

ENVIRONMENTAL ECONOMICS FOR THE CITIZEN

Professor: Rachael K. Behr

Email: rbehr@gmu.edu

Department of Economics

<https://rachaelbehr.com>

<https://economics.gmu.edu/people/rbehr>

ECON 105 (3 credits)

Spring 2021

Online, Asynchronous

COURSE OBJECTIVES & LEARNING OUTCOMES

This course fulfills a Mason Core Exploration Requirement for Social and Behavioral Sciences. This course investigates core economic principles and theories pertaining to environmental economics. The main goal is to introduce you to the economic way of thinking as it relates to environmental issues. In addition, a second aim is to help you use economic tools to understand and analyze the costs and benefits of various environmental policies. The economic way of thinking is not only applicable to environmental issues, but a wide array of social issues. This should be helpful to anyone who wants to understand and analyze social problems in a variety of contexts.

The lectures and discussions in this course are a way to learn and practice the economic way of thinking. This class is based in positive analysis, not normative analysis. In other words, we will focus primarily on “what is,” not “what should be.” All discussions will be framed around economic principles. Active participation in the class is encouraged and expected. There are no prerequisites for this class.

Diversity is one of GMU’s core values. This class will support a diversity of perspectives, so please remember to be respectful of other people’s opinions and observations.

Upon completion of this course, you will

1. Understand the economic way of thinking.
2. Be able to synthesize the economic way of thinking with a wide array of social-environmental issues and policies.

COURSE STRUCTURE

Our class is entirely asynchronous, per the University’s schedule. I will post all content for each week on Monday mornings, meaning you will have Monday through Sunday of each week to view lectures and send in reading reactions. I will also have live, twice weekly office hours on Zoom:

<https://gmu.zoom.us/j/92950094339>

Office hours: **Mondays and Wednesdays, 11:00 am - 1:00 pm**, on Zoom or by appointment. I am flexible and happy to meet with you and work around your schedule. Due to COVID-19, office hours and any other meetings will be online only. Here is the Zoom link, which is good for the whole semester:

<https://gmu.zoom.us/j/92950094339>

REQUIRED MATERIALS

Students will need to buy, rent, or borrow the following book:

- Terry L. Anderson and Donald R. Leal. 2015. *Free Market Environmentalism for the Next Generation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. (FME).

Additionally, short readings/videos/podcasts will be assigned during the semester as supplements to the main textbook and are accessible online. The links to the readings/videos/podcasts are listed in the schedule below.

GRADING AND ASSIGNMENTS

Grades will be based on the following items:

- Week 1 or Week 2 Virtual Meet-and-Greet (5% of total grade)
- Reading Reactions (20% of total grade)
- Two Op-eds (20% of total grade; 10% each)
- Midterm Exam (25% of total grade)
- Final Exam (30% of total grade)

Week 1 or Week 2 Virtual Meet-and-Greet: Due to the online nature of the course, it would be helpful for us to meet each other at the beginning of the course. Just come to office hours for 5 minutes or so, either in Week 1 or Week 2, and you may ask any questions about the course or let me know any specific information I may need to know about you. These meetings will be one-on-one, like regular ‘in person’ office hours would be. Office hours are M and W, 11am-1pm, at the following Zoom link: <https://gmu.zoom.us/j/92950094339>

Reading Reactions: Short reading reactions will be due during every week throughout the semester, **starting in Week 1**. You may send your reaction at any point during the week, but I will not accept submissions after Sundays at 11:59 pm at the conclusion of each week. These should be no shorter than a few paragraphs, and no longer than 1-1.5 pages. The reading reactions are meant to demonstrate your engagement with the readings. No reading reactions will be due during exam weeks. **Send to rbehr@gmu.edu.**

Op-ed Writing Assignments: You are assigned to write **two** op-eds through the semester. The purpose of these op-eds is for you to apply the economic way of thinking to a current event on an environmental topic. These op-eds are a chance for you to share your opinion that is informed by economic thinking. Grades will not be based on your opinion but will be based on your ability to persuasively use the economic way of thinking to demonstrate why your opinion is valid. Op-eds are a chance to be creative and show your personality. Using the economic way of thinking does not mean that writing has to be boring. One op-ed is due on **Monday, March 1, at 10am**, and the other is due at the beginning of the week on **Monday, April 12, at 10 am**. Please email op-eds to rbehr@gmu.edu.

