

UNC Course Syllabus for ECON 586-001

Fall 2022

<u>Course:</u>	ECON 586-001	<u>Term:</u>	Fall 2022
<u>Credit hours:</u>	3.0	<u>Schedule:</u>	M/W 12:20 - 1:35 PM
<u>Prerequisites:</u>	ECON 400, ECON 410	<u>Location:</u>	Caldwell, Room 0105
<u>Instructor:</u>	DeForest McDuff		Zoom as needed
<u>Email:</u>	dmcduff@email.unc.edu	<u>Office hours:</u>	Zoom by appointment

Course Title: Economics of Life: Applying Economics to Life’s Big Questions

Course Description: This course explores the intersection of economics and self-examination in trying to live a good life. Students will learn about economic models, data, and economic research in the following areas: (1) Education, (2) Career, (3) Finance, (4) Marriage, (5) Children, (6) Individuals, (7) Cooperation, and (8) Society. Students will review evidence and excerpts from published economic research, classic economic thinkers (*e.g.*, Adam Smith, John Rawls, Gary Becker), and contemporary economists (*e.g.*, Russ Roberts, Angus Deaton, David Card, Dan Ariely). Students will engage in regular online and classroom discussions, including a research project with an in-class group presentation. The course culminates in a self-reflective term paper with the following prompt: “What are you seeking in life, and how can economics help you get there?”

Learning Objectives:

- To understand and apply economic models
- To review and evaluate empirical evidence
- To consider a range of economic perspectives
- To think critically about life objectives and trade-offs
- To apply economic principles and research to personal aspirations and life goals

Assignments:

- **Readings:** Students will be assigned a variety of readings, including book chapters, academic papers, and online sources to be provided by the instructor and completed in advance of class. You must also purchase the following two books:
 - 1. Russ Roberts (2014), *How Adam Smith Can Change Your Life* ([Amazon](#))
 - 2. Bill Perkins (2019), *Die with Zero: Getting All You Can from Your Money and Life* ([Amazon](#))
- **#1 Forum discussions:** The instructor will provide online prompts and questions for online written discussion via Sakai. Students are expected to contribute at least 1 affirmative response and 1 response to another student per online prompt.
- **#2 Group presentations:** Students will research and present to the class group presentations on an Economics of Life topic of their choosing. Details will be provided in class.
- **#3 Term papers:** Students will write a term paper at least 10 pages in length with the prompt: “What are you seeking in life, and how can economics help you get there?”

Grading:

- 20% Class Attendance and Participation
- 30% Online Forums
- 20% Group Project
- 30% Term Paper

Readings: The instructor will post readings online that are relevant to each topic being studied. Readings will include book chapters, academic papers, and online sources. Students are expected to complete the readings outside of class and in advance of the topic being discussed. Some readings are easy to follow (*i.e.*, introductory-level economics) whereas others are more difficult (*i.e.*, published research and graduate-level material). Students should strive to review and understand all materials as best as possible, recognizing that full comprehension of more difficult material is not needed.

Class Attendance and Participation: Classes will include (1) lectures in which the instructor providing most of the content and (2) discussions in which the students and instructor will discuss course content. Class attendance is required except for University approved absences, and absences will result in a lower participation grade. Students will be evaluated based on class attendance, interaction outside of class (*e.g.*, office hours), and the quantity and quality of class participation.

Online Forums: The instructor will provide online prompts in Sakai Forums related to the readings and class lectures. Students are expected to contribute to the online discussions by providing at least 1 affirmative response and 1 response to another student per posted prompt. Students are expected to engage in open dialogue that respects diversity of opinions, such that all students' opinions will be respected and permitted in a constructive discussion of the core issues. The instructor reserves the right to moderate online discussions, as needed. Online participation will be evaluated based on the consistency, quantity, and quality of online participation in the forums.

Group Projects: Students will complete a group research project on one of the course topics. Students will research that topic and present their findings to the class. Groups will be comprised of 4-6 students each and will be responsible for submitting a PowerPoint presentation and presenting for 20 minutes in class. Topics must be pre-approved by the instructor.

