

Economics of Poverty and Discrimination in the United States, CAS EC325

On campus course, Summer I 2016

Instructor: Lee Tucker

Office: SSW room 543, 270 Bay State Road

Mailbox: SSW room 456

Office hours: Monday 12:30pm - 2:00pm, Tuesday 12:30pm – 2:00pm, or by appointment

E-mail: tuckerl@bu.edu

Course Website: The material for this class (this syllabus, readings, problem sets, announcements) will be posted on the course web page at: <http://learn.bu.edu/>

Classes: Monday through Wednesday 2:00pm - 4:30pm (CAS B06A)

Overview

The aim of this course is to use your knowledge of economics and statistics to examine issues of poverty and discrimination in the United States, and to provide a broad overview of the institutional and policy frameworks that seek to address poverty and discrimination in this country. As with all upper-division economics courses, a key goal of this course is to strengthen your ability to “think like an economist.” This means that we will spend a considerable amount of time considering both theory and empirical evidence.

Topics to be covered include: the history of anti-poverty policies in the U.S., theories of discrimination in the labor market, race and gender discrimination, the minimum wage and other labor market policies, policies aimed at early childhood, the effects of concentrated poverty, and intergenerational mobility. Where possible, these issues will be connected to current policy debates.

These are challenging and broad topics, and this will be a challenging course. You may leave this course feeling that you have more questions and fewer answers about how to address poverty and discrimination than when you began. A recurring theme will be exploring the limits of statistical evidence to answer these policy questions, and so a strong understanding of basic statistical techniques is required. In addition to intermediate microeconomic theory (EC201), an initial course in empirical economics (EC203, EC303, or EC305) is required for this course.

Grading

- Short paper proposal 5%
- Midterm 25%
- Short paper 30%
- Final Exam 35%
- Class Participation 5%

Your final course grade will be a weighted average of your performance in each of the categories stated above. Letter grades will be determined according to the final distribution of all the students in the course. After the midterm, I will communicate you your preliminary cumulative percentage, as well as a preliminary corresponding letter grade. This letter grade is not binding in any way, and is only an approximation of your standing in the course.

As an initial assignment, you will be asked to produce a 1-2 page **proposal for a short paper** that you will

write over the course of the term. In the proposal, I will ask you to choose from a list of potential policy interventions that are designed to address issues of poverty and/or discrimination. In the initial proposal, you should outline what the policy is, the goal that you believe that it is designed to achieve, and any broad theoretical concerns with the policy that your training in economics suggests may be of concern.

For the **short paper**, I expect you to produce a paper of 4-8 pages in length which describes in further detail the goals, theoretical underpinnings, and potential pitfalls of the policy that you have chosen. If the policy has been enacted in the United States, you should provide a brief summary of the history of the policy, and a summary of the empirical evidence of its success or failure. If the policy has been enacted abroad, but not in the United States, then an overview of its use abroad and potential for use in the U.S. would be appropriate. If the policy has not yet been enacted, then you should describe in detail a proposed way to test this policy, keeping in mind the discussions of statistical methods that we will have in class. A detailed study of academic research is encouraged, but is not necessary. However, identifying credible sources for information is an important skill, and the quality of your research will be an important determinant of your grade. Besides the textbook and the citations therein, I am happy to point students toward reliable information sources on their chosen policy.

Because of the compressed schedule of this course, the short paper is due on June 27th, which is two days before the final exam for this course. I strongly advise students not to procrastinate, and to be proactive in researching the policy to be discussed in their paper.

There will be one **midterm** exam and a **final exam**. Both exams are required. No makeup midterm exams will be given. Failure to attend the midterm will result in a grade of 0 for the midterm. The midterm is scheduled for Wednesday, June 8th. The final exam will be held in-class on the last meeting of the semester, which is Wednesday, June 29th. Both the midterm and the final will be graded on a 100-point scale. The final will be more heavily weighted towards the last part of the course but will nevertheless be cumulative. You are welcome to use calculators in the exams, though they are not required.

