

**IDST 190-001**  
**Understanding Our Social World:**  
**An Introduction to Philosophy, Politics and Economics**

**Instructors:**

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Dr. Douglas MacKay ([dmackay@email.unc.edu](mailto:dmackay@email.unc.edu))

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Office Hours: Mondays 10:30-12:00pm (or by appointment), Gardner Hall 200C

**Teaching Assistants:**

Dominik Berger ([dominik@live.unc.edu](mailto:dominik@live.unc.edu))

Office Hours: Wednesdays and Fridays 10:00-11:00am (or by appointment), Caldwell Hall 12B

Michael Prinzing ([prinzing@live.unc.edu](mailto:prinzing@live.unc.edu))

Office Hours: Mondays 10-11am and Fridays 9-10am (or by appointment), Caldwell Hall 107A

**Meeting times and locations:**

Lectures: MW 9:05am-9:55am. Murphey Hall 104.

Recitations: Fridays. Locations and times vary.

**Prerequisites:** None.

**Course Content**

This interdisciplinary course provides an overview of some core conceptual tools used to analyze issues at the intersection of philosophy, politics, and economics (PPE). It introduces students to the tools of economic analysis, including supply and demand, equilibrium, taxes and tariffs, market failures, externalities, asymmetric information, game theory, monopoly and oligopoly, and GDP and growth. It complements these tools with philosophical reflection on the nature of well-being, fair pricing, the ethics of price discrimination, wealth and income inequality, and equality of opportunity. It addresses contemporary social issues such as minimum wage, sin taxes and nudge, health care, climate change, university admission, and concludes with public choice, voting theory, and gerrymandering.

## **Course Goals**

This course will be an excellent opportunity for students to learn how to tackle social problems from multiple angles. Students will learn a lot about contemporary social problems and will acquire skills they require to address them in a comprehensive, interdisciplinary way. The course will achieve this by introducing students to a suite of tools, topics, and analytical resources that are often employed in isolation, but which gain considerable power from being brought together.

The guiding idea of the PPE Program and of this course is that the disciplines of philosophy, political science, and economics share a common subject matter – the formal and informal institutions and practices that shape our lives together – and they each bring into sharp relief crucial aspects of this common subject that would otherwise be missed. Students will read widely on these topics and will explore applications to contemporary social problems.

## **Learning Outcomes**

Students will learn how to approach social problems from the complementary perspectives of philosophy, political science and economics.

## **Course Audience**

This course is intended for students who are interested in:

1. Understanding the basic tools of economic, political, and philosophical analysis;
2. Exploring the economic, political, and philosophical aspects of contemporary public policy problems;
3. Participating in small-group and class discussions; and
4. Developing critical thinking, reading, and writing skills.

## **Texts**

The course will include required readings from a variety of sources. These include economics texts, classic and contemporary scholarly writings in philosophy and political theory, and selected readings from newspapers, magazines, and other popular press.

Required text: Austin Frakt and Mike Piper *Microeconomics Made Simple*. 2014. (Available from UNC bookstore)

All other readings will be made available on Sakai.

## Course Website

The course website is [sakai.unc.edu](http://sakai.unc.edu). We will post course documents on the website. We will also use the Sakai site to make announcements regarding changes in the reading schedule or other aspects of the course.

## Graded Activities

Students will complete a variety of assignments and exams that reflect the breadth of material covered in the course. In addition, they will receive grades on their participation during Friday recitation sessions. The full list of graded activities and their contributions toward students' final grades is:

Activity	Grade share	Date
Participation	10%	
Problem Set 1	5%	
Problem Set 2	5%	
Midterm	15%	March 6, in class
Short Paper	15%	Due February 21, 11:59pm
Long Paper	25%	Due April 18, 11:59pm
Final Exam	25%	May 6, 8-10am

The instructors will assign grades using the following scale:

Grade	Score
A-range	90-100
B-range	80-89
C-range	70-79
D-range	60-69
F-range	< 60

“A” indicates *mastery of course content*

“B” indicates *strong performance*

“C” indicates an *acceptable performance*

“D” indicates *marginal performance*

“F” indicates *unacceptable performance*

## Course Policies

1. Regular attendance and class participation is expected.
2. Our goal is to maintain a classroom setting which provides a good learning environment for all students and the instructors. To minimize distractions, please put away all phones, laptops, and tablets.

3. Late assignments will be penalized one half-grade (i.e. “A” to “A-“) per day, including weekends. Extensions will only be permitted on the grounds of illness (including mental illness) or bereavement. Documentation is required.
4. The instructors reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus, including assignment due dates and test dates. These changes will be announced as early as possible.

