

Econ 590 Special Topics. Applied microeconomics in health care and other topics

Spring semester 2022

Summary

This 3 credit-hour course will apply microeconomic methods to health, health care, and other related topics. The course will emphasize social policy and consider the economics of current issues such as the opioid crisis and other substance use; mental health care; issues related to behavioral health such as criminal justice and homelessness; social determinants of health; the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act; and public health insurance (Medicaid, etc). Pre-requisites are a C or better in ECON 400 (Introduction to Econometrics) and 410 (Intermediate Microeconomics).

Who should take this course?

Motivated students majoring in economics or a related major

Learning objectives

- ✓ Understand and apply economic models to health and health care, crime and criminal justice, housing among the poor and homelessness, and other socially relevant areas
- ✓ Review and evaluate empirical evidence
- ✓ Think critically about issues in health, criminal justice, and homelessness
- ✓ Apply economic principles to a research project to be decided during the class
- ✓ Master economic concepts to the degree of being able to discuss them in conversation
- ✓ Demonstrate an ability to use skills valued in the wider world of work such as formulating an idea and then testing and researching it, and communicating results to a defined audience

When do we meet?

Monday and Wednesday 3:35pm to 4:50pm, starting Monday January, 10, 2022; Peabody 2094

Instructor information

Alex Cowell. Virtual office hours are by appointment. Because I don't have an office and have a day job, office hours are most likely to be the evenings or the weekends. Main email address: acowell@unc.edu. Back-up, personal email address alexcowell@protonmail.com. I check my UNC email at least every other day.

What to call me (to my face)

Alex or Dr. Cowell. My pronouns are he, him, and his.

Grades

Grade philosophy

I hope this course stays with you and means much more than a grade. But of course, grades matter.

Grades will reflect to the greatest degree possible UNC's [policies and procedures](#):

Permanent Grade Definitions

Grade Definition

A Mastery of course content at the highest level of attainment that can reasonably be expected of students at a given stage of development. The A grade states clearly that the student has shown such outstanding promise in the aspect of the discipline under study that he/she may be strongly encouraged to continue.

B Strong performance demonstrating a high level of attainment for a student at a given stage of development. The B grade states that the student has shown solid promise in the aspect of the discipline under study.

C A totally acceptable performance demonstrating an adequate level of attainment for a student at a given stage of development. The C grade states that while not yet showing any unusual promise, the student may continue to study in the discipline with reasonable hope of intellectual development.

D A marginal performance in the required exercises demonstrating a minimal passing level of attainment for a student at a given stage of development. The D grade states that the student has given no evidence of prospective growth in the discipline; an accumulation of D grades should be taken to mean that the student would be well advised not to continue in the academic field.

F For whatever reasons, an unacceptable performance. The F grade indicates that the student's performance in the required exercises has revealed almost no understanding of the course content. A grade of F should warrant questioning whether the student may suitably register for further study in the discipline before remedial work is undertaken.

Grading process

- ✓ Grading is performed blinded to the student's identity whenever possible. I grade essays and written exam questions without seeing the student's name, and multiple choice portions of tests are conducted on bubble sheets that are scored centrally
- ✓ I will determine rounding of scores for a grade at the time of the final exam
- ✓ The group projects (paper and funding proposal) grades depend on the contribution of both you and your fellow group members. As part of determining the group project grade, I ask every group member to report on their own contribution as well as the contribution of each of their fellow group members.
- ✓ Grade philosophy. I do not strictly 'curve', meaning I do not apply a bell curve to the grade distribution centered on a B or C grade. The below Grading Scale can shift up or down, depending on my assessment of the difficulty of the assignment.

Grading Scale (Rough Guide)

At least 95%	A+
90% - 95%	A
88% - 89%	A-
86% - 87%	B+

80% - 85%	B
78% - 79%	B-
76% - 77%	C+
70% - 75%	C
68% - 69%	C-
60% - 67%	D
Less than 60%	F

Grading weight

Not-Quite-Midterm Exam	15%
Just-Past-Midterm Exam	15%
Final Exam	20%
Group project research paper	20%
Group project funding proposal	20%
In-class quizzes	10%

Exams!

These will be old fashioned multiple choice, closed book. Bring a scantron or bubble sheet please.

Groups!

You will be part of a group and that same group will be responsible for two deliverables: a research paper and a funding proposal. Your group picks the topic(s) and does not have to pick the same topic for both deliverables.

- ~10 groups of 3 people; we may need ~4 people in a couple of groups, depending on enrollment
- By 5pm Wednesday, January 19:
 - let me know what group of 5 you want to be in, OR, let me know if you would like me to put you in a group.
 - Let me know your preferred research paper and funding proposal topics.
 - I reserve the right to reassign people across groups.
 - Final group assignments and topics, Monday January 24.
- I will review emails for your statement of what topic and group you want. I will create an assignment table with this information.
- If you do not tell me what group and topic you want by January 19, I will assign you a group and topic.
- I must approve of all group topics by January 19 (if all goes according to plan, that part should be academic).

