Course Description:
This course is a first course in microeconomic analysis. While the material will be accessible to students with no economics background, we will cover some topics at the intermediate level. This course will develop a conceptual framework for analysis and apply this framework to real-world issues. We will examine the choices of individuals, firms, and governments in a variety of market environments. As a core MPA and MIPA course, we will develop competence in important analytical tools and critical thinking skills from the field of economics for the study of public affairs. There will be an emphasis on applying these tools and skills to evaluate existing policy and also to consider the implications of hypothetical policy alternatives. By the end of the course, students should (1) be familiar with the basic tools of microeconomic analysis, (2) have an understanding of their usefulness and limitations, and (3) have experience applying these tools to issues of public policy.

This course emphasizes the nature of decision-making by consumers, firms, and governments, and the effect of these decisions on the allocation of resources. A central issue is to define the meaning of "efficiency" in resource allocation to establish a best-case scenario that can then be compared across a variety of policy options. We will investigate the conditions under which a market economy is able to secure an efficient allocation of society’s resources, and explore how the public sector has an important role to play in a market economy like that of the United States. We will study the ways in which private market failure exists, and the possible response of government to this failure.

A second basic issue is to understand how the income generated by the economy's use of resources is allocated among people--workers and capital owners; highly-skilled workers and unskilled workers; rich and poor. The questions here are ones of "equity," or inequality.

A third objective is to assess the effectiveness of collective action--public policy--taken to improve economic efficiency and enhance equity. Having developed the analytical tools of microeconomics necessary to discuss efficiency and equity issues, we will apply them to a series of important contemporary public policy issues. Many of these issues involve public policy proposals, and our objective will be to understand how these proposals might affect the efficiency of the allocation of the nation's resources and equity or fairness in the distribution of income.

The course can roughly be thought of as having three segments. In the first segment, we will focus on the basic principles of consumer decision-making and the concepts of efficiency and equity, after which
there will be a midterm examination. In the second section, we will work on the economics of production, costs, and different forms of market structure. The third segment focuses on specific topics that the tools of applied microeconomics can be used to analyze.

**Course Canvas Site:** I will post problem sets, lecture slides, and supplemental materials to the course Canvas website, among other things. The address is [https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/368960](https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/368960)
The website includes the course syllabus (this document) and the readings (course e-reserves). Weekly problem sets, answer keys, supplementary readings, and other important information will also be posted on the website over the course of the semester. The course website shows the list of “Announcements,” where the instructor will post important course-related announcements. The TA and the instructor will also be communicating with you through e-mail class lists, and these e-mails will often direct you to the course website.

**Class Lecture Sessions:** The class will meet two times per week, on Monday and Wednesday. On Monday and Wednesday, the class will meet jointly from 9:30-10:45am; Professor Fletcher will be conducting these sessions. All of the Monday and Wednesday sessions will involve formal presentations, but with questions and comments encouraged.

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<th>Day</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>9:30AM-10:45AM</td>
<td>5106 Sewell Social Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>9:30AM-10:45AM</td>
<td>5106 Sewell Social Sciences</td>
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**Discussion Sections:** There are three discussion sections, and each student is assigned to one of these discussion sections. The TA, Nguyen Vuong, will be responsible for the discussion sections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DIS 301</td>
<td>9:55am-10:45am</td>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>574 Van Hise Hall</td>
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<tr>
<td>DIS 302</td>
<td>11:00am-11:50am</td>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>574 Van Hise Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIS 303</td>
<td>12:05pm-12:55pm</td>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>574 Van Hise Hall</td>
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In the weekly discussion section, Nguyen will go over the problem sets for the prior week, answer questions about the lectures during the previous week, and facilitate critical discussion of the course material. On some weeks, he will make a presentation on a topic that could not be covered in sufficient depth during the lectures. The separate discussion sections will be similar in format and content. Should scheduling conflicts arise during a particular week, students may substitute another discussion section for the one in which they are registered.

