



ECONOMIC PROBLEMS & PUBLIC POLICIES

George Mason University

ECON 309–001 ∞ Spring 2024, *Horizon Hall 1008*

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“There is and can be no ultimate solution for us to discover, but instead a permanent need for balancing contradictory claims, for careful trade-offs between conflicting values, toleration of difference, consideration of the specific factors at play when a choice is needed, not reliance on an abstract blueprint claimed to be applicable everywhere, always, to all people.” —from [Isaiah Berlin: Against Dogma](#)

Welcome! This course is about some of the greatest challenges of our generation. We will discuss policies that shape immigration, foreign aid, international trade, climate change, inequality, and others. How should governments and organizations respond to those challenges with policy? We will need to form and defend opinions about policy, as citizens, employees, and managers. We can do that better using some tools from economics—alongside many other tools of course.

This is a Mason Core [Synthesis Course](#). That means it is about *applying* the economic principles you’ve already learned. A synthesis course is about thinking critically, clarifying your questions, and defending your own personal answers. It is not about solving math problems to get the single ‘right’ answer. We’ll confront many questions that don’t have one. Instead we will practice weighing different answers. You will choose and evaluate one policy that matters most to you.

★ I may update this syllabus. I will do so well in advance of due dates. *This version: January 9, 2024.*

BASICS

Learning goals By the end of this course you will be able to: 1) apply economic thinking to evaluate policy proposals for some of the biggest issues of our time, 2) assess claims about the ‘effect’ of a policy, and 3) choose a specific change in public policy and argue forcefully *for* or *against* it—relative to the alternatives.

Prerequisites ECON 100 or 103 and 104 or permission of instructor.

Ground rules **Artificial Intelligence:** Yes, you can use A.I. software (*outside* the classroom only). In fact, it’s required. Using A.I. tools will be a key to success in the modern job market.

Show up: I need you to come to class. Most of our learning will happen in the classroom, not from readings. If you absolutely cannot attend due to a religious holiday, please let me know right away.

Respect: We will address some difficult issues in this course, like race and gender. We will always do that with respect for *all* of each other’s diverse perspectives, ideas, and experiences.

Extensions: I have built a lot of flexibility into the grading. For that reason, except in extreme cases of documented medical emergency, I cannot give extensions or make-ups.

Honor: The Mason [honor code](#): “Student Members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work.”

Announcements Crucial information will arrive in your Mason email, from Blackboard. To ensure you receive it, please add donotreply@blackboard.com to your email address book or safe-sender list.

Office hours Whatever comes up, let’s talk. I’ve reserved numerous Zoom meeting slots, Mon.–Fri. at different times of day. No need to email: Just schedule a Zoom directly at [the Calendly link](#) above.

REQUIRED WORK

<i>Overview</i>	This course requires <i>Participation</i> (24% of grade); four written <i>Solo Labs</i> completed by yourself (24% of grade); four written <i>Group Labs</i> completed jointly (24% of grade); and one <i>Group Lab Presentation</i> with <i>Peer Review</i> in the classroom (28% of grade).
<i>Detail</i>	<p>► <i>In-Class Discussions</i>: Success in this course requires showing up, almost all the time. I use digital feedback tools to record your active participation at most course meetings. These cannot be made up, but when calculating your grade, I will drop your lowest four scores. One more point is for our mandatory office hours meeting with <i>all</i> group members; dates below. (1 point each)</p> <p>► <i>Solo Labs</i>: These four written assignments assess comprehension and application of the concepts we discuss in class. Each is a separate, self-contained exercise to be completed outside the classroom and turned in on Blackboard. I will distribute each of them on Blackboard. Feel free to discuss your ideas with other students, but what you deliver must be in your own, individual words and diagrams. Late delivery gets half credit. The first lab is graded pass/fail. (6 points each)</p> <p>► <i>Group Labs</i>: While the <i>Solo Labs</i> are on assigned policy problems, the <i>Group Labs</i> evaluate a public policy change of your choice. It can be nearly any policy change that you find interesting, as long as I approve it. If you would like suggestions for general policy areas where you can identify the specific policy you'll study, a brainstorming list is at the end of this syllabus. The four written <i>Group Labs</i> are cumulative: They build upon each other to prepare for your in-class presentation at the end of the course. They are to be completed in small groups that we will form a few weeks into the course. I will distribute each of them on Blackboard. Only one collaborative writeup must be delivered per group, but all group members should substantively contribute. Late delivery gets half credit. (6 points each)</p> <p>► <i>Group Lab Presentation</i> and <i>Peer Review</i>: Your group will do two things in class. First you will present, verbally and with slides, your final written <i>Group Lab</i>. The total presentation is 20 minutes, with speaking time divided roughly equally among group members. Second, your group will provide a brief verbal <i>Peer Review</i> (about 5 minutes) on one of the other groups' presentations. You will receive that other group's written <i>Group Lab</i> a week in advance. Everyone will also rate the persuasiveness of each presentation. The group with the highest peer rating will receive a <i>coveted</i> prize. There are no make-up presentations. (Presentation 22 points; Peer Review 6 points)</p>

