

**Senior Capstone – Economics of Education and Work**  
**ECON 4999**  
**Spring 2020**

**Instructor: Alexa Prettyman**

**Email:** [cprettyman2@gsu.edu](mailto:cprettyman2@gsu.edu)

**Office:** 14 Marietta Street (Old AYS). Desk 556 J

**Office Hours:** Monday 10:30am-11:30am  
Thursday 3:30pm-4:30pm

Email me to schedule an appointment if the times above do not work for your schedule.  
Also, I have an open door policy, so feel free to stop by anytime.

**Class Meeting Time/Place:** TR 11:00am-12:15pm/ Aderhold 107

**Prerequisites:** ECON 3900, ECON 3910 and two 4000 level ECON courses with grades of C or better or permission of the instructor. You should understand concepts such as preferences, utility, tradeoffs, supply and demand, and how to graph a linear equation. Strongly recommended is a course in statistics. This course will also use data analysis and critical reading, thinking, and writing skills.

**Purpose:**

This course serves as an integrative capstone course for the economics major and should normally be taken during the student's last two semesters of study. Basic tools and methods of economics are used to understand and analyze a variety of contemporary economic problems and policy issues. This course is broken down into two sections. The first half of the semester applies economic principles to exploring potential causes of income inequality, such as human capital accumulation, labor supply, and labor demand. We will also evaluate income redistribution policies that influence these decisions. Some of the questions that we will study include:

What is income inequality and why does it exist?

Why do people go to college?

What factors influence one's decision to work?

How does income redistribution influence labor supply?

In the second half of the course you will learn about data analysis and causal inference through a replication exercise and student-led paper presentations.

**Course Learning Outcomes:**

By the end of this course you should be able to:

1. Describe income inequality and its causes, consequences, and potential solutions.
2. Explain why people go to college and what factors influence one's decision to work.
3. Critically analyze income redistribution programs and their influence on working.
4. Gain awareness of causal inference techniques by reading and discussing economic peer-reviewed articles.
5. Replicate a well-established trend using public data and Stata (or Excel).

With these goals in mind, the first half of the semester will be taught through lectures and discussions, and the second half will be taught through doing (i.e. student-led presentations and data work).

**Essential course materials:**

**1. Readings:**

There is no assigned textbook<sup>1</sup>, instead you will have a combination of academic papers, policy briefs, and news articles that you will be responsible for reading and discussing. Because this is a seminar (not a lecture), your attendance and participation is key.

**2. iCollege:**

Important course information will be posted on iCollege, including all readings, assignments, lecture slides, and grades. It is your responsibility to check iCollege regularly.

**3. Email:**

You are expected to check your GSU email daily. The university sends important messages about road closings, safety, and inclement weather to this email. I will occasionally use this method to send announcements, miscellaneous assignments, or contact students individually. There is a way to set up your account so that GSU emails get forwarded to your personal email. More importantly, when writing an email to a professor/instructor or colleague, remember to be professional. There should be an appropriate heading and closing, write in complete sentences, use punctuation, and reread before sending. An email is not a text message. I will not respond to unprofessional emails. Checking your email regularly and being professional is an important habit to develop not only for my class, but for life in the “real world.” **When emailing me about class, always write “ECON4999” on the subject line.**

**Attendance Policy:**

Students who attend class have higher academic and personal outcomes. Class attendance is *highly encouraged*. Missed in-class activities, quizzes, and discussions cannot be made up. Students missing class should consult with a classmate to determine what was missed.

*Learning is a reciprocal process: what you put in it is what you get out.*

**Grading Policy:**

See the following tables for details on how grades will be determined. I reserve the right to curve grades (upward or downward).

Component of Grade	Weight	Date
Writing Assignments	20%	Pre-thought exercise: Jan 28 Post-thought exercise: April 23
Economics Exam	10%	Feb 6
Class Participation & Discussion	20%	Throughout the semester
Research Paper Presentation	20%	April
Data Replication Assignment	30%	March 31
Total	100%	

Course Grade	Evaluation
A+	your grade $\geq$ 97%
A	$\geq$ 93%
A-	$\geq$ 90%
B+	$\geq$ 87%
B	$\geq$ 83%
B-	$\geq$ 80%
C+	$\geq$ 77%
C	$\geq$ 73%
C-	$\geq$ 70%
D	$\geq$ 60%
F	< 60%

<sup>1</sup> If you want to buy or reference a textbook, I will mostly be teaching from *Labor Economics* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) by Cahuc, Carcillo, and Zylberberg, and *Modern Labor Economics* (11<sup>th</sup> ed.) by Ehrenberg and Smith.

### **Writing Assignments:**

#### **1. Pre-thought exercise (5pts):**

Within the first two weeks of class, you will write a short (<500 words) response to a prompt about one of the core topics discussed in class. This assignment will be graded based on completion and effort. No late submissions accepted.