**We’ll also note that 880 students have two tutors:**
Mary Baumgartner, Mondays from 12:00-2:00pm, Sterling Hall 2335;
Johanna Schmidt, Tuesdays from 1:00-3:00pm, Agriculture Hall room 10

**Examinations and Grading:** There will be two midterm examinations and a final examination. The midterm examinations will be given during regularly scheduled class periods. The final examination will be given at the scheduled time during the final exam period or earlier (see below for date/time). Each of the midterm exams will count for 20 percent of the course grade. The final exam will be comprehensive (i.e., cumulative), and will count for 35 percent of the course grade. Hence, the exams will count for a total of 75 percent of the final course grade. Your homework completion, participation in class and discussion section, and Podcast assignments will account for the remainder (i.e., 25 percent) of the course grade.

**Weekly Homework / Problem Sets:** With some exceptions, there will be a problem set posted on the class web site by the ‘close of business’ each Wednesday. Students will complete the problem sets and
hand them in at the lecture on the following Monday. This will allow four days for completing the assignment. The problem set handed in on Monday will be reviewed in the discussion sections that week. While students are encouraged to discuss homework assignments with each other, the work turned in must be the student's own work. Your assignment must be turned in before the start of class and late homework will not be accepted. The homework assignments will be ‘graded’ using simple check (v), check-minus (v–), and check-plus (v+) grades.

Podcasts. Many lectures will also have a podcast of related material. You will listen to at least two podcasts during the semester and write a short (<1 page) memo about the key ideas in the podcast that intersect with 880 and any implications for ongoing policy debates. If a specific policy is described, be sure to outline winners and losers of the policy. In addition to the memo, students will also create an exam question based on the content of the podcast and be prepared to discuss the basic ideas of the podcast during class or discussion section. Sign up on the Google Doc here before Midterm 1: https://tinyurl.com/24zyuads

Strong Recommendation: In the past, students have found it very helpful to form study groups to work through these problems. The instructor can assist you in forming these groups.

Class Participation: Regular attendance at the two weekly lectures is essential to gain the full benefit from the course. Attendance at discussion sections is required.

Required Materials:

1. The following book is the recommended textbook for the course:


The reading assignments for each class meeting are shown on the attached class schedule (below). The readings are collected in folders at the Canvas class website. Many class sessions also have Khan Academy links for additional ways of learning the content. See also this excellent Online Course.

Related Readings: Because we will be discussing many current issues and policies, students are expected to keep up with major developments in the economy as well as the emergence of new economic issues and policy proposals. The best way to follow these developments is by reading regularly *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, or such business publications like *The Economist*. The instructor recommends regularly following a podcast such as *Tradeoffs* (health policy), *The Weeds* or *Freakonomics*.

A final note on the readings: in general, I suggest prioritizing the text book, lecture notes, journal articles (especially toward the end of the semester) for proficiency in the topics/ideas. The Khan Academy videos are meant to help you if you are having trouble or would like another perspective on the basic concepts. The popular-press readings (i.e. Slate articles) are meant to further tie the concepts to real world and interesting applications, but some students feel bogged down when doing all the readings each week, so it is fine to skim these readings.

Communication with Instructor: In addition to office hours, I will typically be available in the classroom before the class lectures. This would be a good time especially to discuss material, ask questions about class logistics, etc. so that I can share responses with the rest of the class during lecture. E-mail
Communication is best reserved for timely or highly person-specific matters that cannot be addressed during office hours.

**Concerns about the Course:** If you have a concern about the course, please bring it to the attention of the instructor or TA. If you have a concern about the grade you receive on a homework assignment or an examination, first talk to your TA, Nguyen Vuong. If you believe you still have a legitimate concern that has not been addressed, please provide Professor Fletcher with a written explanation of your concern. The instructor will review the materials and will be in touch with you.