Term Paper: Students will write a self-reflective term paper that include economic analysis and research components. The papers should combine economic analysis (relevant models, data, and trade-offs) and economic research (papers and book chapters) with personal evaluation (how those trade-offs apply to one's own life). Students will share papers with the rest of the class and will review and discuss the term papers. Term papers will be graded based on (1) writing, (2) economic analysis, (3) course content, and (4) creativity / originality. The instructor will provide more guidance on term papers during class.

Academic Integrity: Students are bound by the University Honor Code (<http://honor.unc.edu/>) and must adhere to University standards of academic integrity. During class discussions and particularly in student term papers, all words or ideas that are not your own must be cited. Plagiarism is taken very seriously in and may be referred to the University. Please see the UNC Plagiarism Tutorial for an overview of why we cite and what constitutes plagiarism (<https://guides.lib.unc.edu/plagiarism>).

Teaching format: UNC is planning for in-person learning this semester, though recognizing that plans may change and that university guidance will be followed. Periodically, the instructor may need to hold a class via Zoom or move the time of the class to accommodate a scheduling conflict; in such cases, the instructor will provide further guidance. Remote classes via Zoom may be recorded by the instructor for use and reference within the class. Consistent with UNC policy, students may not share or distribute the recordings outside of class for any reason.

Diversity Statement: I respect the perspectives of individuals from all backgrounds reflecting the diversity of our students. I strive to make our classroom an inclusive space for all students and welcome any suggestions or feedback in this regard during the course.

Student Resources: Students have access to a number of University resources, including counseling and psychological services (<https://caps.unc.edu/>), the UNC Learning Center (<http://learningcenter.unc.edu/>), and the UNC Writing Center (<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/>). Students are encouraged to use those resources, as needed, and may contact the instructor with any questions with accessing those resources.

Course Evaluations: The University will distribute student course evaluations at the end of the semester during the last week of classes. I value your feedback and suggestions for making future versions of the course as good as possible. If you have any suggestions or concerns about how the course is going, I highly encourage you to raise these with me as they arise so that I can make the course as successful as possible.

Tentative Class Schedule: See the subsequent pages below for a tentative class schedule. The instructor will modify the schedule and readings as the semester progresses, as needed, to accommodate covering the topics of the course.

Tentative Class Schedule

Class	Topic	Outline	Readings
1	Introduction	Class topics and objectives	Course Syllabus
2	A Good Life	1. Goals <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. What are we pursuing? b. What should we pursue? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Russ Roberts (2014), How Adam Smith Can Change Your Life, Penguin Random House Publishing, Chapters 1-3. 2. Bill Perkins (2020), Die with Zero: Getting All You Can from Your Money and Life, First Mariner Books, Chapter 1.
3-4	Education	1. Economics of Higher Education <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Returns to education b. Human capital v. Signaling 2. Education Choices <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. The role of college b. How much and what kind c. Market equilibrium 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. David Card (1999), "The Causal Effect of Education on Earnings," The Handbook of Labor Economics, Chapter 30. 2. Gary Becker (2008), "Human Capital," Concise Encyclopedia of Human Capital. 3. Bryan Caplan (2018), The Case Against Education, Princeton University Press, Chapter 1 (The Magic of Education), Chapter 4 (The Signs of Signaling). 4. Georgetown University (2015), "The Economic Value of College Majors," Center on Education and the Workforce.
5-6	Career	1. Labor Markets <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Wages by profession 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. George Borjas (2019), Labor Economics: 8th Edition, McGraw-Hill, Chapter 4: Labor Market Equilibrium.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> b. Labor market equilibrium <p>2. Career Choices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Passion v. craftsman b. Finding your arena c. Uncertainty 	<p>2. Cal Newport (2012), <i>So Good They Can't Ignore You</i>, Grand Central Publishing, Chapters 1-4.</p> <p>3. Financial Samurai, "Ikigai is Why You Shouldn't be Afraid of Retirement."</p>
7-8	Finances	<p>1. Saving</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. How much to save? b. What are financial markets? <p>2. Investing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. How to invest? b. How much risk to take? 	<p>1. Bill Perkins (2020), <i>Die with Zero: Getting All You Can from Your Money and Life</i>, First Mariner Books, Chapters 2, 6.</p> <p>2 – TBD. John Bogle (2017), <i>The Little Book of Common Sense Investing: 10th Anniversary Edition</i>, Wiley Publishing, Introduction, Chapter 3 – TBD. William Bernstein (2002, 2010), <i>The Four Pillars of Investing: Lessons for Building a Winning Portfolio</i>, McGraw-Hill, Introduction.</p>
9-10	Marriage	<p>1. The Economic Lens</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Economic explanations b. Marriage and well-being c. Finding a partner <p>2. Evolution of Marriage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Trends b. Economic explanations 	<p>1. Stevenson and Wolfers (2007), "Marriage and Divorce: Changes and their Driving Forces," <i>Journal of Economic Perspectives</i>, 21(2).</p> <p>2. Stutzer and Frey (2006), "Does Marriage Make People Happy, or Do Happy People Get Married?," <i>The Journal of Socio-Economics</i>, 35, pp. 326-347.</p> <p>3. Lundberg, Pollak, and Stearns (2016), "Family Inequality: Diverging Patterns in Marriage, Cohabitation, and Childbearing," <i>Journal of Economic Perspectives</i>, 30(2).</p>