#### **2. Post-thought exercise (15pts):**

Towards the end of the semester you will revise and rewrite your pre-thought exercise. This assignment will be graded based on economic support and reflection. Late submissions will be deducted a letter grade for each day late.

### **Economics Assessment Exam (10pts):**

This exam will be taken in the beginning of the semester. The objective of this task is for faculty to understand what students pursuing an economics major learn and retain. You must take this exam at least once; this is a department rule and not mine. There are 18 microeconomics questions and 16 macroeconomics questions, for a total of 34 questions. You will receive one-third (1/3) point for every correct answer. In other words, 30 correct answers is a 100%, 27 correct answers is a 90%, 24 correct answers is an 80%, etc.

### **Class Participation and Discussion (20pts):**

Throughout the semester there will be various opportunities to earn points towards your class participation grade. A total of 20 points must be acquired to earn full credit towards your grade for this category, and up to 23pts can be earned. The extra 3 points may be used towards your economics assessment exam grade<sup>2</sup>. **Regular class attendance and participation should satisfy the minimum for this requirement.** Missed in-class assignments and discussion cannot be made up. There may be opportunities outside of class to earn points as well. I will tell you about these opportunities as they arise.

**On the board work:** Occasionally, there will be days in which I will ask for volunteers to work exercises on the board. (Potential points: 1 point/lecture)

**Exit Quizzes:** On occasion, short quizzes (1-2 questions) will be given at the end of class to test understanding of class material. Correct quizzes will yield 2pts toward your class participation grade and incorrect quizzes will yield 1pt (assuming first and last name included).

**Reading Quizzes:** On designated discussion days noted in the class schedule by a \*, I may give a reading quiz to check whether you read the material. Quizzes will be 2-3 questions graded on correctness (1pt/question). They should be easy if you read the assigned material.

### **Research Paper Presentation (20pts):**

In groups of 3-4 people, you will present a research paper to the class using slides. You should have about 5-10 slides and plan for a 20-minute presentation with 5-10 minutes of class discussion. You will be responsible for explaining the research question, method and data used to answer this research question, findings, and policy relevance or economic implications. Also, this presentation should include your thoughts of the findings and research and how this research relates to this class and can be expanded upon. You will also be responsible for helping facilitate the class discussion.

---

<sup>2</sup> Three points will only be applied for students who took the assessment. Since this exam is mandatory, those who do not take the assessment cannot apply these “bonus” points.

### **Data Replication Assignment (30pts):**

This is a comprehensive project designed to exercise your ability to find and replicate a well-established trend using data analysis. In pairs (2 people) or individually, you will replicate a common, well-known trend. You will use either Stata or Excel and data from a public source (Census, BLS, etc.). I recommend discussing ideas with me throughout the semester. This will be due March 31. Late submissions will be deducted a letter grade for each day late.

### **Life Learning Outcomes:**

Students will:

1. develop professional communication and writing skills.
2. develop/enhance their time management skills.
3. learn how to engage and work with students different from themselves.
4. gain a better sense of community with GSU to create a sense of belonging.
5. continue to understand which learning and study techniques work best for them. Everyone learns differently and at different paces.
6. better understand their individual interests and strengths.

### **Additional Notes:**

1. *The course syllabus provides a general plan for the course; deviations may be necessary.*
2. All students are responsible for knowing and adhering to [GSU's Policy on Academic Honesty](#) as published in [Student Code of Conduct Handbook](#). Some unacceptable actions to be aware of include but are not limited to:
  - a. Plagiarism: Presenting another person's work as one's own
  - b. Cheating on exams: Giving or receiving unauthorized help before, during, or after an exam
  - c. Falsification: Signing another person in for attendance or adding their name to an assignment they did not contribute to
3. Your constructive assessment of this course plays an indispensable role in shaping education at Georgia State. Upon completing the course, please take time to fill out the online course evaluation.
4. Students who wish to request accommodation for a disability may do so by registering with the [Office of Disability Services](#). Students may only be accommodated upon issuance by the Office of Disability Services of a signed [Accommodation Plan](#) and are responsible for providing a copy of that plan to instructors of all classes in which accommodations are sought.
5. Students who withdraw after the midpoint of each term will not be eligible for a "W" except in cases of [Emergency Withdrawal](#).
  - a. Withdrawal Policy: <http://advisement.gsu.edu/self-service/policies/withdrawal-policy/>
  - b. Repeat to Replace Policy: <http://advisement.gsu.edu/self-service/policies/repeat-to-replace-policy/>
  - c. Grade Appeal and Change (including Incomplete Grades) Policy: <http://registrar.gsu.edu/academic-records/grading/grade-appeals-and-changes/>
6. Important University dates can be found at <http://registrar.gsu.edu/registration/semester-calendars-exam-schedules/>.
7. Georgia State University values diversity and is committed to fostering and maintaining an educational environment which appreciates individual differences in all areas of operation including classroom instruction, texts, and materials. To this end, any actions, practices, or processes by any faculty, staff person, or student that discriminates against or is prejudicial toward any person or group based on race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, nationality, disability, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status will not be tolerated.