Group research paper

1. The paper will be between 1,500 and 2,500 words. Use diagrams and figures. I anticipate you will be using papers from the published literature and textbooks. **I will look very kindly on papers that use data and simple analysis.**
2. You help decide the topic. Choose *THIS* or *THAT*

Option *THIS*. You propose a topic to me by 4:55 Wednesday, January 19. I then give you feedback on the proposed topic by Friday, January 21. We agree to the topic by Friday over email.

Option *THAT*. By 4:55 Wednesday January 19, pick one of the topics below:

- a. Does naloxone distribution result in increased death because of moral hazard?
 - b. Does Medicaid churn (coming on and off Medicaid month-to-month) result in poor health?
 - c. What economic evidence is there for improving access to substance use treatment among people involved in the criminal justice system?
 - d. What is it about mental illness that makes its global burden of disease so much higher than many other disease categories?
 - e. What can economics tell us about solving the homelessness crisis?
3. Format: structure as an essay or, if you use data, as an academic article. Calibri 11 point font 1.5 spacing. Headers bold in line all caps with section numbers. Your group name only on the first page with your group members' PIDs and the title and in no other place on the paper. Every page should have the group name listed in a footer and the page number in the bottom right corner.
If you are not analyzing data yourself and relying on published work with estimates, structure the paper like an essay. I should be able to identify the central idea or hypothesis, it should be well motivated in an introduction, and you should tell me why those papers are relevant. The key is to come to a logical conclusion based on the evidence presented and to use enough strong evidence to support that conclusion.
 4. I will grade printed papers only. Bring your paper with you to class on or before the day it is due.

Milestones. The paper has several milestones

1. Outline (due Jan 26) – One page outline of how you will structure the paper
2. Storyboard for the paper (Feb 2) — A series of structured bullets that walks the reader through the main arguments.
3. Sources document (Feb 23) — Include as references in your storyboard cites and then references for the 3 to 10 main sources you plan to use.
4. Draft group research paper (Mar 7) — This will be briefly reviewed by me and more carefully reviewed by at least one group of peers.
5. Peer review comments due back to me (Mar 10) – Your group's consensus comments on the paper you're reviewing should come to me from one person in your group. Structure the peer review according to the following considerations, explaining the degree to which the paper
 1. answers the question
 2. is well written and crafted (grammar, referencing etc)

3. has a strong logical argument
4. considers the main points
5. uses economic concepts throughout
6. Submit paper (Apr 6)

Group research paper grading rubric

The following factors contribute to the grade on the research paper, with a potential breakdown of points

- Outline document (1)
- Sources document (2)
- Storyboard document (2)
- Quality of peer review comments on other group's paper (2)
 - Provide a justified and constructive opinion on each of the 5 components of the paper below
 - The objective is to help the other student group write a 'good' paper (achieve at least a grade B)
- The paper itself:
 - i. answers the question? (1)
 - ii. how well written and crafted is the paper (grammar, referencing etc)? (3)
 - iii. how strong is the logical argument? (3)
 - iv. are the main points considered? (1)
 - v. to what degree are economic concepts used throughout? (3)
- Individual contribution (2)

Group Funding Proposal Project: proposal to the Gill Bates Foundation

1. The scenario. You are seeking funding from the Gill Bates Foundation for further research on a topic. Your job will be to identify a key area within that topic that needs further research and then make a pitch to be funded to research that topic.
 - For example, your group may pick topic d – the economics of the criminal justice system – and then decide that you would like to pitch to get funding on the economics of helping families of incarcerated people.
2. The product will be a well-presented 5-page briefing document (think bullets, infographics) for the executive team of funders AND an in-person presentation by 2 people in the group.
3. The grade depends on (a) how well you summarize the consensus and the gaps in the literature and (b) your suggested idea of what the research would be.
4. The research paper and the funding proposal project do not have to be on the same topic.

5. The topics. Choose *THIS* or *THAT*.

Option *THIS*. You propose a topic to me by 4:55 Wednesday, January 19. I then give you feedback on the proposed topic by Friday, January 21. We agree to the topic by Friday over email.

Option *THAT*. By 4:55 Wednesday January 19, pick one of the topics below. **Note they are closely related to but not exactly the same as the paper topics.**

- a. Naloxone distribution policies
- b. Economic research on Medicaid and health outcomes
- c. Economic research in mental health
- d. Economics and the criminal justice system
- e. Using economics to address homelessness

6. Provide me an electronic copy of your presentation slides, any other supporting materials you wish to provide, and the 5 page briefing document no later than 3:35 pm the day before class.