The **class participation** grade will take into account your active participation in occasional class discussions, as well as questions and answers given during the course of regular lectures. Passive class attendance does not count towards the class participation grade.

Academic Conduct Code

Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated in any College of Arts & Sciences course. They will result in no credit for the assignment or examination and may lead to disciplinary actions, up to and including expulsion from the university. Please take the time to review the Student Academic Conduct Code:
<http://www.bu.edu/academics/cas/policies/academic-conduct/>

I take cheating *very* seriously, and I will pursue disciplinary action *aggressively* against anyone who cheats in my course. However, I do not wish to discourage you from discussing the course material or the assignments with other students in the class. On the contrary – you should share your thoughts, questions and solutions. Working as a group will help you to solidify your understanding of the material, but it is important that you still think about the material independently and that you write your own solutions/papers. If you have any questions or concerns, please let me know.

Students with Documented Disabilities

If you have a disability that necessitates extra time for exams, or any other accommodations, you will need to give me a note from the BU office of Disabilities Services *at least one week before the midterm*.

Attendance

Class attendance is not formally required, in the sense that I do not take attendance, and that you do not need to contact me to let me know that you will be missing class. Additionally, all presentation materials that I use

will be posted online so that you may access them if you miss a class. However, you should plan to attend this class regularly. Much of the content and value of this course will take place in lectures in a way that cannot be replicated if you do not attend them. Furthermore, in order to receive full credit in the class participation grade, one should attend class regularly, and only discussions and questions that take place in class will count toward this grade.

Presentation Slides and Practice Questions

In general, I will upload my presentation slides to the course website in advance of my lectures. I encourage you to print the slides or bring an electronic copy with you to reference and/or annotate. Tablet or laptop use is allowed in class for the purpose of reviewing these slides or other course materials.

I will also post practice questions and study review materials in advance of the exams. Because the textbook contains much more detail than can be covered in the course, the presentation slides and review materials will also serve as your indicator of what will be covered on the exams.

Required Text and Readings

Lang, Kevin, *Poverty and Discrimination*, Princeton University Press, 2007.

Additional readings will be posted on the course website. I will include a small number of required readings, and several additional readings that are simply recommended for further understanding of current issues. I will notify you of these readings in class or over email when they are posted.

Exam Content

The exams will draw primarily from the material presented in class. I may also ask basic questions involving material from the required non-textbook readings. Material that is in the textbook but that is not covered in class will not be included on the exams. I will provide students with a few review questions prior to exams, which are recommended as study material.

Email Policies

I do my best to respond to student emails in the order that they are received, within a reasonable period of time. However, lengthy questions about course content are usually best answered in person. If you have a lengthy question regarding course materials and are unable to come to regular office hours to ask it, please email me to set an appointment. If a question is too long or is unclear, I may ask you to set an appointment rather than providing an answer by email.

COURSE SCHEDULE (tentative)

Please note that the dates on which material will be covered are approximate. Topics may take more or less time than I anticipate, and I may decide to change the order in which we address various topics. Exams will cover material that has been covered in the actual lectures regardless of whether we are ahead of or behind the projected schedule.

Date	Topic	Textbook Chapters
5/23 M	Introduction	1
5/24 T	Measuring Poverty	2
5/25 W	Dynamics of poverty/poverty policy/trends in poverty	3,4
5/31 T		
6/1 W	Labor market policies and trends; Short paper proposal due	5
6/3 F	<i>Substitute class</i>	
6/6 M		
6/7 T	Policies aimed at children	6
6/8 W	MIDTERM EXAM	
6/13 M	Education reform	8
6/14 T	Welfare reform	9
6/15 W	Theories of discrimination	10
6/20 M		
6/21 T	Racial discrimination	11, 12, 13
6/22 W		
6/27 M	Short paper due; Sex discrimination	14
6/28 T	Wrap-up and review	15
6/29 W	FINAL EXAM	