

ECON 310: Microeconomics Theory and Applications
Spring 2024
3 Credit Hours

Course Information

Instructor: Roberto Lagos Mondragon

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Office Hours: Gardner Hall 4th floor Mondays at 2:00-3:00 pm and Wednesdays 11:00 am -12:00 pm

Teaching Assistant: Carla de Oliveira

Office Hours: TBD

Undergraduate Teaching Assistant: Deborah Brown

Office Hours: TBD

Mode: In-Person

Place and Time: Gardner Hall - Room 0008. MW, 12:20-1:35 pm

Final Exam: Friday, May 10 at 12:00 pm

Course Description

Analysis of the ways in which consumers and businesses interact in a market economy.

Course Materials

There is no required textbook for this class but there are several available that will contain useful supplementary information and practice problems. Microeconomics by Robert Pindyck and Daniel Rubinfeld is a good option but pretty much any undergraduate level textbook with "Intermediate Microeconomics" in the title will be a good resource. Please do not feel the need to purchase a new textbook for this class. I will make versions of my own notes available to you but please note that they may not be full or complete to encourage active listening during class.

Course Goals

1. The main takeaway that I want you to have from this course is not necessarily the knowledge of a specific model or "economic facts" but the ability to use economic models and the economist's way of thinking to understand and think critically about a wide range of issues and problems present in today's world.

2. Along the lines of goal #1, I want this course to help you to build critical thinking skills, especially the ability to see a new problem and use economic intuition and your economics knowledge to analyze and think of a solution to that problem.
3. Understand the way that macroeconomists think and explain human behavior and evaluate its strengths and shortcomings.

Learning Objectives

To achieve these course goals, we will need to learn the basic mathematical tools and reasoning economists use to evaluate real-world situations, some of these include:

1. Vocabulary: Economists use a unique set of vocabulary that can be confusing at first, especially when we redefine a word from its typical English meaning.
2. Assumptions: What economists assume about behavior and why they assume those things.
3. The ability to correctly interpret and understand the results and implications of each model we study.
4. The ability to analyze a model and pinpoint the appropriate contexts and real-world situations to which the model can be applied.
5. The ability to analyze a model and pinpoint contexts and real-life situations the model SHOULD NOT be applied to and understand the implications when a real-world problem is not analyzed with an appropriate model

Class Time

Each class will consist of lectures and participation activities. To be prepared for class you should come having recently read over lecture notes or your own notes from the previous lecture and be ready to take off from where we last left off. To incentivize this, we will have a quick PollEverywhere quiz at the beginning of each class that counts as your participation grade. During class, you are expected to pay attention and participate in activities and answer questions from time to time. After class, I encourage you to review the topics of the day and get a general view of any of the specifics we covered during class. The class works better when everyone is engaged and actively thinking about the material. In order to be successful in this class I would expect that you spend on average 3-6 hours per week outside of class time on the material. This of course will vary from person to person and week to week.

Homework

There will be 10 homework assignments you must complete throughout the semester. I will post assignments to Sakai 1-2 weeks before they are due. You are highly encouraged to work with other students on the assignments, but everyone must turn in his or her own version of the homework. Your assignment must clearly reflect your own work and cannot contain verbatim passages from your classmates' assignments.

The homework for this class is very important, you cannot learn economics by solely reading or listening to a lecture. You should use the homework as a chance to engage with the material and deepen your understanding. To make the homework less busywork and more of a learning opportunity, if you get a higher grade on the final than your overall homework grade I will raise the homework grade to the level of your final grade. This is my way of saying that I don't care if you can get it right the first time, I just care that you understand it eventually.

I will provide answers to all questions about one week after the assignment is due. Homework will be turned in on Gradescope and no late work is accepted. I do not accept late homework because the day it is due, we may discuss some details of the homework in class. To give you the most amount of time possible I make it due right before class starts.

Exams

There will be two midterm exams and one final exam. These exams will be held in person.

An unexcused absence will result in a zero grade for that exam. If you had extenuating circumstances that made it impossible for you to attend that exam and not notify me about it in advance, talk with me and we'll work it out. This will typically result in placing the weight of a midterm exam on the final exam.

If you do poorly on a midterm exam, I do not want you to feel as if you cannot do well in the course. Accordingly, the midterm with the better score will count for 30% of the final grade and the worse will count for 10%.

If you miss an exam due to a university-approved absence, you must provide documentation for this approval as soon you are aware of the conflict and can provide the documentation. Valid reasons for missing an exam include a documented personal illness, a serious illness or emergency within your immediate family, or an authorized university activity. Personal travel, job interviews, and club activities are not approved absences.