## **Honor Code**

You are encouraged to form study groups to review the reading material and questions posed for the discussion papers. However, you are expected to undertake the actual writing of the papers and the exams entirely independently. Plagiarism of published work is a violation of the honor code. Any two papers or exams that are submitted containing the same sentences will be considered a breach of the honor code (<http://honor.unc.edu/>).

In written work (including overheads or handouts used in presentations) words drawn from others should be indicated by quotation marks and ideas drawn from others should refer to their source. If you are unsure about what needs to be cited, please talk with an instructor or ask for assistance from the writing center. Plagiarism is a serious offense which can result in failure of the course and suspension from the University. To make sure that you understand what plagiarism is, please see the following:

<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/plagiarism.html>  
<http://www.lib.unc.edu/instruct/plagiarism/>

## **Grade Appeal Policy**

We take the evaluation and grading of your papers and exams very seriously because we know that you take the preparation and writing of your exams very seriously. If you think you deserve a higher grade on a paper or exam, you may write a letter and explain why you would like to appeal the grade. Before making an appeal, you should review your work and the grading criteria we have provided. After we receive your letter, we will re-read your paper or exam within 1-2 class periods. Depending on our re-reading, your grade may stay the same, be raised, or be lowered. This system is designed to minimize frivolous grade appeals and to ensure that you have carefully examined and reflected on the quality of your work before deciding to initiate a grade appeal.

Students are required to first attempt to resolve disagreements regarding grades with the instructor concerned. If that fails, students and/or faculty may seek additional mediation with the assistance of the Philosophy Department’s Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS). However, the instructor (not TAs or the DUS) is ultimately responsible for the determination of student grades. Finally, after course grades are posted for the end of the semester, students may follow the process outlined in the undergraduate bulletin and protest their grades to the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. The protest must be made in writing, must be made no later than the last day of classes of the succeeding fall or spring semester, and must be based upon one of the following grounds:

- Arithmetic or clerical error
- Arbitrariness, possibly including discrimination based on race, sex, religion, or national origin of the student
- Personal malice
- Student conduct cognizable under the Instrument of Student Judicial Governance

### **UNC Copyright Policy**

UNC's Copyright Policy clearly prohibits students from making commercial use of notes taken in class or labs; you may not sell or otherwise acquire financial or commercial gain from notes you take in this class. Students found to have violated this prohibition are in violation of the Honor Code and are subject to Honor Court proceedings.

### **UNC Policy Addressing Discrimination and Harassment**

Any form of violence or harassment, including sexual assault, relationship violence, and stalking is unwelcome at the University. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can find the appropriate UNC resources at <http://sexualassaultanddiscriminationpolicy.unc.edu/>.

### **Accommodation for Students with Disabilities**

Students in this course seeking accommodations to disabilities must first consult with the Office of Disability Services and follow the instructions of that office for obtaining accommodations.

### **Email Protocol**

When writing email to your teachers, please use:

1. Proper salutation (e.g. Dear Professor/Dr./Mr./Ms. Johnson, Dear Susan, ... )
2. Proper form of leave-taking (e.g. Sincerely,/ Best,/ Regards, ...)
3. Sign your full name
4. Proofread your email for spelling and grammatical errors

For more info: [Link](#) and [Link](#)

## Course outline

Readings are provided on Sakai.

Schedule IDST090.001 Spring 2019		
	Mo	We
7-11 Jan		Intro BM, DM & LB
14-18 Jan	Intro to Econ BM	Supply and Demand BM
21-25 Jan	NO CLASS	Intro to Phil DM
28 Jan – 1 Feb	Well-Being DM	Fair Pricing LB
4-8 Feb	Taxes and Tariffs BM	Sin Taxes and Nudge DM
11-15 Feb	Minimum Wage BM	Minimum Wage DM
18-22 Feb	Externalities BM	Utilitarianism DM
25-29 Feb	Climate Change DM	Asymmetric Information BM
March 4-8	Health Care LB	Midterm
March 11-15	NO CLASS	NO CLASS
March 18-22	Game-Theory 1 LB	Game-Theory 2 LB
March 25-29	Monopoly and Oligopoly BM	Price Discrimination, University Admission BM
April 1-5	Limits of Markets LB	GDP, Growth & Beyond GDP BM
April 8-12	Inequality DM	Equality of Opportunity LB
April 15-19	Public Choice LB	Gerrymandering DM
April 22-26	TBA	TBA