8. **Basic Needs Statement:** Any student who faces challenges securing their food or housing and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Dean of Students for support. Furthermore, please notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable us to provide resources that we may possess. The [Embark program](#) at GSU provides resources for students facing homelessness.

### Schedule of Lectures, Readings, & Assignments

Date	Topic	Reading/Assignments
T 1/14	Syllabus Day What is income inequality? How does it differ from poverty and wealth inequality? Causes, consequences, and solutions	<a href="#">The American Worker: How occupations and earnings have changed</a>
R 1/16	Education: Achievement Gaps & Production Function	<a href="#">An analysis of achievement gaps in every school in America shows that poverty is the biggest hurdle</a> Lovenheim & Turner. Ch. 7
T 1/21	Education: Why do people go to college? Human Capital Accumulation or Signaling	Ehrenberg & Smith. Ch. 9
R 1/23	Discussion: Benefits to schooling	* Oreopoulos & Salvanes. 2011. Priceless: The nonpecuniary benefits of schooling
T 1/28	Education: Attainment Gaps & College Promise Programs Discussion: Free College	<i>Pre-thought exercise. Submit through icollege by 10:59am</i> <a href="#">Pros and cons of free college and college promise programs.</a> <a href="#">The College Promise Landscape.</a> Billings. 2018. Free college for all. Billings. Understanding the design of college promise programs. <a href="#">Brookings Report.</a>
R 1/30	Labor Supply	Borjas Slides * Cascio et al. 2015. The effectiveness of policies that promote labor force participation of women with children: A collection of national studies
T 2/04	Taxes and EITC	Labor Econ. Ch. 12 * Hoynes, H. Proposal 11: Building on the success of the EITC. <a href="#">The Hamilton Project.</a>
R 2/06	Economics Exam	
T 2/11	Labor Demand	Ehrenberg & Smith. Ch. 3 Labor Econ. Ch. 2
R 2/13	Min Wage	* Dube, A. Proposal 13: Designing Thoughtful Minimum Wage Policy at the State and Local Levels. <a href="#">The Hamilton Project.</a>
T 2/18	Technology and Inequality	Labor Econ. Ch. 10.2 David Autor. 2010. The Polarization of Job Opportunities. <a href="#">Brookings Report.</a>
R 2/20	Discussion: Automation	* David Autor. 2016. Will automation take away all of our jobs. <a href="#">Ted Talk</a>

		Automation and Artificial Intelligence: How machines are affecting people and places. <a href="#">Brookings Report</a> . The future of work in the age of the machine. 2015. <a href="#">The Hamilton Project</a> .
T 2/25	Discussion: Universal Basic Income	* <a href="#">Kearney &amp; Mogstad. 2019.</a> * <a href="#">City Lab. UBI in Stockton CA</a> Hoynes & Rothstein. 2019. UBI in the US and advanced countries
R 2/27	Discrimination	Labor Econ. Ch. 8 <a href="#">NYTimes. Racism for Black Boys.</a>
T 3/03	Compensating Wage Differentials	Labor Econ. Ch. 3.2
R 3/05	Discussion: The Gig Economy	* <a href="#">Workers and the Online Gig Economy</a> * <a href="#">NYTimes. Gig Economy.</a>
T 3/10	Data Day 1a. Intro to Stata	<i>Half of class attends</i>
R 3/12	Data Day 1b. Intro to Stata	<i>Second half of class attends</i>
T 3/17	<b>Spring Break</b>	
R 3/19	<b>Spring Break</b>	
T 3/24	Data Day 2. Practice using Stata/ work day	
R 3/26	Data Day 2. Practice using Stata/ work day	
T 3/31	Presentation Example. Economics Exam Retake.	<i>Data Replication Assignment. Submit through icollege by 11:59pm</i>
R 4/02	Presentation	
T 4/07	Presentation	
R 4/09	Presentation	
T 4/14	Presentation	
R 4/16	Presentation	
T 4/21	Presentation	
R 4/23	Presentation	<i>Post-thought exercise. Submit through icollege by 11:59pm</i>
R 4/30	<b>NO Final Exam 10:45am-1:15pm</b> <a href="https://registrar.gsu.edu/files/2019/12/Sprng-2020-Final-Exam-Schedule-Atlanta-Campus.pdf">https://registrar.gsu.edu/files/2019/12/Sprng-2020-Final-Exam-Schedule-Atlanta-Campus.pdf</a>	

\* Required readings for class participation and discussion. These readings have corresponding discussion questions that I recommend being familiar with. You may be quizzed over these.