Re-grade policy: All exams are multiple-choice, so I don't anticipate there being any regrade requests, but if you think a question was worded ambiguously or think your answer is correct feel free to write me an email stating your reasoning and we'll talk about it.

Grading

Your grade will be based on three exams, your homework assignments, and class participation. Your grade is divided as follows:

Midterm(s): 40%

Final: 40%

Homework: 10%

Participation: 10%

Grades will be scaled so that final course grades have at least a B- average although I hope the average will be higher. They will be curved in such a way that no one is harmed by the curve. Accordingly, your raw score on exams may not tell you much about the actual grade. No scaling will be done until all grades are in at the end of the semester. I will give a distribution of grades for each exam, so you have an idea about how you're doing relative to the rest of the class. For participation grades please see the next section.

Attendance Policy

Class Policy

Due to the design of this class, attendance and participation in class activities is highly important to the learning process. Attendance is not mandatory per se, but it is incentivized by a 2-3 question PollEverywhere quiz on the previous class period's content. I will drop 10% of your lowest quiz scores to permit for any illness or unforeseen circumstances, this roughly comes out to about 3 class periods of unexcused absences. The quiz will be started promptly at the beginning of class, if you do not answer the question before it is locked you will not receive credit.

University Policy

No right or privilege exists that permits a student to be absent from any class meetings, except for these University Approved Absences:

- Authorized University activities
- Disability/religious observance/pregnancy, as required by law and approved by Accessibility Resources and Service and/or the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (EOC)
- Significant health condition and/or personal/family emergency as approved by the Office of the Dean of Students, Gender Violence Service Coordinators, and/or the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (EOC).

If you have a University Approved Absence we will work together to make up what you missed during class. If you have a conflict with one of the exam dates due to a University Approved Absence please let me know with at least three weeks notice.

Technology Usage

No laptops or cellphones should be opened or used during class time except for the PollEverywhere quiz at the beginning of class. The exception I'll make is if you use a tablet device to take handwritten notes but these must be flat on the table instead of propped up at an angle. You will not need computers for any in-class activities.

Accessibility Resources

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. Accommodation is 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.

Additional Student Resources

The UNC Learning Center is a great resource both for students who are struggling in their courses and for those who want to be proactive and develop sound study practices to prevent falling behind. They offer individual consultations, peer tutoring, academic coaching, test prep programming, study skills workshops, and peer study groups. If you think you might benefit from their services, please visit them in SASB North or visit their website to set up an appointment: <http://learningcenter.unc.edu>.

The Writing Center is located in the Student and Academic Services Building and offers personalized writing consultations as well as a variety of other resources. This could be a wonderful resource to help with your writing assignments in this course (and any assignments in your other courses). You do not need a complete draft of your assignment to visit; they can help you at any stage! You can chat with someone in the writing center or set up an appointment on their website: <http://writingcenter.unc.edu>.

Counseling and Psychological Services

CAPS 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.

Title IX

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 (gvsc@unc.edu; confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at safe.unc.edu.

Honor Code

All students are expected to follow the guidelines of the UNC honor code. In particular, students are expected to refrain from “lying, cheating, or stealing” in the academic context. If you are unsure about which actions violate that honor code, please see me or consult honor.unc.edu. Students are bound by the Honor Code in taking exams and in written work. The Honor Code of the University is in effect at all times, and the submission of work signifies understanding and acceptance of those requirements. Plagiarism will not be tolerated.

Learning Center

The UNC Learning Center is a great resource both for students who are struggling in their courses and for those who want to be proactive and develop sound study practices to prevent falling behind. They offer individual consultations, peer tutoring, academic coaching, test prep programming, study skills workshops, and peer study groups. If you think you might benefit from their services, please visit them in SASB North or visit their website to set up an appointment: <http://learningcenter.unc.edu>.

Schedule

I am providing you with a rough schedule of topics for the semester. This will be the general direction for the course, but timing may be subject to change.

1. Preferences
2. Utility
3. Budget Constraints
4. Constrained Utility Maximization
5. Demand
6. Income and Substitution Effects
7. Uncertainty
8. Cost and Cost Minimization
9. Perfect Competition
10. Monopoly
11. Game Theory
12. Oligopoly
13. Time Permitting: Externalities and Public Goods

Disclaimer

I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus, including homework due dates and test dates. These changes will be announced as early as possible.