More specific instructions and a rubric for the op-ed assignments will be made available early in the semester. The instructions/rubric will allow students to know what is expected in the op-ed assignments and how they are going to be graded. **No late op-ed writing assignments will be accepted**, so please be proactive and manage your time accordingly.

Midterm Exam: The purpose of the midterm exam is to demonstrate an understanding of the economic principles that have been taught to that point. The exam will consist of multiple-choice questions, definitions, short-answer questions, and essay questions. The topics covered on the test will be based on the readings and the class lectures/discussions. Make-up midterm exams will only be given to students who contact me about an emergency *before the exam*. Given the nature of our online course, the exams

are open-book/note/internet. That said, the exams will be more difficult and longer than an in-person, closed-book exam would be. You will need to have read/watched all the material to do well on the exam.

The midterm will be posted on Blackboard on **Thursday, March 11 at 8 am and is due Sunday, March 14, at 11:59 pm** to rbehr@gmu.edu.

Final Exam: The purpose of the final exam is to demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of economic principles that were taught throughout the course. The exam will consist of multiple-choice questions, definitions, short-answer questions, and essay questions. The topics covered on the test will be based on the readings and the class lectures/discussions. There will be no make-up final exams, except for extreme circumstances that will be decided on a case-by-case basis. Given the nature of our online course, the exams are open-book/note/internet. That said, the exams will be more difficult and longer than an in-person, closed-book exam would be. You will need to have read/watched all the material to do well on the exam.

The final will be posted on Blackboard on **Thursday, May 6 at 8 am and is due Sunday, May 9, at 11:59 pm** to rbehr@gmu.edu.

Grading Scale

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

SCHEDULED OUTLINE OF COURSE EVENTS

I reserve the right to make adjustments if it becomes necessary, but I will limit changes as much as possible. If a change to the schedule occurs, I will post an announcement in Blackboard, so please be sure to check Blackboard regularly.

Week 1, starts on January 25: *Introduction to Economics – Class Orientation and The Economic Way of Thinking*

- Virtual meet-and-greet. Come to office hours for 5 minutes or so, so we can get to know each other, during this week or Week 2.
- *Applied Mainline Economics*, “Chapter 1” Matthew Mitchell and Peter Boettke
https://ppe.mercatus.org/system/files/appliedmainline_fulltext.pdf

Week 2, starts on February 1 (last day to add class): *Basic Economic Principles: Rational Choice and Incentives; Market Process and Institutions*

- Virtual meet-and-greet. Come to office hours for 5 minutes or so, so we can get to know each other, during this week or in Week 1.
- “*Incentives Matter*” By Russell Roberts
<https://www.econlib.org/library/Columns/y2006/Robertsincentives.html>
- *Applied Mainline Economics*, “Chapter 2 The Core Themes of Mainline Economics” by Matthew Mitchell and Peter Boettke
https://ppe.mercatus.org/system/files/appliedmainline_fulltext.pdf

- *Applied Mainline Economics*, “Chapter 3 Market Process Economics” by Matthew Mitchell and Peter Boettke
https://ppe.mercatus.org/system/files/appliedmainline_fulltext.pdf
- *Applied Mainline Economics*, “Chapter 4 Institutions and Culture” by Matthew Mitchell and Peter Boettke https://ppe.mercatus.org/system/files/appliedmainline_fulltext.pdf

Week 3, starts on February 8: *Basic Economic Principles: Marginalism, Opportunity Cost, Unintended Consequences & Property Rights & The Coase Theorem*

- “Marginalism” By Steven E. Rhoads
<https://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/Marginalism.html>
- “Opportunity Costs: The Broken Window”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HR2mxZX1B9w>
- “Unintended Consequences” By Rob Norton
<https://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/UnintendedConsequences.html>
- “The Role of Property Rights As An Institution: Implications for Development Policy” by Karol Boudreaux <https://www.mercatus.org/system/files/Property%20Rights.pdf>
- “The Coase Theorem:” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=00HPak2RLIQ>

