# Welcome to ECON 309
# Economic Problems and Public Policies

## I. Contact Information

**Instructor:** Dr. Jason Dunick
**Office:** Buchanan Hall D150
**Office Phone:** 993-1141
**Email:** jdunick@gmu.edu
**Office Hours:** After class or Wednesdays 1-3pm or by appointment—just ask!

## II. Course Overview

**Catalog Description:** Economic problems in light of current and proposed public policies. Topics include environmental issues, international trade policies, and regulatory issues and their historical roots.

**Learning Outcomes:** This course is a **synthesis course** and an **upper-division elective** within economics.

As a **synthesis course**, this course strives to help students:

- **Communicate effectively** in both oral and written forms.

- **Connect issues** in a given field to wider intellectual, community or societal concerns using perspectives outside of the discipline of economics.

- Apply **critical thinking skills** to evaluate the quality, credibility and limitations of an argument or a solution using appropriate evidence or resources

As an **upper-division elective** in the discipline of economics, this course strives to help students:

- **Develop an economic imagination**, learning how economic research is used to understand the impact of public policy.

- **Understand and apply relevant economic concepts and theories** that are used to frame research questions and policy debates.

- **Compare and contrast economic arguments** made in peer-reviewed journals and mainstream media sources by breaking down arguments and identifying the relevant concepts and theories from economics.

All learning outcomes will be demonstrated through written assignments, oral presentations, exams, and classroom participation.

## Course Outline:

**Introduction: Developing an Economic Imagination**
    **(Research Skills & Economic Arguments)**

**Part I: Demonstration of How to Identify an Economic Problem and Analyze a Policy**

Education Policy: Educational Quality, Vouchers, and Charter Schools
- Overview of the problem and policy response
- Presentation of relevant economic concepts
- Analysis of peer-reviewed articles in economics
- Review of a non-economic perspective

**Part II: Preparation for Student-Led Analysis**

Students will pick a policy topic from the list below and prepare a policy wiki page and annotated bibliography in the same format as the demonstration in Part I.

Policy List: Higher Education, Health, Labor, Tax, Regulation, and Trade

**Part III Student-Led Analysis of an Economic Problem and Public Policy**
Each student will be responsible for presenting a part of the analysis and creating a part of the Policy Wiki Page on Blackboard.  The final draft of the wiki page will be due one week after the presentation is complete.

## Course Assignments with Weights:

- In-class Work and Research Assignments      5%
- Policy Wiki Page Draft                                      5%
- Policy Wiki Page Final Draft                          10%
- Policy Wiki Page Presentation                       10%
- Midterm                                                            20%
- Policy Paper Draft                                            5%
- Final Policy Paper                                          20%
- Final Exam                                                      25%

**A detail description of the course assignments will be posted on Blackboard.**

## Grading Scale (as a percentage):

| A + | 100-97 | B | 86 – 83 | C- | 72 – 70 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | 96 – 93 | B- | 82 – 80 | D | 66 – 60 |
| A - | 92 – 90 | C+ | 79 – 77 | F | 59 – 0 |
| B+ | 89 – 87 | C | 76 – 73 | | |

## Course Schedule:

| Date | Topic | Assignment Due |
|---|---|---|
| Aug. 29th | Introduction | |
| Sept. 3rd | Research Skills | |
| Sept. 5th | Economic Arguments | |
| Sept. 10th | Economic Arguments | |
| **PART I** | | |
| Sept. 12th | Education Policy | In-class work & Research Assignments |
| Sept. 17th | Education Policy | In-class work & Research Assignments |
| Sept. 19th | Education Policy | In-class work & Research Assignments |
| Sept. 24th | Education Policy | In-class work & Research Assignments |
| Sept. 26th | Education Policy | In-class work & Research Assignments |
| Oct. 1st | Exam Review | |
| **Oct. 3th** | **\*\*\*MIDTERM\*\*\*** | |
| **PART II** | | |
| Oct. 8th | Wiki Planning Day | Assigned a Group for Wiki Page Project |
| Oct. 10th | Wiki Planning Day | **Draft of the Wiki Page Due (Oct. 14th at 11:59pm)** |
| Oct. 15th | \*\*\*No Class\*\*\* | |
| Oct. 17th | Wiki Planning Day | **Final Draft of the Wiki Page Due (Oct. 21st at 11:59pm)** |
| **PART III** | | |
| Oct. 22nd | Higher Education Policy | Presentations and in-class work |
| Oct. 24nd | Higher Education Policy | Presentations and in-class work |
| Oct. 29th | Health Policy | Presentations and in-class work |
| Oct. 31st | Health Policy | Presentations and in-class work |
| Nov. 5th | Labor Policy | Presentations and in-class work |
| Nov. 7th | Labor Policy | Presentations and in-class work |
| Nov. 12th | Tax Policy | Presentations and in-class work |
| Nov. 14th | Tax Policy | Presentations and in-class work |
| Nov. 19th | Regulation Policy | Presentations and in-class work |
| Nov. 21st | Regulation Policy | Presentations and in-class work |
| Nov. 26th | Paper Draft Workshop | **Policy Paper Draft** |
| Nov. 28th | \*\*Thanksgiving Break\*\*\* | |
| Dec. 3rd | Trade Policy | Presentations and in-class work |
| Dec. 5th | Trade Policy | Presentations and in-class work |
| Dec. 17th | Final Exam Day (1:30pm) | **Final Exam (1:30pm) & Final Policy Paper** |

**Readings & Textbooks:** Assigned readings will be posted on Blackboard (*http://mymason.gmu.edu*).  Reading assignments will be provided after each lecture to allow for flexibility.  There are no required textbooks for this course; however, here is a list of recommended books to help develop your research and writing skills.

*The Elements of Style* by Strunk and White
*The Craft of Research* by Booth, Colomb, and Williams
*Economical Writing* by McCloskey
*A Guide for the Young Economist* by Thomson (available online through Mason's library)

## III.    Course Policies:

**Course Expectations**:  It is expected that all readings will be complete by the start of class and that you come to class ready to participate.  *In addition, this class requires significant writing assignments as well as familiarity with graphing and algebraic computations.*  If you find yourself struggling with the material at any time, please make an appointment to talk with me as soon as possible.  I have strategies that might be helpful.

**Class Participation & Make-up Work:**  Attendance and class participation are necessary to have a successful experience in this course.  **In-class work, research assignments, wiki page postings, and presentations cannot be made-up**.  **However, I can offer a make-up exam or an extension on the paper with a valid excused absence.**   If you are unable to attend exam for an excusable reason, please contact me *before* the start of the exam.

**Electronic Devices:** *Regarding electronic devices (such as laptops, cell phones, etc.), please be respectful of your peers and your instructor and do not engage in activities that are unrelated to class. Such disruptions show a lack of professionalism.  If disruptions are interrupting other students' learning, you may be asked to leave the classroom.*


**Communication**: *Students must use their MasonLive email account to receive important University information, including messages related to this class. See http://masonlive.gmu.edu for more information.*

**Honor Code:** Students are expected to abide by the Honor Code in its entirety in completing all requirements for this course.  The Honor Code parameters will differ depending on the assignment and will be clearly explained for each assignment.  If at any time you are unsure about the Honor Code implications for a particular assignment, ask for clarification.

**Important:** No person should be denied educational access because of a disability.  *If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474, http://ods.gmu.edu. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS.*