 *Introduction to Financial Markets & Pricing Risk Free Assets*
 Why study financial markets? What are interest rates, and how are they determined?
- Days 8 - 21 *Modern Portfolio Theory & Pricing Risky Assets*
 Risk and Return, Modern Portfolio Theory, Bond Markets, Equity Markets, FX markets, and Market Efficiency.
- Days 22 - 24 *The Markets and the Economy & Risk Management*
 Interaction between the financial markets and the economy, Financial Structure, Regulation, the Credit Crisis, and Derivatives for Risk Management.

Macro-Strategy Portfolio Exercise:

Welcome to Aguilar Macro-Strategy (AMS), a global macro hedge fund located here in Chapel Hill, NC. We are a “top-down” shop, meaning that we look to the macro-economy and policy environment to inform our trading decisions. You are the newest member of our fund family. Along with a few of your classmates, you will form a portfolio management team. Each team roughly will consist of 6-15 students.

Since our focus is “top-down”, the investable universe for each team is a sampling of macro-based ETF’s. I will make the list available to students during class. Each team’s mandate is to outperform the S&P500. Each team is seeded with \$1,000,000 at the opening bell 06/24/2015 EST. Each team can hold no more than 5% cash at any time. You may rebalance your portfolio as often as you like. Long and short positions are permitted. You are subject to transaction fees. Each team must cash out all positions by the close of trading 07/22/2015.

Your trading platform is the Virtual Stock Exchange (VSE). Each team will open a free account with VSE at the url: <http://www.marketwatch.com/Game/>. All other trading rules and regulations will be made available in class.

Report to CIO: Each team must submit a weekly report to me (the CIO of AMS), which contains four key elements: i) Week in Review: An overview of the markets, economy, and policy environment in the previous week. ii) Performance Summary and Holdings: Detail the performance of your portfolio during the previous week and since inception. Include simple metrics such as mean return and standard deviation relative to your benchmark. Also include a detailed accounting of the weights for each of your holdings. iii) Summary of Activity: justify each of your (non)trading decisions from a macro-perspective. Note: the decision to hold an asset requires as much justification as does a buy or sell action. iv) Outlook: Describe how you plan to position the portfolio for the coming week. [I expect weekly reports to be 5-10 pages in length].

VC Roadshow: You are seeking to acquire funding from venture capital investors. Each team must give a presentation detailing why you are deserving of their money. The presentation will be given on the last day of classes. At the culmination of the last day, ”investors” will allocate their VC dollars to the fund(s) they feel most deserving. The teams will be awarded extra credit points in proportion to the funds they raise (maximum of 1 extra credit point to course grade). The presentations must be supplemented with a detailed report of the fund’s attributes, a semester in review, performance, a summary of activity, and outlook, as per the instructions detailed for the “Report to CIO” above. [I expect this VC Roadshow report to be 15 - 20 pages in length.]

The scores for the Macro-Strategy Portfolio Exercise will be subjected to a peer review process, wherein each student has the opportunity to evaluate their team members’ contributions during the semester. The professor will take these evaluations into consideration when compiling grades for the associated assignments.