Week 4, starts on February 15: *Private Sphere vs. Public Sphere*

- *Applied Mainline Economics*, “Chapter 5 The Political Process” by Matthew Mitchell and Peter Boettke https://ppe.mercatus.org/system/files/appliedmainline_fulltext.pdf
- “Public Choice,” By William F. Shughart II,
<https://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/PublicChoice.html>
- “Virginia School of Political Economy I: An Introduction to Public Choice.”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=54&v=4XsR82AUBIc

Week 5, starts on February 22: *What Are Environmental Problems?*

- Free Market Environmentalism (FME) Chapter 1: Visions of Environmentalism
- “Terry Anderson on the Environment and Property Rights,” EconTalk podcast,
<http://www.econtalk.org/terry-anderson-on-the-environment-and-property-rights/>

Week 6, starts on March 1: *Ecology and Society Are Dynamic! & The Economics of Wild Animals*

First op-ed assignment is due at the beginning of the week (Monday, March 1, at 10am)

- FME Chapter 2: Rethinking the Way We Think
- “Private Property Rights to Wildlife: The Southern African Experiment”
<http://cei.org/sites/default/files/Kay%20Muir-Leresche%20-%20Private%20Property%20Rights%20to%20Wildlife%20The%20Southern%20Africa%20Experiment.pdf>
- “Saving African Rhinos: A Market Success Story,” by Michael ‘t Sas-Rolfes and edited by Laura Huggins, <https://www.perc.org/wp-content/uploads/old/Saving%20African%20Rhinos%20final.pdf>

Week 7, starts on March 8: *Property Rights*

- FME Chapter 3: Who Owns the Environment?
- **Midterm Exam: handed out Thursday, March 11 at 8 am and due Sunday, March 14, at 11:59 pm.**
- No reading reaction due this week due to the midterm exam.

Week 8, starts on March 15: *Public Lands, Public Problems*

- FME Chapter 4: This Land Is Whose Land?

- “Is Yellowstone National Park In Danger Of Being 'Loved To Death'?” NPR from April 18, 2016, <https://www.npr.org/2016/04/18/474658536/is-yellowstone-national-park-in-danger-of-being-loved-to-death>

Week 9, starts on March 22: *What to Do About Energy; Water Scarcity and Water Markets*

- FME Chapter 5 Prospecting for Energy and the Environment
- “Regulating Monopolies: A History of Electricity Regulation” by Lynne Kiesling in conjunction with Learn Liberty, <http://www.learnliberty.org/videos/regulating-monopolies-history-electricity-regulation/>
- FME Chapter 6: Tapping Water Markets
- “David Zetland on Water,” EconTalk podcast, <http://www.econtalk.org/david-zetland-on-water/>

Week 10, starts March 29: *Issues with Fisheries*

- FME Chapter 7: Fencing the Fishery
- “The Tragedy of the Commons” - Marginal Revolution University video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bs2P0wRod8U>
- “Governing the Fisheries: Insights from Elinor Ostrom’s Work” <https://poseidon01.ssrn.com/delivery.php?ID=639031071067109065080127027075014103097015064044037086104072017113002092101009031027063025012043117004047031072010073083010116123037031086044064118067126107121125105036051031099095100121019085001002072111090000076071098095099087085115105028027010083005&EXT=pdf>

Week 11, starts April 5: *Overpopulation: Are Too Many Humans Going to Ruin the Planet?*

- “Julian Simon Was Right” <https://www.cato.org/publications/economic-development-bulletin/julian-simon-was-right-half-century-population-growth>
- “Deconstructing the Population Bomb” <https://www.perc.org/2009/09/10/deconstructing-the-population-bomb/>
- Is Population A Problem? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MAVHcOIGq0Q>

Week 12, starts April 12: *Community-Based Solutions and Nobel Laureate Elinor Ostrom*

Second op-ed assignment is due at the beginning of the week, Monday, April 12, at 10 am.