**Course Outline:** Materials on Canvas Site: [https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/368960](https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/368960)

1. September 6:
   - Introduction to the Course: The Economic Problem: Production Possibilities, Concept of Tradeoffs
   - Barro: “Pleading the Case”
   - Skim: DeLong on “Thinking Like an Economist”
   - Deep Dive (after class): Mulligan Paper on FDA and Opportunity Costs
   - Khan: [Opportunity Costs](#)

   **Big Idea:** Opportunity Costs

2. September 11
   - Marginal Analysis, Supply, Demand, and Market Equilibrium.
   - Perloff, Chs. 1 & 2;
   - Landsburg, SE, “Giving Your All.” Slate 1997
   - Economist, Proof that you should get a life, December 2014
   - Khan Academy Links: [Marginal Benefits and Efficiency](#), [Marginal Utility](#), [Demand and Supply](#)

   **Big Idea:** Marginal Analysis, Sunk Costs

3. September 13
   - Shifts in Supply and Demand; Government Market Interventions (Quotas, Price Floors and Ceilings);
   - Perloff, Ch. 3, pp. 43-56;
   - Greg Mankiw, “A Veto Threat,”
   - Slate, Legalized Prostitution
   - Economist, The baseball-card bubble, December 2014

   - Khan Academy: [Minimum Wages and Price Floors](#)
   - Marginal Revolution: [Supply and Demand and Interlinked Markets](#)

4. September 18
   - the Shapes of the S and D curves; Elasticity; why it matters
   - Perloff, Ch. 3, pp. 58-68
   - Grim, R. “Who’s Got the Acid?” Slate, 2004

   - Marginal Revolution: [Elasticity](#) Khan Academy: [Elasticity](#)

5.  September 20  
Concepts of Economic Surplus, Price Floor and Ceilings; Rent Control and Minimum Wages

Perloff, Ch. 9, pp. 267-295
“Is Santa a Deadweight Loss?” The Economist, 2001
Economist, Why some economists oppose minimum wages, January 2014

Marginal Revolution: Price Ceilings and Floors

6.  September 25 (note: Yom Kippur)  
The Market and Welfare Effects of Sales/Unit Taxes and Subsidies  
Some Applications of Consumer Theory: In-kind Transfers, School Vouchers, Excise Subsidies, Paying for Trash; Evaluating government policies: Surpluses and Shortages

Chapter 5, sections 5.1 (Excise Subsidies, Health Care and Consumer Welfare), 5.2 (Public Schools and the Voucher Proposal), and 5.3 (Paying for Garbage), from Edgar Browning and Mark Zupan, Microeconomics: Theory and Application, Wiley, 2002, pp. 118-128.
Friedman, D. Hidden Order: The Economics of Everyday Life. Chapter 4 and 7 (skim)

Khan: Producer and Consumer Surplus
Marginal Revolution: Taxes and Subsidies

Big Idea: Incidence

7.  September 27  
Market Failures: Welfare Loss of non-Intervention and Externalities Introduction

Perloff, Ch. 18;
Landsburg, S. “Property is Theft.” Slate 1997
Landsburg, SE. “No Parking Anytime.” Slate 2007
NY Times, The Inevitable, Indispensable Property Tax, July 2015

Khan: Negative Externalities
Marginal Revolution: Externalities

8.  October 2  
Negative externalities and policy responses

Handout discussion on tobacco policy: comparing supply restrictions, to “perfect” and “imperfect” tax policies.

Additional Reading
Gruber, J. “The Economics of Tobacco Regulation.” Health Affairs, 2002 Vol 21(2).
9. October 4
   Positive Externalities and Public Goods

   Marginal Revolution: Public Goods

10. October 9 [MIDTERM 1]

11. October 11
   From Inputs to Outputs to Costs to Supply: the Short-run Supply Curve of a Firm
   Perloff, Ch. 7, Ch. 8, pp. 237-253;
   Barro, R. “Attention Consumers: Creativity Never Comes Cheap.” Business Week, 2000

   Khan: Marginal and Average Costs

12. October 16
   Perfect Competition in the Short- and Long-run; the Process of 'General Equilibration'
   Perloff, Ch. 8, pp. 220-236; and Ch. 9, pp. 262-266;
   Chapter 10, sections 10.3 (Airline Regulation and Deregulation) and 10.4 (City Taxicab Markets), from Edgar Browning and Mark Zupan, Microeconomics: Theory and Application, Wiley, 2002, pp. 274-282.

