Eco 736 Public Economics
Spring 2020

Instructor: Prof. Marie Hull
Bryan 445
mchull2@uncg.edu
Office hours: TR 3:30-4:30pm and by appointment

Class: MW 9:30-10:45am
Bryan 110

Course description

Public economics is the study of the role of the government in the economy. This graduate-level course will focus on the effect of government policies on economic outcomes, rather than examining when and how governments should intervene. Thus, a key theme in the course will be modern empirical methods used for policy analysis. Policy areas covered include tax and transfer policy, public health, housing, education, family, and environmental policy, among others. Prerequisites: Eco 641 and Eco 642, or permission of instructor

Course materials

Journal articles and other supplemental readings, available on Canvas or through the library

An undergraduate-level text in public economics may be useful as a reference. I recommend Public Finance and Public Policy (any recent edition) by Jonathan Gruber.

Course objectives

By the end of the course, students will:
• Understand major themes in public economics and have a working knowledge of various types of government programs
• Understand econometric techniques commonly used to analyze the effects of public policies, including instrumental variables, difference-in-differences, regression discontinuity, and synthetic controls
• Formulate a proposal to evaluate the effect of a government policy through an empirical analysis
• Develop skills in discussing and presenting research
Evaluation

Evaluation in this course will consist of participation, presentations, a research proposal, and take-home midterm and final exams.

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<td>Midterm exam</td>
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<td>Final exam</td>
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<td>Presentations</td>
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<td>Research proposal</td>
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<td>Participation</td>
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**Exams:** The course will have take-home midterm and final exams that are open-book and open-note. The exams will not be cumulative, and they will cover or build on the assigned readings. The midterm exam will be due on **Wednesday, February 26**, and the final exam will be due **Monday, May 4**.

**Presentations:** Each student will be responsible for giving two presentations. The first will be a short (approximately 20 minutes) presentation on one of the assigned readings or a related paper. The presentation should offer an overview of the paper and pose questions for discussion. Students will choose the paper for the presentation with my help at the beginning of the semester. The second presentation will cover their research proposal (see below).

**Research proposal:** By the end of the semester, students will write an original research proposal that addresses a question of interest in public economics. The suggested length is 6-12 double-spaced pages with standard formatting (10- to 12-point Times New Roman, Arial, or similar font; 1-inch margins; etc.). The proposal should:
- explicitly state and motivate the research question;
- provide a brief literature review (suggested citations 5-10) that points to a gap in the literature;
- describe a proposed data source and why it is well suited to answer the research question;
- describe the estimation strategy, including a discussion of any assumptions necessary for identification; and
- conclude with a discussion of potential problems and limitations to the proposed project.

Students will turn in a short description of the progress they have made on their research proposal on **Monday, March 23**. The suggested length is 1-2 pages with standard formatting. The description will be used for peer feedback. Students will turn in an updated description on **Monday, April 6**, for comments from the instructor. The final version of the research proposal will be due on **Wednesday, April 22**. Students will present their research proposal during the last week of class (April 27 or 29).

**Participation:** Your participation grade depends on several factors:
- arriving to class prepared to participate and engaging with the material during class,
- posting on Canvas in response to the readings by 5pm on the day before we discuss the reading in class, and
- attending the external research seminars (see below).

**Seminar attendance:** Students are required to attend at least three research seminars offered by the UNCG Economics Department. These seminars are generally held on Fridays 3:30-5pm.
at several points during the semester. Check the course Canvas page for up-to-date information on the seminar series. If you have conflicts that prevent you from attending at least three seminars, please see me as soon as possible so that I can come up with an alternative assignment. Other events may substitute pending instructor approval.

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to know and abide by UNCG’s Academic Integrity Policy in all matters pertaining to this course. Violations will be pursued in accordance with the policy. For more information, see: https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0rFGGhJvbDHUExSZmFFaWFmb00/view

Faculty and Student Guidelines