

Course Information

Course Number: ECON 465
Course Title: Contemporary Economic Issues
Section: 501
Time: Tuesday and Thursday, 1:05-02:20 pm
Location: ALLN 1002
Credit Hours: 3

Instructor Details

Instructor: Jorge Hirs-Garzon
Office: WCSS 263
E-Mail: jorgehirs@tamu.edu
Office Hours: Thursday, 2:30 - 03:30 pm; Zoom meetings available on request
Zoom Link: <https://tamu.zoom.us/j/98165504956?pwd=0tQSf4ahMHYav7CsiCVDL8jYpS3kon.1>
Passcode: 028493

Teaching Assistant Details

Teaching Assistant: TBD
Office: TBD
E-Mail: TBD

Course Description

This course applies economic principles to real-world challenges, equipping students with practical tools to analyze and interpret some of the most pressing issues of our time. Drawing on both microeconomic and macroeconomic frameworks, students will explore macroeconomic stabilization policies in the context of financial crises, fiscal policy and government spending, policy uncertainty and international cooperation (including tariffs and geopolitical dynamics), labor market and demographic challenges shaped by artificial intelligence, technological transformations beyond AI, and climate change with its implications for sustainable economic policy.

The emphasis is on real-world applications rather than abstract theory or formal modeling. Students will learn to critically evaluate policy debates, interpret data, and develop actionable insights. The course also provides space for students to propose and analyze topics aligned with their own interests, fostering a personalized and engaging learning experience. Through class discussions, collaborative projects, and hands-on analysis, students will develop the skills needed to address complex economic problems in practical and impactful ways.

Course Prerequisites

ECON 323 (ECON 410 recommended) or approval of undergraduate advisor.

Course Learning Outcomes

- Identify and explain key concepts and frameworks from microeconomics and macroeconomics relevant to contemporary economic challenges.
- Interpret and summarize real-world economic data to inform policy analysis
- Compare and contrast alternative perspectives on significant economic issues.
- Analyze the design and potential impacts of contemporary economic policies using appropriate analytical tools.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of policy responses in addressing economic challenges.
- Communicate evidence-based arguments clearly in both oral discussions and written assignments.
- Collaborate in a team setting to research, develop, and present a policy-oriented project.

Textbook and/or Resource Materials

- Optional (all required readings will be posted on canvas):

Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Economic Issues, 17th edition, McGraw Hill, 2019.
ISBN-13: 978 125 967 2477

The Economics of Macro Issues, 8th edition, Pearson, 2018.
ISBN-13: 978-0-13-453199-1

Chat GPT-4 subscription

Grading Policy

Your final grade in this course will be determined by your performance on:

- Non-cumulative exams (10+10+10=30%)
- Group Project: Presentation 13%, submission of two papers related to the topic of interest 10%, topic 1%, proposal 1%, Slides submission (4%), peer reviews (4+4=8%), surveys (0.5+0.5=1%) (38%)
- Participation (14%)
- Quizzes (10%)
- Perusall (8%)

Grading scale:

A	89.50 and above
B	79.50 to 89.49
C	69.50 to 79.49
D	59.50 to 69.49
F	59.49 and below

Groups: All students will be assigned to groups; we will devote the first two weeks of classes to group creation and choice of research topics.

Quizzes (10%): short quizzes that will be based on assigned reading(s) and will be administered either in class or via Canvas. Each quiz will consist of approximately 5-10 multiple-choice or T/F questions. The three lowest quiz scores will be dropped.

Exams (30%):

3 non-cumulative exams may include multiple choice questions, T/F questions, and 1-2 essay questions.

- **First Exam:** October 2, held in class.
- **Second Exam:** October 30, held in class.
- **Third Exam:** December 4, held in class.

Note: These dates are tentative and may be adjusted based on class size.

Group project & Peer reviews (38%):

All students will create groups of 5-6 students and submit a group creation form with a list of students, topic, and least preferable dates for presentation. Each group should have a unique topic, two groups cannot have the same topic. Each group should submit 1-2 page(s) proposals. The Proposal should include: title, 1-2 paragraphs describing the issue and different points of view on this issue, the outline of the presentation, and at least 5 possible sources (it could be not final list).

The use of AI tools, specifically Chat GPT-4, is allowed for the group project. AI can be utilized to gather information for your proposal, generate ideas, and assist in developing different perspectives on the issue. Students should document how they used Chat GPT throughout the project, particularly in the research and proposal stages.

Each group should submit two papers representing opposite points of view on the issue. The papers should be either from peer reviewed journal or an expert's report/analytical paper/testimony that is published at a think tank (see examples of think tanks in the syllabus) or at the website of public or private economic research agency/institution (for example NBER), or at hearings sections of the U.S. House of Representatives committees. It could be a chapter from a textbook, or a part of a longer article.

Each paper should be approximately 5-12 pages long (if shorter/longer - consult instructor before submitting). It CANNOT be from popular press (newspapers, nonacademic journals), nor from online encyclopedias (Wikipedia, Investopedia, etc.). If you are not sure whether the papers satisfy the requirements, please consult the instructor before submitting.