   Khan: Perfect Competition
   Marginal Revolution: Competition, Profit Maximization and Entry/Exit

13. October 18
   Monopoly
   Perloff, Ch. 11 (through p 373)
   Friedman, D. Hidden Order: The Economics of Everyday Life. Chapter 10: Monopoly for Fun and Profit
   Becker, G. “Cracking the Genetic Code: Competition was the Catalyst.” Business Week, 2000

   Khan: Monopoly
   Marginal Revolution: Monopoly

14. October 23
   Natural Monopoly and Price Regulations. Price Discrimination, Oligopoly
   Perloff, Ch. 13 (through p. 456, skim the rest)

   Marginal Revolution: Price Discrimination

15. October 25
   Game Theory/Strategy
   Perloff, Ch 14. (through p 477, skim the rest if interested)
Friedman, D. Hidden Order: The Economics of Everyday Life. Chap 11, “Hard Problems: Game Theory, Strategic Behavior and Oligopoly”
“Pricking Consciences.” The Economist, 2007
Khan: Nash Equilibrium

16. October 30
Cost-Benefit Analysis, Discounting, and Present Value;
Perloff, Ch. 16
“The Price of Prudence.” The Economist, 2004
Brennan, “Discounting the Future: Economics and Ethics”

17. November 1
Risk and Expected Value
Perloff, Ch. 17
Fisman, R. “The Bad Economics of Switching Health Care Plans.” Slate

18. November 6
Cost-Benefit Analysis and Policy Issues
The Contingent Value Debate
Problems with Contingent Valuation (from dubious to hopeless)
NY Times: New Calculus of Smoking

19. November 8
Nguyen Guest Lecture: Policy Implications of Long Term Effects of Early Childhood Exposures

20. November 13 (MIDTERM 2)
Final Topics Module: International Trade, Education, Health Care, Environmental Policies, Labor Market Outcomes

21. November 15
Information
Adverse Selection, Moral Hazard, Lemons
Perloff, Ch. 19 (through p. 637), Ch. 20 (skim)
Kuttner, R. “How to Undermine an Ownership Society.” Business Week, 2004
Landsburg, SE. The Armchair Economist. Chapter 3: Truth or Consequences
Gruber [Lecture Video

22. November 20
Health Care and the Affordable Care Act

**November 22: No Class Meeting / Thanksgiving Break**

23. November 27
Economics of Higher Education and the Labor Market

Perloff Chapter 19 (p 638-646)
Payback Website

**Big Idea:** Signaling and Investments of Human Capital

24. November 29

International Trade in the Partial Equilibrium Framework: Gains from Trade, Welfare Effects of Tariffs, Quotas, and Import Controls, Two country welfare analysis

Perloff, Ch. 9, (p. 295-end of chapter);
The Doha Round...and Round...and Round,” *The Economist*, July 31, 2008.

**Big Idea:** Comparative Advantage

Khan: [Gains from Trade](#)
Marginal Revolution: [Trade](#)
25. December 4
Policies toward Environmental Pollution: Emissions Charges and Tradable Permits
Perloff, Ch. 18, pp. 605-622;

26. December 6
Inequality
Video Conversation between Robert Lucas and Paul Krugman

27. December 11
Applying Concepts to Policy Analysis

Alan Krueger thoughts on the intersection of economics and policy
https://youtu.be/wEMA9zgXy80
https://youtu.be/VnWsZQXsMiU

28. December 13 (Last Class)
Review Session

**FINAL EXAM:** December 21 from 7:45-9:45 AM, Room SOC SCI 5106
University Policies

Academic Integrity and Honesty
University statement: By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UW-Madison's community of scholars in which everyone’s academic work and behavior are held to the highest academic integrity standards. Academic misconduct compromises the integrity of the university. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these acts are examples of academic misconduct, which can result in disciplinary action. This includes but is not limited to failure on the assignment/course, disciplinary probation, or suspension. Substantial or repeated cases of misconduct will be forwarded to the Office of Student Conduct & Community Standards for additional review.
For more information, refer to https://conduct.students.wisc.edu/academic-misconduct/.

Accommodations for Disabilities
McBurney Disability Resource Center statement: The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform faculty [me] of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. Faculty [I], will work either directly with the student [you] or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student’s educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA.
Please find more information and resources at: http://mcburney.wisc.edu.