OVERVIEW CALENDAR

Jan. 17–22	POLICY, EVIDENCE, & SCIENCE	
Jan. 24–Feb. 5	IMMIGRATION	Mandatory office hour 1: Feb. 5–22
Feb. 7–19	GLOBAL POVERTY	Due Feb. 9: <i>Solo Lab 1</i>
Feb. 21–26	CLIMATE CHANGE	Due Feb. 23: <i>Group Lab 1</i>
Feb. 28–Mar. 11	INTERNATIONAL TRADE	Due Mar. 1: <i>Solo Lab 2</i>
Mar. 13–20	INEQUALITY	Due Mar. 15: <i>Group Lab 2</i>
		Mandatory office hour 2: Mar. 18–Apr. 4
Mar. 25–Apr. 3	EDUCATION	Due Mar. 22: <i>Solo Lab 3</i>
		Due Mar. 29: <i>Group Lab 3</i>
Apr. 8–10	WOMEN IN THE LABOR MARKET	Due Apr. 5: <i>Solo Lab 4</i>
Apr. 15–17	AUTOMATION AND JOBS	Due Apr. 12: <i>Group Lab 4</i>
Apr. 22–29	SHARK TANK: presentations, peer review	Due Apr. 17–29: <i>Group Lab presentation</i>

DETAILED CALENDAR: Meetings, assignments, and useful links

The links for each course meeting, below, are not required readings in advance. They are resources if you want to review what we discuss in class. For each topic, the best starting point is marked with a star: ★

Jan. 17 THE HARDEST POLICY PROBLEMS WE FACE

▷ Question: *How does economics add value for choosing how, and whether, to enact public policy?*

Due: IN EACH CLASS, FROM HERE ON: We'll do short exercises to build and assess communication.

Useful links:

- ★ Our four principles of *economic thinking* that maximizes welfare: [A one-chapter review](#); and a 10-minute [video summary](#) by Stevenson & Wolfers
- This is a great time to review some of those principles. Here are great videos by Alex Tabarrok on [marginal analysis](#), and Tyler Cowen on [opportunity costs](#)
- “[Can We Learn to Disagree Better?](#)”, podcast interview with Adam Grant
- In our *Policy Triad*, ‘good’ policy must consider what is 1) *Welfare-Maximizing*, but also what is 2) *Politically Supportable*, and 3) *Administratively Feasible*

Jan. 22 A SCIENTIFIC APPROACH, AND ITS TOOLS

▷ Question: *How do economists assess whether a policy caused some effect?*

Useful links:

- ★ David Card, [What is Design-Based Research?](#) Video of Nobel lecture
- Summary of impact evaluation: [Measuring Impact by Design](#), by Impact Canada
- Quick table of [the main impact evaluation methods](#), and what each assumes
- [Short explanation of three types of evidence validity](#)—Internal, External, and Construct Validity—by Woodward; and [a longer explanation](#) by Shadish et al.

Jan. 24 IMMIGRATION 1: Policy challenges in regulating migration

▷ Question: *What are the big trends in immigration, and what is driving them?*

Useful links:

- ★ [Moving for Prosperity](#), overview, by World Bank
- [World Migration Report 2022](#), by International Organization for Migration
- [Yearbook of Immigration Statistics](#), U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security

Jan. 29 IMMIGRATION 2: Economic effects of immigration—impacts on native workers

▷ Question: *Do restrictions on hiring immigrant labor help working-class Americans?*

▷ Policy of the Day: [The R.A.I.S.E. Act of 2017](#)

Due: IN CLASS: Vote to express interest in different policy topics

Useful links:

