

Who am I?

- My name is Kyle Coombs
- This is my first-year at Vassar – I was at Bates for two years
- I'm originally from upstate NY, but have lived several places including Minnesota, Peru, DC, NYC, and Maine (now I live in Tarrytown)
- I study topics related to Public Economics, Labor, and Applied Micro
- I'll hold Office Hours in person on Tuesdays (2-3pm) and Thursdays (10:50-11:50am) in Blodgett 134 (or remote as needed)

Course overview

1 Taxes

- Tax incidence and excess burden
- Inequality and low-income support
- Optimal tax and transfer programs

2 Market failures and government interventions

- Externalities
- Public goods
- Moral hazard
- Adverse selection

Personal opinion: The first half of this class is harder than the second half, but YMMV

Attendance

- Please attend the class in person
- My official policy is listed on the syllabus, but roughly:
 - I excuse absences for medical, quarantine, family, etc. emergencies and religious observances/holidays
 - I will not grant exemptions for other classes, work, extracurriculars, etc.
 - Please tell to me ahead of time and we can figure something out
 - If you are not here and we have not discussed, I will note you as absent
- My goal is to make the course a better learning experience and it is easier to do that if I know who will be here ahead of time

Contacting me

Private question

- You can reach me at my university email kcoombs@vassar.edu
- To help me stay organized, write [ECON 342] *your topic* in the subject (i.e. [ECON 342] Missing class)

Public good questions

- Each Pset has a Moodle forum for asking “public good” questions
- There is also a “general” and “policy brief” forum
- These for questions that benefit everyone
- Example: “When is Pset 1 due?”
- I check the forum every 24 hours as well
- Responses to your peers’ questions helps you gain a class participation bonus

I respond to emails and check the fora, once per day (typically at 5pm)

Grading

- 25% of your grade will be determined by a midterm.
- 25% of your grade will be determined by a final.
- 15% of your grade will be determined by four out of five written problem sets. You can drop the lowest-scoring problem set.
- 10% of your grade will be determined by “class jobs”
- 25% of your grade will be determined by a group policy presentation that you help design and policy brief that you write.

I offer a 2.5% bonus for participation at my discretion – unexcused absences lose you this bonus

Problem sets & Exams

Problem Sets:

- There will be five problem sets: about one every 2-3 weeks
- The problem sets are tough and intended to be tough
 - A class example may show line graphs, while the problem set will provide equations – technically the same problem
 - You are encouraged to work together, but write up your own answers
 - They build on the math and statistical skills you built in your core classes

Exams:

- There will be an in-class midterm – Thursday before Fall Break and a final on the official date listed by Vassar
- You are allowed a cheatsheet: front-and-back of an 8x11 sheet of paper
- I am encouraging you to build a study guide that summarizes the key concepts and frameworks we cover in class

Submitting Psets

- Unless otherwise noted, all problem sets are due at the start of class on the Tuesday of the week posted
- Turn in a Pset in person and submit on Moodle as a .pdf or .docx file
- Handwritten Psets can be scanned to PDF using a variety of phone apps or library scanners
- You are encouraged to work together, but write up your own answers
- Late problem sets lose 50% if turned in within two days of the deadline, after that they receive a 0
- I will not accept problem sets:
 - via email
 - with poor quality scans

Exams

- Exams are written to take 75 minutes
- Short answer questions (3-6): Apply an economic concept. Designed to be answered in 1-3 sentences.
- Tougher, but not necessarily longer questions (1-2): Likely involves some math
- Midterm covers first half, final is cumulative
- Study advice: practice problems in textbook, on Moodle, review PS solutions

Policy presentation and brief

- During the semester, you'll work in groups to identify and suggest a fix for a policy failure
- You'll present your policy to the class and write a policy brief
- The presentation is 15 minutes long with 10 minutes for discussion
- The policy brief should be short – no more than 1800 words

Class jobs

- Each class, three students are randomly selected for tasks: reading summary, prior class summary, or note-taking.
- Jobs are graded on a 0-2 scale: 0 for no contribution, 1 for minimal effort, and 2 for satisfactory or exceptional effort.

Job Descriptions

- *Prior Class Summary*: Include the lecture topic, main learning goals, and any remaining questions.
- *Reading Summary*: Address the main idea, methods, data used (if empirical), findings, limitations, and implications of the study.
- *Note Taker*: Take comprehensive notes and post them to the Moodle page for all students to access.

Other course policies

Official language for each is in the syllabus – this is tl;dr

- AI: You are welcome to use AI for assignments, but must cite it (see syllabus language from JPubE)
- Reach out to Office of Accessibility and Educational Opportunity for accommodations in class
- The Teaching, Learning, and Research Center has ample academic support resources

Advice for this class

- Work through the solutions of problems that you get wrong
- Try practice problems beyond what I assign in class
- Check the economic intuition BEFORE you start the math
- Read instructions completely, clarify if you don't understand
- Be concise in your writing: in short answers, I penalize wrong answers even if the correct answer is given in the same paragraph
 - Why? Because it suggests you're just flinging mud at the wall and hoping something sticks
- Come to office hours, but come prepared

Questions?