11-12	Children	<p>1. What's good for the parents?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Demand for children b. Parental well-being <p>2. What's good for the children?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Parental investment b. Life outcomes <p>3. What's good for the world?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Malthusian economics b. Population growth 	<p>1. The Guardian (2011), "Is Strict Parenting Better for Children?"</p> <p>2. Amy Chua (2011), <i>Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother</i>, Penguin Group, Chapters 6-11.</p> <p>3. Bryan Caplan (2011), <i>Selfish Reasons to Have More Kids</i>, Basic Books, Introduction, Chapter 2 (The Case Against Guilt).</p> <p>4 - TBD. Steven Landsburg (2007), <i>The Unconventional Wisdom of Economics</i>, Simon & Schuster, Chapter 2 (Be Fruitful and Multiply).</p>
13-16	Group Presentations	In-class presentations	
17-18	Individual Pursuits	<p>1. Well-being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. What is well-being? b. What improves well-being? <p>2. Happiness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Are we striving for happiness? b. What else might we strive for? 	<p>1. Frey and Stutzer (2002), "What Can Economists Learn from Happiness Research," <i>Journal of Economic Literature</i>, 40(2), pp. 402-435.</p> <p>2. Kahneman and Deaton (2010), "High Income Improves Evaluation of Life but not Emotional Well-Being", <i>Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America</i>, 107(38).</p>
19	Discussion	Term Papers	

20-22	Cooperation	<p>1. Cooperation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The value of cooperation b. The economics of cooperation <p>2. Giving</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Should we cooperate? b. What about ethics, giving, and honesty? <p>3. Collective Decisions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Who gets to decide? 	<p>1. Russ Roberts (2014), How Adam Smith Can Change Your Life, Penguin Random House Publishing, Chapters 7-10.</p> <p>2. Freakonomics Podcast (2021), “Robert Axelrod on Why Being Nice, Forgiving, and Provokable are the Best Strategies for Life”, People I (Mostly) Admire, Ep. 47.</p> <p>3. Adam Grant (2016), Give and Take: Why Helping Others Drives Our Success, Penguin Books, Chapter 1 (Good Returns)</p>
23	Discussion	Term Papers	
24-25	Society	<p>1. Human Progress</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. How are we doing? b. What about collective action? <p>2. Life Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. What is fair? What is just? b. What about inequality? 	<p>1. John Rawls (1971), A Theory of Justice, Presidents and Fellows and Harvard University, Excerpts.</p> <p>2. Michael Sandel (2020), The Tyranny of Merit: What’s Become of the Common Good, Farrar Straus and Giroux Publishing, Chapter 5.</p> <p>3. Emmanuel Saez (2017), “Income and Wealth Inequality: Evidence and Policy Implications.”</p> <p>TBD</p>
	Term Paper Due		

26	Discussion	Term Papers	
27	Final Class	Reflection	