- ★ [How specialization creates wealth](#), by Krugman summarizing Adam Smith
- “[The Effect of Immigrants on US Employment & Productivity](#)”, by Peri
- “[Effect of Low-Skill Immigration Restrictions](#)” (Summary), by Clemens & Lewis
- [The debate over the Mariel Boatlift](#), by Clemens

Jan. 31 IMMIGRATION 3: Economic causes of migration

▷ Question: *Does rising wealth overseas reduce migration pressure?*

▷ Policy of the Day: [The Alliance for Prosperity](#)

Due: IN CLASS: Choose your student group for the semester

Useful links:

- ★ “[Migration on the Rise, a Paradigm in Decline](#)”, by Clemens
- “[Migration from Developing Countries](#)” by Clemens & Mendola
- “[The Emigration Life Cycle](#)” by Clemens
- “[Do Cash Transfers Deter Migration?](#)” by Clemens

DETAILED CALENDAR, *continued*

Feb. 5 IMMIGRATION 4: Broader impacts on the economy, local and global

► Question: *What is the effect of the most educated migrants—overseas and back home?*

► Policy of the Day: [The 2008 expansion of Optional Practical Training for foreign students](#)

Useful links:

- ★ [“Immigration: A Story of Substitutes and Complements”](#), St. Louis Fed
- [“STEM Workers, H-1B Visas, and Productivity in US Cities”](#), by Peri et al.
- [“Medical Worker Migration”](#), by Abarcar & Theoharides

Feb. 5 **Due:** MANDATORY GROUP OFFICE HOUR 1: to discuss group project,
–Feb. 22 *via Zoom, all group members attend. Scheduled by you on Calendly.*

Feb. 7 GLOBAL POVERTY 1: Poverty around the world

► Question: *What are the root causes of global prosperity and global poverty?*

Useful links:

- ★ [“What is Economic Growth and Why Is It So Important?”](#), Max Roser
- [“Why Are Some Countries Rich and Others Poor?”](#), St. Louis Fed
- [Poverty and Shared Prosperity Report](#), World Bank
- [“Growth is not enough”](#), by Poverty Action Lab
- [“Growth is enough and *only* growth is enough”](#) (Summary), Lant Pritchett
- [“Ending Africa’s Poverty Trap”](#), Sachs et al.
- [“Economic Development as Coordination Problems”](#), Matsuyama ([ungated](#))
- [“Long-Term Effects of the Targeting the Ultra Poor Program”](#), Banerjee & Duflo
- [“The New Era of Unconditional Convergence”](#), by Patel et al. [[Authors’ summary](#)]

Feb. 9 **Due** at 5pm: SOLO LAB 1, *written, via Blackboard*

Feb. 12 GLOBAL POVERTY 2: Case study of a multifaceted antipoverty project in Africa

► Question: *How does our model of poverty shape the effectiveness of antipoverty policy?*

► Policy of the Day: [The U.N. Millennium Villages](#)

Useful links:

- ★ [“The New Transparency in Development Econ.”](#), Clemens & Demombynes
- [Angeline Jolie goes to Sauri, Kenya](#) (*video*)
- [“With Transparency Comes Trust”](#), editorial by *Nature*
- [“Aiming high and falling low: The SADA-Northern Ghana Millennium Village Project”](#), by Masset et al.

Feb. 14 GLOBAL POVERTY 3: Constraints on the best intentions

► Question: *By what mechanisms can overseas assistance tend to impede development?*

Useful links:

- ★ [Interview with William Easterly](#) (*video*), by IEA London
- [“Does Aid Cause Growth?”](#)—a video summary of [“Counting Chickens when They Hatch”](#), by Clemens et al.
- [“Aid, Dutch disease, and manufacturing growth”](#), by Rajan & Subramanian
- [“Foreign Aid, Institutions, and Governance”](#), by Bräutigam & Knack
- [“Foreign aid and bribery at the United Nations”](#), by Kuziemko & Werker
- [“How external states can prolong civil wars”](#), by Cunningham
- [“Food Aid, Food Prices, & Producer Disincentives in Ethiopia”](#), Tadesse & Shively
- [“What’s New in Economic Sanctions?”](#), by Hufbauer & Jung
- [Haiti: The Tumultuous History](#), by Girard

DETAILED CALENDAR, *continued*

Feb. 19 GLOBAL POVERTY 4: The role for effective foreign aid

► Question: *What forms of foreign assistance can do the most good?*

► Policy of the Day: [Jamaica Early Childhood Intervention](#) [more]