- FME Chapter 8: Calling on Communities
- “Bloomington School of Political Economy III: The Continuing Relevance of Institutional Analysis,” Mercatus Center at George Mason University. https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=557&v=TTK1bAIO7MQ

Week 13, starts April 19: *Entrepreneurs Meet Environmental Problems*

- FME Chapter 9: Enviropreneurship in Action
- “Your Next High-End Safari Destination: The Plains of Montana,” Brad Wieners. Bloomberg. <https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2016-american-prairie-reserve/>

Week 14, starts April 26: *The Hardest Cases in Environmental Problems*

- FME Chapter 10 Frontiers of Free Market Environmentalism
- “Interview with Nobel prize winner Elinor Ostrom on climate change,” Irin News, <http://www.irinnews.org/feature/2012/04/25>
- Last day of class is Friday, April 30

Week 15: *Final Exam Week*

- **Final Exam: handed out Thursday, May 6 at 8 am and is due Sunday, May 9, at 11:59 pm.**
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ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic integrity is crucial for being both a good student and a good person. Review the Mason Honor Code here: <https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/>

I will not accept any documents, assignments, papers, etc. that are sent as corrupted files. You will immediately be deducted 10 points. You are responsible for ensuring the document you send me is properly working and uncorrupted.

DIVERSITY

GMU is committed to diversity. As I mentioned above, all viewpoints in class will be considered with respect, and all ideas are subject to economic scrutiny. Please be respectful in class to all ideas presented. There is large value to an inclusive learning experience – I truly believe we gain the most by interacting and discussing with others.

Please inform me of any days you will be unavailable due to religious observances. I am happy to accommodate you if I am made aware of your absence(s) ahead of time, within the first two weeks of the course. See the religious holidays calendar here: <https://ulife.gmu.edu/religious-holiday-calendar/>

TUTORING SERVICES

Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, tutoring services are currently unavailable. I am here to help you and can meet by appointment or during office hours. Tutoring may become virtually available and I will update you as more information becomes available.

STUDENT SERVICES

Keep Learning, Learning Services (learningservices.gmu.edu/keeplearning/)

- University Libraries (library.gmu.edu)
- Writing Center (writingcenter.gmu.edu)
- Counseling and Psychological Services (caps.gmu.edu)
- See a longer list of Mason student support services posted on The Stearns Center website.

SPECIAL ACCOMODATIONS

If you have a documented learning disability or other condition that may affect academic performance you should: 1) make sure this documentation is on file with Disability Services (SUB I, Rm. 4205; 993-2474; <http://ds.gmu.edu>) to determine the accommodations you need; and 2) talk with me to discuss your accommodation needs. Please see me immediately following the first class so that we can work together to make sure that you have what you need to succeed in this course. Visit <http://ds.gmu.edu/> for more information on resources available to students at GMU.

POLICY REGARDING AUDIO/VIDEO RECORDING & PICTURES

Since we are all asynchronous, there are no policies to follow here. All videos and lectures will be posted on Blackboard for you to use.

That said, please familiarize yourselves with “Netiquette” at GMU. I you to be respectful and use proper etiquette when discussing any coursework online. See the [core rules of "Netiquette"](#).

NOTICE OF MANDATORY REPORTING OF SEXUAL ASSAULT, VIOLENCE, AND STALKING

I am designated as a “Responsible Employee,” and must report all disclosures of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking to Mason’s Title IX Coordinator per University Policy 1412. You may seek assistance from Mason’s Title IX Coordinator, Jennifer Hammat, by calling 703-993-8730 or email cde@gmu.edu. If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact one of Mason’s confidential resources, such as Student Support and Advocacy Center (SSAC) at 703-993-3686 or Counseling and Psychology Services (CAPS) at 703-993-2380. The 24-hour Sexual and Intimate Partner Violence Crisis Line for Mason is 703-380-1434.

PRIVACY

Student privacy is governed by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and is an essential aspect of any course. See your rights under FERPA here: <https://registrar.gmu.edu/ferpa/>

Students must use their MasonLive email account to receive important University information, including communications related to this class. I will not respond to messages sent from or send messages to a non-Mason email address.