7. I will provide you with an assessment template for you to assess the work of you, your group, and other groups

	Rule Do	Don't
<i>Choose a topic</i>	Find a topic that you're interested in. May be you already are researching it for this class or for another class	Wait
<i>You are seeking funding ... for further research on a topic</i>	Read the literature – especially the further research is needed or limitations part of the discussion – for gaps. Ask me if you're not sure a paper fits	Skip reading the literature
<i>... [a] 5-page briefing document... for the executive team of funders</i>	State the problem to be addressed, what's known and what's not known	Make the document too long or without substance
<i>In-person presentation by 2 people</i>	Practice the timing. The presentation should be 10 minutes of delivery (6 slides)	Run long. Worry about 'performing'

Your grade depends on the group and you

Work hard at this. It's worth a lot of the points and actually is fun

Slack, expecting your colleagues to do the work

Briefing document guidance

- ✓ State the problem. Why is Gill Bates going to give you the time of day?
 - E.g. Chronic and widespread homelessness should not be found in one of the wealthiest nations on the planet.
- ✓ State what's known.
 - E.g. In 2001 Quigley et al. made a convincing case that economic factors explained much of the housing in California. Improvements in the affordability of rental housing or its availability can reduce the incidence of homelessness.
- ✓ State what's not known.
 - Research is badly needed to know whether these findings still hold 20 years later and, if so, why little has been done since then.
- ✓ Make the pitch.
 - Empty out your pockets to fund us to do this research.
 - We will perform the following activities in the coming year with these funds ...
- ✓ The briefing document includes everything – the cover sheet, the references etc.
 - BUT you can use collateral and additional materials, like an appendix. You could put the references in that appendix, for example.
 - JUST REMEMBER it is the briefing sheet and the presentation that get most of the grade; appendix materials may not be graded

Group funding proposal rubric

The following factors contribute to the grade on the group funding proposal, with a potential breakdown of points

1. briefing document accessibility [4]
2. briefing document content [4]
3. briefing document logical flow [3]
4. presentation slide content + style [4]
5. delivery of content in presentation [2]
6. answering questions in the presentation [1]
7. individual contribution [2]

Group research paper individual contribution report

Here are the instructions for you to tell me about individual contributions.

- A. Within 3 days of submitting the paper, email me with the following as the subject line: "[your group name] - individual assessment"
- B. In the body of the email state the following using the same list numbering as I use here
1. How many hours did the average group member spend working on the paper? Provide an answer to the nearest 15 minutes.
 2. How many hours did you spend working on the paper? Provide an answer to the nearest 15 minutes.
 3. List all group members and describe for each their contribution.
 - i. Who conceptualized the paper?
 - ii. Who produced the outline?
 - iii. Who researched and summarized which source materials?
 - iv. Who drafted the storyboard?
 - v. Who wrote the following sections – introduction, methods, findings, discussion/conclusion?
 - vi. Who wrote which draft?
 - vii. Who reviewed and edited drafts?
 4. Did any single person or group of people contribute more than the other group members? If so, who and how?
 5. Did any single person or group of people contribute less than the other group members? If so, who and how?

Group funding proposal project individual contribution report

Here are the instructions for you to tell me about individual contributions.

- A. Within 3 days of the group's presentation, email me with the following as the subject line: "[your group name] - individual assessment"
- B. In the body of the email state the following using the same list numbering as I use here
1. How many hours did the average group member spend working on the group project? Provide an answer to the nearest 15 minutes.
 2. How many hours did you spend working on the group project? Provide an answer to the nearest 15 minutes.
 3. List all group members and describe for each their contribution
 4. Did any single person or group of people contribute more than the other group members? If so, who and how?
 5. Did any single person or group of people contribute less than the other group members? If so, who and how?

Pop Quizzes

These are designed to incentivize you to stay engaged, but not to punish you if you're still shaky on a couple of concepts or papers, miss one class, or have a bad day. I also don't want to over-reward for just turning up, thus the maximum score possible is 10 percentage points. There will be a minimum of 6 pop quizzes. Your lowest score(s) will be dropped, depending on the number of quizzes completed.

Late work or tardy submissions

See the Econ 590 Schedule on Sakai for project details and deadlines. If your material is late, your grade on that assignment will drop 3 percentage points per day. Late submissions will be penalized for each day they are late. If it's not ready at deadline time, it's already considered a day late. Failure to meet some deadlines may earn a zero grade.

Grade appeal

Although grades are not negotiable, I will carefully consider a concern about an assignment grade if the concern is promptly identified. If you have questions or dispute a particular grade, please bring it to my attention **within a week of receiving that grade**. Unless there is an easily identifiable oversight, I will re-grade all material on that assignment. The only grades that I will discuss at the end of the semester are those assignments you complete at the end of the semester.