Useful links:

- ★ “Using household grants to benchmark the cost effectiveness of a USAID workforce readiness program”, McIntosh & Zeitlin
- “Why Do People Stay Poor?”, Balboni et al.
- “Long-Term Effects of the Targeting the Ultra Poor Program”, Banerjee et al. (ungated)
- “Effective Foreign Aid: Gavi’s Vaccine Program”, Shastry & Tortorice
- The New Role for the World Bank, by Clemens & Kremer
- “The Extraordinary Relationship between Peacekeeping and Peace”, Walter et al.
- “The Welfare Effects of Encouraging Rural-Urban Migration”, Lagakos et al.
- “Migrant Income and Long-Run Economic Development”, Khanna et al.

Feb. 21 CLIMATE CHANGE 1

► Question: *What are the economic effects of climate change?*

Useful links:

- ★ “Externalities” by Caplan; “Public Goods”, by Cowen
- “Circumstances affecting the Heat of the Sun’s Rays”, Eunice Foote 1856
- *How Do We Know Climate Change Is Real?*, by NASA
- *Climate Change: Evidence and Causes*, Royal Society
- *State of the Climate*, Carbon Brief
- “Climate Change: The Ultimate Challenge for Economics”, by Nordhaus
- “Temperature Shocks and Economic Growth”, by Dell et al.
- “Unequal effect of extreme heat on economic growth”, Callahan & Mankin
- “The Economic Impacts of Climate Change”, by Tol

Feb. 23 Due at 5pm: GROUP LAB 1, written, via Blackboard

Feb. 26 CLIMATE CHANGE 2

► Question: *What can or should public policy do about a changing climate?*

► Policy of the Day: [The Paris Agreement of 2015](#)

Useful links:

- ★ [Why global emissions negotiations fail](#), Bruce Bueno de Mesquita
- “Perpetrators & Victims”: Robert Frank, *Darwin Economy*, on Coase Theorem
- *Carbon Pricing Dashboard*, World Bank
- *Applying game theory to climate negotiations*, by CORE Econ
- “Global Cooperation Is Not Necessary to Fight Climate Change”, by Subramanian
- *Adaptation to Climate Change in Low-Income Countries*, Malik & Smith
- *African development in an era of climate change*, by Ken Opalo
- *Action Plan for Climate Adaptation*, US Dept. of Agriculture
- *Adaptation Gap Report 2022*, United Nations

DETAILED CALENDAR, *continued*

Feb. 28 INTERNATIONAL TRADE 1

▷ Question: *How does economic prosperity depend on specialization and trade?*

Useful links:

- ★ [“The Iowa Car Crop”](#): Steven Landsburg explains Comparative Advantage
- [“International Trade”](#), from *Basic Economics* by Thomas Sowell
- [“Comparative Advantage”](#), by Lauren Landsburg [[video](#) by Boudreaux]
- [Analyzing tariffs with supply & demand](#), by Cowen & Tabarrok [video]
- [“Does Trade Reform Promote Economic Growth?”](#), by Doug Irwin
- [“Trade Liberalization and Growth”](#), by Wacziarg & Horn-Welch
- [Globalization and Poverty](#), by Ann Harrison
- [A Practical Guide to Trade Policy Analysis](#), WTO

Mar. 1 Due at 5pm: SOLO LAB 2, written, via Blackboard

Mar. 11 INTERNATIONAL TRADE 2 (Note this is a Tuesday)

▷ Question: *How can or should policy respond to shifts in comparative advantage?*

▷ Policy of the Day: [US Trade Adjustment Assistance](#)

Useful links:

- ★ [“Why the theory of comparative advantage is overrated”](#), by Tyler Cowen
- [“On the Persistence of the China Shock”](#), by Autor, Dorn, and Hanson
- [“US exports and employment”](#), by Feenstra, Ma, Xu [[authors’ summary](#)]
- [Larry Summers vs. Angus Deaton on ‘Deaths of Despair’](#) [video]
- [Evaluation of Trade Adjustment Assistance](#), by Mathematica [[summary](#)]
- [The Collapse of America’s Free Trade Consensus](#), by Aaron Cavin
- Dani Rodrik’s [Trilemma of Globalization](#)
- [“The New Empty Argument against Trade”](#), Penny Goldberg
- [“...Effect of Imports from China on US Employment”](#), by de Chaisemartin & Lei