Each student will be assigned a peer review of papers of some other group. Based on the results of peer review the instructor may recommend some groups to change and resubmit papers. Some of these papers will be assigned to non-presenting students to read for the date of presentation.

Each group must submit the slides for presentation. The length requirements are 15-25 slides (not counting reference list). The slides are well balanced with information and visuals, and have easy to read and interpret design. Each student will be assigned peer review of slides. Both peer review assignments (papers and slides) will be administered via Peerceptiv. Slides for presentations should be submitted both to Perceptiv assignment in Canvas and to the discussion board in Canvas (it could be submitted as links or uploaded as PDF documents). In case of links make sure to share it with the Texas A&M group.

All groups will present their projects during class time. The presentation should be about current economic issues. Each presentation should be approximately 20-25 minutes long, there will be 2 presentations in each class followed by discussion, not presenting students will ask questions, and presenters will answer. The points for the presentation will be distributed as follows: 10% for the quality of presentation, and 3% for the quality of answers to the questions. Presenting group should be ready to conduct a class discussion on the chosen topic and to provide the overview of the issue and possible solutions. In order to receive credit the group member should participate in the presentation. It is expected that the presentation would cover different points of view on the issue and policies addressing this issue, and use supporting documentation/data. The grade would depend on :

- the formal requirements being satisfied (length and duration of presentation, deadlines)
- the coverage of the issue
- argumentation and analysis being backed up by supporting data/articles/research publications/reports/etc.

[List of possible topics](#)

Class participation (14%)

(4%) attendance: students should be present in class, participating in group work and class activities.

(6%) contribution to discussions using cards: Each student will receive 2 contribution cards before each exam (a total of 6 cards). Each time a card is used, the student earns 1% towards their participation grade. Additional contributions beyond the 6 cards can earn extra credit, with 0.25 percentage points awarded per extra card, up to a maximum of 2% bonus points (8 cards).

(4%) group successfully completes class activities: Groups are required to complete in-class activities, which may include short presentations of assigned sections of a paper, answering specific questions, summarizing results of group discussion, doing in class applications of generative AI and sharing the results, submitting the results of group work at Canvas.

Students should come to the class prepared: read the paper and complete the assignment related to the reading (could be finding articles/reports/examples related to the topic of reading), be prepared to answer questions based on the assigned readings, and to conduct a discussion.

Unexcused absences policy: Each student is allowed to miss 3 classes (unexcused) without it affecting the class participation points.

Excused absences policy:

- Contact before or within 48 hours of absence
- Submit request via email: jorgehirs@tamu.edu
- If you need an extension, please contact me within 48 hours at jorgehirs@tamu.edu.

Course Schedule

Module 1. Macroeconomic Stabilization Policies

Module 2. Policy Uncertainty, Trade, and Macroeconomic Impacts

Module 3. Labor Market and Demographic Challenges in the Age of AI

Module 4. Technological Transformations Beyond AI and Their Economic Implications

All topics are subject to change; we may cover less or more than outlined or include a different topic.

DO NOT USE this outline as a study guide for the exam!

Helpful Websites

Think tanks publish research papers on both domestic and international economic, political, environmental, and social issues. You can find interesting ideas and sources for your papers there.

1. CATO Institute – www.cato.org
2. Hudson Institute – www.hudson.org
3. The Heritage Foundation – www.heritage.org.
4. American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research (AEI) – www.aei.org
5. Brookings Institution – www.brookings.edu
6. Hoover Institution – www.hoover.org
7. National Bureau of Economic Research – www.nber.org
8. Competitive Enterprise Institute – <http://cei.org>
9. Urban Institute – www.urban.org
10. Economic Policy Institute - <https://www.epi.org/>
11. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities - <https://www.cbpp.org/>
12. Federal Reserve Economic Data (FRED) - <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/>

Email Policy

Please include the course number (ECON 465) in the subject of your email. I reserve the right not to answer emails that do not include information about the course and section number.

Check your TAMU email regularly. I send important announcements to the TAMU emails only.

Statement on class climate, harassment, and discrimination

My goal is to have a learning environment in the classroom in which students of all backgrounds and identities would feel belonging and supported. Let me know if you feel uncomfortable because of something was said/posted in class (by anyone), if you prefer you can provide your feedback anonymously.

Texas A&M University, in accordance with applicable federal and state law, prohibits discrimination, including harassment, on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Individuals who believe they have experienced harassment or discrimination prohibited by this statement are encouraged to contact the appropriate Designated Official.

As a courtesy to me and your fellow students, be on time, do not depart early, and refrain from disruptive behavior (such as talking to each other or reading the newspaper) during lecture. If you have a question during the lecture, do not hesitate to ask me. Turn cell phones off.

Whom to contact:

If the alleged offender is a:

STUDENT – Dean of Student Life, studentlife@tamu.edu, 979-845-3111

FACULTY – Dean of Faculties, Dof@tamu.edu, 979-845-4274

STAFF or THIRD PARTY – Vice President of Human Resources and Organizational Effectiveness, ocrm@tamu.edu, 979-862-4027

Also see the section on Title IX and Statement on Limits to Confidentiality below for further information.