You have the right to appeal any grade in this course. You are free to talk with me about a grade in this course and discuss the determination of that grade. If you are not satisfied, you may submit your appeal in writing along with the assignment or project in question. I will respond to your appeal. If you are not satisfied, you may appeal to your academic dean. The academic dean will consider the merits of the grade appeal. After careful consideration, the dean may reject or accept your grade appeal. The dean may also appoint a grade-appeal committee to consider your complaint. That committee would then recommend action to the dean who appointed the committee.

Once reported, permanent course grades may not be changed except for clerical or arithmetical error or by a successful grade appeal, as outlined above. A formal grade appeal, if any, must be filed no later than the last day for late registration of the next semester.

Policies and resources

Expectations of students

- ✓ Engage in class and with the materials. Students will participate in regular discussions during class.
- ✓ You are expected to read the class materials ahead of time so that we can discuss the materials in class. Exceptions to this expectation – such as the first day of class – will be noted.
- ✓ Use the library resources to obtain the readings. Most readings are in academic journals, and these are available through the UNC library. Although I will link readings when possible through the Sakai platform, it is your responsibility to obtain the readings.
- ✓ Contribute to a group project. The group will be small (four to six students). Your grade from the project will depend both on the overall product from the group as well as your own individual contribution. the product will likely be a combination of a presentation and a briefing document of no more than 10 pages.
- ✓ Please show good phone and device courtesy. Be present with what is going on in the class. Refrain from making calls or messaging. Feel free to discretely type your notes and research topics live.

Attendance policy

- ✓ This course depends on instruction and your own independent study. Attend class and be present when in class.
- ✓ Per Economics Department policy, I take attendance during the first week of the semester and drop from the course who do not show up for the first two days of class. This action opens seats for students who are waiting to get into filled courses.
- ✓ While this is a discussion class that requires your real-time participation, I will attempt to accommodate those who are unable to attend due to COVID-19 issues. If you are in that situation, please let me know as soon as you can.
- ✓ UNC-Chapel Hill's attendance policy stipulates that *"No right or privilege exists that permits a student to be absent from any class meetings, except for these University Approved Absences."*
- ✓ The Econ 590 attendance policy conforms to the UNC-Chapel Hill's attendance, grading, and examination policies and procedures, as documented in the [Academic Catalog](#) (click link to read [the policy](#)).

Academic integrity

All students are expected to adhere to the Honor Code (honor.unc.edu). Any violation will result in an F for the course, and other sanctions may apply.

Community standards

We are in the midst of a global pandemic. This semester all enrolled students are required at all times to wear a mask covering the mouth and nose in our classroom. This requirement is to protect our educational community — your classmates and me — as we learn together. If you choose not to wear a mask, or wear it improperly, I will ask you to leave immediately, and I will submit a report to the [Office of Student Conduct](#). At that point you will be disenrolled from this course for the protection of our educational community. Students who have an authorized accommodation from Accessibility Resources and Service have an exception. For additional information, see [Carolina Together](#).

Counselling and Psychological Services

Counselling and Psychological Services is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body through timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services, whether for short or long-term needs. Go to their website: <https://caps.unc.edu/> or visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health Services building for a walk-in evaluation to learn more.

Peer tutoring is available at <https://econ.unc.edu/undergraduate/econaid/>

Title IX resources

Any student who is impacted by discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, or stalking is encouraged to seek resources on campus or in the community. Please contact the Director of Title IX Compliance (Adrienne Allison – Adrienne.allison@unc.edu), Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (reportandresponse@unc.edu), Counseling and Psychological Services (confidential), or the Gender Violence Services Coordinators (gvscc@unc.edu; confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at safe.unc.edu.

Accessibility Resources and Service

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in barriers to fully accessing University courses, programs and activities. Accommodations are determined through the Office of

Accessibility Resources and Service (ARS) for individuals with documented qualifying disabilities in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. See the ARS Website for contact information: <https://ars.unc.edu> or email ars@unc.edu.

Important dates (As of January 10, 2022)

What	When
Observe MLK Jr Day	January 17
Group membership and topic request	January 19
Outline document for group research paper due	January 26
Storyboard for group research paper due	February 2
Not-Quite-Midterm Exam	February 14
Sources document for group research paper due	February 23
Group Funding Proposal Presentations	February 28 and March 2
Draft group research paper due – prof and peer review	March 7
Peer review comments on other group's paper due to prof	March 10
Spring Break	March 11 – March 21
Alex Cowell out – Exam and guest lecture	March 24 – March 31
Just-Past-Midterm Exam	March 28
Group Research Paper due	April 6
Final	4pm May 5

Week-By-Week Schedule and Readings

These are updated regularly. Please see the separate document