Mar. 13 INEQUALITY 1

▷ Question: *Inequality of what, for whom, and how much is there?*

Useful links:

- ★ [“Impacts of Neighborhoods on Intergenerational Mobility”](#), Chetty & Hendren
- [“Concepts of Inequality”](#), United Nations
- [“Inequality: Too Much of a Good Thing”](#), Alan Krueger
- [“In Defense of Inequality”](#), Finis Welch; [“Defending the One Percent”](#), by Mankiw
- [“The Fading American Dream”](#), Chetty et al.
- [World Inequality Database](#), Alvaredo et al.
- [“Income Inequality in the United States”](#), Auten & Splinter [[Vox explainer](#)]
- [Trends in the Distribution of Family Wealth](#), Congressional Budget Office

Mar. 15 Due at 5pm: GROUP LAB 2, written, via Blackboard

DETAILED CALENDAR, *continued*

Mar. 18 INEQUALITY 2: REDISTRIBUTING INCOME OR WEALTH

- ▷ Question: *What are some of the root causes of poverty, and how are they affected by redistribution?*
- ▷ Policy of the Day: [Targeted Housing Vouchers: Moving to Opportunity](#)

Useful links:

- ★ [“Race and Economic Opportunity in the United States”](#), Chetty et al.
- [“Rethinking Redistribution”](#), by Miron
- [“The Macroeconomic Effects of Tax Changes”](#), Christina Romer & David Romer
- [“The U.S. Racial Wealth Gap, 1860–2020”](#), Ellora Derenoncourt et al.
- [A Debate on Reparations for Black Americans: Sandy Darity vs. Randall Kennedy](#)
- [The State of Baby Bonds](#), Madeline Brown et al.
- [“Children of the Poor”](#), by Mollie Orshansky, origin of the poverty line
- [“An Absolute Full-Income Poverty Measure”](#), Burkhauser et al.
- [“Evidence from the Moving to Opportunity Experiment”](#), Chetty et al

Mar. 18 **Due:** MANDATORY GROUP OFFICE HOUR 2: to discuss group project,
–Apr. 4 *via Zoom, all group members attend. Scheduled by you on Calendly.*

Mar. 20 INEQUALITY 3: REGULATING MARKET TRANSACTIONS

- ▷ Question: *Can market interventions to reduce inequality yield perverse consequences?*
- ▷ Policy of the Day: [Ban-the-Box Laws](#)

Useful links:

- ★ [Price Floors: The Minimum Wage](#), by Cowen & Tabarrok [video]
- [Minimum Wage Tracker](#), Economic Policy Institute
- [The Economics of Imperfect Competition](#), Joan Robinson 1933
- [“The Elusive Employment Effect of the Minimum Wage”](#), Alan Manning
- [“Minimum wages and the China syndrome”](#), Milsom & Roland
- [“Immigration Restrictions as Active Labor Market Policy”](#), Clemens et al.
- [“A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination”](#), Bertrand & Mullanaithan
- [“Ban the Box, Criminal Records, and Racial Discrimination”](#), Agan & Starr
- [Evidence about the effects of rent control](#), Rebecca Diamond

Mar. 22 **Due** at 5pm: SOLO LAB 3, *written, via Blackboard*

Mar. 25 EDUCATION 1: COLLEGE

- ▷ Question: *What shapes the effect of higher education on economic mobility?*
- ▷ Policy of the Day: [Univ. of Michigan’s HAIL Scholarship](#)

Useful links:

- ★ [“The effect of attending the flagship state university on earnings”](#), by Hoekstra
- [“Education and Economic Growth”](#), Anna Valero
- [“Intergenerational Mobility Across Colleges in the United States”](#), Chetty et al.
- [“Effect of Reducing Complexity ... in College Pricing”](#), Dynarski et al.
- [“The Power of Certainty”](#), Burland, Dynarski et al.
- [“The Hidden Supply of High-Achieving, Low-Income Students”](#), Hoxby & Avery
- [“Income-contingent loans in higher education financing”](#), Chapman & Dearden

Mar. 29 **Due** at 5pm: GROUP LAB 3, *written, via Blackboard*

DETAILED CALENDAR, *continued*

Apr. 1 EDUCATION 2: PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLING

► Question: *How does public financing or provision of basic education shape adult outcomes?*

► Policy of the Day: [The Rosenwald Schools](#)

