

ECON 103: Contemporary Microeconomic Principles

Course Information

Term: Spring 2021
Course: [ECON 103-004](#)
Class time: Tuesday & Thursday
9:00 AM to 10:15 AM
Location: Robinson Hall B113

Contact

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Course Objectives

The world is a complex and messy place where teasing out cause-and-effect from human interactions can be a daunting endeavour. Economics is a social science which seeks to explain the emerging social phenomena from human action. We can apply economic theory to make the events in our world intelligible. The objective of this course is to introduce the economic way of thinking and the basic concepts of microeconomic theory and analysis. To do this, the course will cover the core foundational concepts of economics, such as the gains from trade, downward sloping demand curves, marginal analysis, and understanding tradeoffs, which will be used to more broadly comprehend how the market mechanism operates, the role of the price system in allocating scarce resources, how incentives affect human behavior, and the effects of unintended consequences. This course will not only prepare students for more advanced courses in economics, but also teach them how to apply the economic way of thinking to the world around them.

Texts

Required

Modern Principles: Microeconomics, 4th Edition
by Tyler Cowen and Alex Tabarrok

Recommended

Universal Economics
by Armen Alchian and William Allen

Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this class; however, a general understanding of algebra and familiarity with linear functions in the Cartesian coordinate system are vital to understanding some of the concepts in this course. Please review this material as you feel necessary.

Grading and Coursework

Your grade will be comprised of quizzes, homework, two exams, and a final, distributed as shown in the table.

Category	Percentage
Quizzes	15%
Homework	15%
Exam I	20%
Exam II	20%
Final	30%

- **Quizzes:** Quizzes will be taken at the beginning of each class and will be on the textbook reading due that day. Your lowest quiz score will be dropped and not counted in your final grade. Quizzes cannot be made up, but can be exempted from if you have an excuse from the school or health office. If the course moves to online instruction, quizzes will be replaced with 250 word reading summaries. More information will be given as necessary.
- **Homework:** Homework will be turned in on Blackboard and is due on Fridays before 5:00pm. Late assignments will not be accepted. Your lowest homework score will be dropped and not counted in your final grade. Homework will be graded on accuracy and the point value of the assignment will depend on the number of problems assigned. Weekly homework will only cover material from chapters which have been completely covered during that week of class.
- **Exams:** Exams will be taken in class on the scheduled date. You will have will have the full class time to complete the exam. There are no exam makeups. You may bring a scientific or basic calculator to the exam, but graphing calculators and cellphones are not allowed.
- **Final:** The final will be on **Thursday, May 6th at 7:30am**. The test is cumulative, covering material from Exam I, Exam II, and any new material covered. If your final exam score is better than either your Exam I or Exam II scores, I will replace your final score with your lowest exam score. In other words, I will drop your lowest exam score and count the final as 50% of your grade if this improves your final grade. If not, I will leave the weights as depicted in the table.

Bonus Opportunity

You will be given the opportunity to earn an added 2% to your grade by submitting a response to the weekly topics of the [Wall Street Journal Future View](#). The only requirement is that your response include some form of economic analysis. Your response will be graded out of 5 points. If you do not earn full credit in your first submission, you can keep submitting to earn all of the possible points, but no more than 5 points in total will be awarded. Responses must be emailed to me no later than Monday at 11:59 PM before the journal's deadline.

Grading Scale

You will earn a letter grade based off your overall course percentage from the weighted categories listed above. Letter grades correspond to the percentages as shown in the table. I will round up 0.5 and round down 0.49.

Grade	Percentage
A+	97-100%
A	93-96%
A-	90-92%
B+	87-89%
B	83-86%
B-	80-82%
C+	77-79%
C	73-76%
C-	70-72%
D	60-69%
F	<60%

Office Hours

Weekly office hours will be held on [Zoom](#) on Thursday from 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM. If you are unavailable at this time, then you can email me and we can reschedule.

Technology Policy

Laptops, tablets, cell phones, and other devices are not allowed in this class. Please keep them stowed away and out of sight.

Special Accommodations

Disability Services at George Mason University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students by upholding the laws that ensure equal treatment of people with disabilities. If you are seeking accommodations for this class, please first visit <http://dsgmu.wpengine.com/> for detailed information about the Disability Services registration process. Then please discuss your approved accommodations with me. Disability Services is located in Student Union Building I (SUB I), Suite 2500. Email: ods@gmu.edu | Phone: (703) 993-2474

Audio/Video Recording & Pictures

For the privacy and comfort of your fellow students, audio and video recordings, as well as photography, is strictly prohibited during class.

Academic Dishonesty

Cheating will not be tolerated and can result in a failing grade, dismissal from class, and expulsion from the university. If I suspect you of cheating, I will seek the appropriate punishment under George Mason University guidelines. Please review the [George Mason University Honor System and Code](#).