Additional Academic Resources

The Department of Economics Tutoring Lab will be available during the semester. The Department Tutoring Lab schedule will can be found here:

<https://artsci.tamu.edu/economics/academics/undergraduate/current-students/tutoring-lab.html>.

University Policies

Attendance Policy

The university views class attendance and participation as an individual student responsibility. Students are expected to attend class and to complete all assignments. Absences will affect grades, as documented above. As a courtesy to me and your fellow students, be on time, do not depart early, and refrain from disruptive behavior (such as talking to each other) during the lecture.

Please refer to [Student Rule 7](#) in its entirety for information about excused absences, including definitions, and related documentation and timelines.

Makeup Work Policy

Students will be excused from attending class on the day of a graded activity or when attendance contributes to a student's grade, for the reasons stated in Student Rule 7, or other reason deemed appropriate by the instructor.

Please refer to [Student Rule 7](#) in its entirety for information about makeup work, including definitions, and related documentation and timelines.

Absences related to Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 may necessitate a period of more than 30 days for make-up work, and the timeframe for make-up work should be agreed upon by the student and instructor" ([Student Rule 7, Section 7.4.1](#)).

"The instructor is under no obligation to provide an opportunity for the student to make up work missed because of an unexcused absence" ([Student Rule 7, Section 7.4.2](#)).

Students who request an excused absence are expected to uphold the Aggie Honor Code and Student Conduct Code. (See [Student Rule 24](#).)

Academic Integrity Statement and Policy

"An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal, or tolerate those who do."

"Texas A&M University students are responsible for authenticating all work submitted to an instructor. If asked, students must be able to produce proof that the item submitted is indeed the work of that student. Students must keep appropriate records at all times. The inability to authenticate one's work, should the instructor request it, may be sufficient grounds to initiate an academic misconduct case" ([Section 20.1.2.3, Student Rule 20](#)).

You can learn more about the Aggie Honor System Office Rules and Procedures, academic integrity, and your rights and responsibilities at aggiehonor.tamu.edu.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Policy

Texas A&M University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. If you experience barriers to your education due to a disability or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Resources office on your campus (resources listed below). Disabilities may include, but are not limited to attentional, learning, mental health, sensory, physical, or chronic health conditions. All students are encouraged to discuss their disability related needs with Disability Resources and their instructors as soon as possible.

Disability Resources is located in the Student Services Building or at (979) 845-1637 or visit disability.tamu.edu.

Title IX and Statement on Limits to Confidentiality

Texas A&M University is committed to fostering a learning environment that is safe and productive for all. University policies and federal and state laws prohibit gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, sexual exploitation, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking.

With the exception of some medical and mental health providers, all university employees (including full and part-time faculty, staff, paid graduate assistants, student workers, etc.) are Mandatory Reporters and must report to the Title IX Office if the employee experiences, observes, or becomes aware of an incident that meets the following conditions (see [University Rule 08.01.01.M1](#)):

- The incident is reasonably believed to be discrimination or harassment.
- The incident is alleged to have been committed by or against a person who, at the time of the incident, was (1) a student enrolled at the University or (2) an employee of the University.

Mandatory Reporters must file a report regardless of how the information comes to their attention – including but not limited to face-to-face conversations, a written class assignment or paper, class discussion, email, text, or social media post. Although Mandatory Reporters must file a report, in most instances, a person who is subjected to the alleged conduct will be able to control how the report is handled, including whether or not to pursue a formal investigation. The University's goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and to ensure access to the resources you need.

Students wishing to discuss concerns related to mental and/or physical health in a confidential setting are encouraged to make an appointment with [University Health Services](#) or download the [TELUS Health Student Support app](#) for 24/7 access to professional counseling in multiple languages. Walk-in services for urgent, non-emergency needs are available during normal business hours at University Health Services locations; call 979.458.4584 for details.

Students can learn more about filing a report, accessing supportive resources, and navigating the Title IX investigation and resolution process on the University's [Title IX webpage](#).

Statement on Mental Health and Wellness

Texas A&M University recognizes that mental health and wellness are critical factors influencing a student's academic success and overall wellbeing. Students are encouraged to engage in healthy self-care practices by utilizing the resources and services available through [University Health Services](#). Students needing a listening ear can call the Texas A&M Helpline (979.845.2700) from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. weekdays and 24 hours on weekends for mental health peer support while classes are in session. The [TELUS Health Student Support app](#) provides access to professional counseling in multiple languages anytime, anywhere by phone or chat, and the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline offers 24-hour emergency support at 988 or [988lifeline.org](#).

Students needing a listening ear can contact University Health Services (979.458.4584) or call the Texas A&M Helpline (979.845.2700) from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. weekdays and 24 hours on weekends while classes are in session. 24-hour emergency help is also available through the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (988) or at [988lifeline.org](#).