Useful links:

- ★ [“The Race between Education & Technology”](#), Claudia Goldin & Larry Katz
- [“The \(Perceived\) Returns to Education & the Demand for Schooling”](#), Rob Jensen
- [“Controversies about the effectiveness of school resources”](#), Eric Hanushek
- [“Effects of School Spending on... Economic Outcomes”](#), Kirabo Jackson et al.
- [“Teacher effects and teacher-related policies”](#), Kirabo Jackson et al.
- [“School Accountability”](#), Jason Burns & Katharine Strunk
- [Affirmative action in Maryland public schools](#), Jishnu Das
- [“Universal screening ... in gifted education”](#), by Card & Giuliano
- [“The Impact of Rosenwald Schools”](#), Aaronson & Mazumder
- [“Access to education and rates of incarceration”](#), Katherine Eriksson
- [“How to Improve Education Outcomes Most Efficiently?”](#), Angrist et al.

Apr. 3 EDUCATION 3: EARLY CHILDHOOD

► Question: *How can policies before children enter school shape schooling outcomes?*

► Policy of the Day: [Head Start preschool services](#)

Useful links:

- ★ [“The Fetal Origins Hypothesis”](#), Douglas Almond & Janet Currie
- [“Long-Term Effects of In Utero Influenza Exposure”](#), Douglas Almond
- [“Inequality at Birth”](#), Janet Currie
- [“Fighting crime in the cradle”](#), Barr & Smith
- [“Early Childhood Education in the United States”](#), Elizabeth Cascio
- [The Heckman Curve](#), explained by Heckman in a 3 min. video [[original paper](#)]
- [“Reducing Inequality through Dynamic Complementarity”](#), Johnson & Jackson
- [“The long-term impact of the Head Start program”](#), Schanzenbach & Bauer

Apr. 5 Due at 5pm: SOLO LAB 4, written, via Blackboard

Apr. 8 WOMEN IN THE LABOR MARKET 1

► Question: *When women’s specialization is constrained, what is lost by women and men?*

Useful links:

- ★ [“The Quiet Revolution”](#), Claudia Goldin [[Nobel lecture video](#)]
- [“Gender in the 21st Century”](#), Marianne Bertrand
- [“Women in economics”](#), Shelly Lundberg & Jenna Stearns
- [“The economics of women’s rights”](#), Michèle Tertilt et al.
- [“The Gender Wage Gap: Extent, Trends, and Explanations”](#), Blau & Kahn
- [“Dynamics of the Gender Gap for Young Professionals”](#), Bertrand et al.
- [“A grand gender convergence”](#), Claudia Goldin
- [“The Child Penalty Atlas”](#), Kleven et al.

DETAILED CALENDAR, *continued*

Apr. 10 WOMEN IN THE LABOR MARKET 2

- ▷ Question: *Does welfare-improving policy require knowing the exact mechanism for gender gaps?*
- ▷ Policy of the Day: [Rheinland-Pfalz Childcare Extension Experiment](#) [[Summary](#)]

Useful links:

- ★ [“Improved allocation of talent boosts US economic growth”](#), Hsieh et al.
- [“Sticky floors or glass ceilings?”](#), Ciminelli et al.
- [“Gender stereotypes about intellectual ability emerge early”](#), Bian et al.
- [“Small gender differences that become large”](#), de Sousa & Hollard
- [“How Professor Gender Perpetuates the Gender Gap”](#), Carrell et al.
- [“Orchestrating Impartiality”](#), by Goldin & Rouse
- [“Signals in the Labor Market ... Medical Referrals”](#), Heather Sarsons

Apr. 12 Due at 5pm: GROUP LAB 4, written, via Blackboard

Apr. 15 AUTOMATION AND JOBS

- ▷ Question: *How will artificial intelligence affect your job prospects, and what if any role for policy?*
- ▷ Policy of the Century: *Let’s admit it; no one has figured this out*

Useful links:

- ★ [“Who Owns the Robots Rules the World”](#), Richard Freeman
- [“How Technology Displaces and Reinstates Labor”](#), by Acemoglu & Restrepo
- [“How susceptible are jobs to computerisation?”](#), Frey & Osborne [[critique](#)]
- [“From unbridled enthusiasm to qualified optimism to vast uncertainty”](#), Autor
- [“Artificial intelligence and the future of labour demand”](#), Acemoglu & Restrepo
- [“The Labor Market Impact Potential of Large Language Models”](#), Eloundou et al.
- [“Short-Term Effects of ... Artificial Intelligence on Employment”](#), Hui et al.
- [“Navigating the Jagged Technological Frontier”](#), by dell’Acqua et al.
- [“The Wrong Kind of A.I.”](#), Acemoglu & Restrepo
- [“The Jobless AI Future Is Still a Long Way Off”](#), Michael Strain

Apr. 17 SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS and SHARK TANK 1

Due in class, Apr. 17–29: GROUP LAB PRESENTATION, PEER REVIEW, and VOTING

Useful links:

- ★ [The Properly Trained Economist](#), Boettke & Rosolino
- [Creating Markets for New Vaccines](#), Michael Kremer
- [Advance Market Commitments: ... Theory and Experience](#), Kremer et al.

Apr. 22 SHARK TANK 2. **Due in class:** *Continuing presentations, peer reviews, and voting*

Apr. 24 SHARK TANK 3. **Due in class:** *Continuing presentations, peer reviews, and voting*

Apr. 29 SHARK TANK 4. **Due in class:** *Continuing presentations, peer reviews, and voting*

RESOURCES

Econ review Economics terminology is explained in plain English by *The Economist’s* [The A to Z of Economics](#). For a video review of nearly any concept from your economics principles course, it is hard to beat [Marginal Revolution University](#) produced here at Mason.

Accessibility Students with documented disabilities have the right to specific accommodations that do not fundamentally alter the nature of the course. Please alert me should you require them. More information at [ds.gmu.edu](#).

<i>University deadlines</i>	Only students registered for this course can attend. The last day to add classes is January 23. The last day to drop with 100% tuition refund is January 30. The last day to drop with 50% tuition refund is February 6.
<i>Crisis</i>	You can speak confidentially about any crisis you might face by calling the Student Support and Advocacy Center (SSAC) at 703-993-3686, or Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at 703-993-2380. To report threatening behavior or violence, go to stopviolence.gmu.edu . To report discrimination on the basis of sex, or sexual misconduct, you can call Mason's Title IX office at 703-993-8730. You can reach the National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline by dialing 988 from any phone, 24 hours a day.

SAMPLE TOPICS FOR GROUP LAB AND PRESENTATION

Your group is free to choose *any* change in policy, with my approval, as the one to evaluate in your Group Labs and Presentation. I will approve policy changes that can be fruitfully analyzed with economic thinking and existing evidence (almost all policies can be!) and are appropriate for class discussion. The policy you choose can relate to nearly any topic you find compelling; you do not need to choose one from the list below. But if you are looking for ideas, I offer the following list as a brainstorm of potentially interesting topics.

<i>Affirmative Action</i>	<i>Firearms policy</i>	<i>Internet regulation</i>	<i>Rent control</i>
<i>Antitrust & competition</i>	<i>Geography of US poverty</i>	<i>Judicial reform, policing</i>	<i>Reparations</i>
<i>Automation and AI</i>	<i>Global poverty, foreign aid</i>	<i>Labor unions</i>	<i>Reproductive rights</i>
<i>Brain drain</i>	<i>Health insurance</i>	<i>Minimum wage</i>	<i>Saving for retirement</i>
<i>Carbon offsets</i>	<i>Immigration</i>	<i>Multinational corporations</i>	<i>School choice</i>
<i>Central planning</i>	<i>Industrial Policy</i>	<i>Narcotics regulation</i>	<i>Taxation & national debt</i>
<i>Childcare</i>	<i>Inequality in the US</i>	<i>Pandemic policy</i>	<i>Terrorism</i>
<i>Climate change</i>	<i>Intergenerational mobility</i>	<i>Patents, copyright, IP</i>	<i>Transportation</i>
<i>Deaths of despair</i>	<i>International sanctions</i>	<i>Property rights in space</i>	<i>Urban planning</i>
<i>Eldercare</i>	<i>International trade</i>	<i>Regulation (FDA, EPA, ...)</i>	<i>Women in the labor market</i>

Once you and your group choose a topic—whether from the above list or otherwise—you will choose a specific policy change related to that topic. This is the policy change you will evaluate in your Group Labs and Presentation. By ‘specific policy change’, I mean a real-world change in public policy that was made by a specific government in a specific place at a specific time, or a future proposed change in public policy by a specific government at a specific time. ■