Course Schedule

Date	Class Topic	Readings
Tuesday, January 26th	The Big Ideas	★ <i>Modern Principles: Microeconomics</i> by Cowen and Tabarrok, Ch. 1 📺 "Introduction to Microeconomics" from Marginal Revolution University <i>Universal Economics</i> by Alchian and Allen, Ch. 1, 2
Thursday, January 28th	Supply and Demand I	★ <i>Modern Principles: Microeconomics</i> by Cowen and Tabarrok, Ch. 3, through "What Shifts the Demand Curve?" 📺 "The Demand Curve" from Marginal Revolution University
Tuesday, February 2nd	Supply and Demand II	★ <i>Modern Principles: Microeconomics</i> by Cowen and Tabarrok, Ch. 3, through "What Shifts the Supply Curve?"
Thursday, February 4th	Equilibrium I	★ <i>Modern Principles: Microeconomics</i> by Cowen and Tabarrok, Ch. 4
Tuesday, February 9th	Equilibrium II	★ <i>Modern Principles: Microeconomics</i> by Cowen and Tabarrok, Ch. 4

Date	Class Topic	Readings
Thursday, February 11th	Elasticity and Its Applications I	★ <i>Modern Principles: Microeconomics</i> by Cowen and Tabarrok, Ch. 5
Tuesday, February 16th	Elasticity and Its Applications II	★ <i>Modern Principles: Microeconomics</i> by Cowen and Tabarrok, Ch. 5
Thursday, February 18th	Taxes and Subsidies	★ <i>Modern Principles: Microeconomics</i> by Cowen and Tabarrok, Ch. 6
Tuesday, February 23rd	The Price System: Signals, Speculation, and Prediction	★ <i>Modern Principles: Microeconomics</i> by Cowen and Tabarrok, Ch. 7 "The Use of Knowledge in Society" by Hayek  "The Market Process" from Chris Coyne
Thursday, February 25th	Price Ceilings and Floors	★ <i>Modern Principles: Microeconomics</i> by Cowen and Tabarrok, Ch. 8
Tuesday, March 2nd	Exam I	
Thursday, March 4th	The Power of Trade and Comparative Advantage	★ <i>Modern Principles: Microeconomics</i> by Cowen and Tabarrok, Ch. 2
Tuesday, March 9th	International Trade	★ <i>Modern Principles: Microeconomics</i> by Cowen and Tabarrok, Ch. 9
Thursday, March 11th	Firms and Factor Markets I	★ <i>Modern Principles: Microeconomics</i> by Cowen and Tabarrok, Ch. 11
Tuesday, March 16th	Firms and Factor Markets II	★ <i>Modern Principles: Microeconomics</i> by Cowen and Tabarrok, Ch. 11
Thursday, March 18th	Competition and the Invisible Hand	★ <i>Modern Principles: Microeconomics</i> by Cowen and Tabarrok, Ch. 12
Tuesday, March 23rd	Monopoly I	★ <i>Modern Principles: Microeconomics</i> by Cowen and Tabarrok, Ch. 13
Thursday, March 25th	Monopoly II	★ <i>Modern Principles: Microeconomics</i> by Cowen and Tabarrok, Ch. 13
Tuesday, March 30th	Price Discrimination and Pricing Strategy	★ <i>Modern Principles: Microeconomics</i> by Cowen and Tabarrok, Ch. 14
Thursday, April 1st	Oligopoly and Game Theory I	★ <i>Modern Principles: Microeconomics</i> by Cowen and Tabarrok, Ch. 15
Tuesday, April 6th	Oligopoly and Game Theory II	★ <i>Modern Principles: Microeconomics</i> by Cowen and Tabarrok, Ch. 15
Thursday, April 8th	Labor Markets	★ <i>Modern Principles: Microeconomics</i> by Cowen and Tabarrok, Ch. 18
Tuesday, April 13th	Exam II	

Date	Class Topic	Readings
Thursday, April 15th	Externalities: When the Price Is Not Right	★ <i>Modern Principles: Microeconomics</i> by Cowen and Tabarrok, Ch. 10
Tuesday, April 20th	Public Goods and the Tragedy of the Commons	★ <i>Modern Principles: Microeconomics</i> by Cowen and Tabarrok, Ch. 19
Thursday, April 22nd	Political Economy and Public Choice	★ <i>Modern Principles: Microeconomics</i> by Cowen and Tabarrok, Ch. 20
Tuesday, April 27th	To Be Determined	★ <i>Modern Principles: Microeconomics</i> by Cowen and Tabarrok, Ch. 23 or 24
Thursday, April 29th	Economics, Ethics, and Public Policy	★ <i>Modern Principles: Microeconomics</i> by Cowen and Tabarrok, Ch. 21
Thursday, May 6th	Final Exam	