Econ 207 (Urban Economics) Syllabus Spring 2024

Course Meets: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11 am – 12:15 pm, in King 243.

Contact Details

Instructor: Prof. Ron Cheung [he/him]
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Office: Rice Hall 229

In-person office hours: Mondays, 10:30 am – 11:30 am; Wednesdays, 1:30 pm – 2:30 pm; Thursdays, 1:30 pm – 2:30 pm. No appointment necessary; just drop in (first come, first served). None of the times above work for you? Please email me and we'll schedule an alternative time.

Student Teaching Fellow

This class has a teaching fellow, a student who has previously taken the class before. I will introduce the student at the beginning of the semester. The teaching fellow has three major tasks:

- Grade assignments
- Hold office hours if you want some extra help
- Hold review sessions before exams

The Economics Department has recently created the Teaching Fellows program, funded by the Joel Dean Foundation, to encourage student-led teaching and learning. Our aim is to provide an extra layer of resources for students to succeed in the course. I hope you find the teaching fellow helpful!

Course Description and Learning Goals

Three-quarters of the U.S. population and about half of the world population are urban. Cities are complex, dynamic creatures, and urban economists have attempted to systematically explain their existence, growth and impact. This course provides an introductory look at these theories and concepts. Along the way, an important emphasis will be placed on policies (public and private) that have had important effects on urban form, structure and economy.

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Understand the implications of canonical theoretical models in urban economics.
- Apply these models in three equally important ways: conceptually, graphically and mathematically.
- See how theoretical models have been taken to empirical data to test their validity.

- Evaluate good and bad local policy along the dimensions of efficiency, equity, sustainability and other criteria.
- Tie models to your own experience with cities by participating in the class project.

QFR Goals

This course is designated QFR (Quantitative & Formal Reasoning). This course will focus on the following goals as a way to hone your quantitative and formal reasoning skills:

- Interpretation - Explain information presented in mathematical forms and/or within a formal reasoning system.
- Representation - Translate information into a formal system or mathematical model; translate real world phenomena into formal/mathematical symbols.
- Implementation - Use formal reasoning/mathematical methods, tools, technology, and calculation to solve problems.
- Application / Analysis - Make judgments and draw appropriate conclusions based on the quantitative and/or formal analysis of data.

Remote Accessibility

This information is subject to change depending on the situation.

Lectures

- The course is a traditional class with in-person attendance expected.
- If we ever have to have a virtual class, you will be given the appropriate link.

Submitted Work

- Assignments & Final Project
    - Your problem sets and the final project will be submitted electronically via Gradescope, which is connected through Blackboard. Some of you may have used the platform for another course; if so, you'll see this course on your dashboard as long as you used your Oberlin email to register.
    - You'll be given information on how to use Gradescope. You will need either (1) access to a scanner, or (2) a smartphone - preferred. If you have neither, please talk to me.
- Exams
    - The two midterm exams will be conducted in person on paper. After you complete them, I will scan them into Gradescope where you will be able to review grading.

Prerequisite

The **prerequisite for this class is Econ 101**, Principles of Economics. This means that you have seen and are familiar with the basic concepts of demand and supply, competitive markets, elasticities, and so on. I will post refresher videos for your review in the first week, or you can consult your Econ 101 textbook.

This course, while having a strong focus on applied policy, is nonetheless in a quantitative discipline. It will thus use models, equations, graphs and statistics. This means the course will be more quantitative than Econ 101. Expect algebra, simple statistics and lots of graphs, but not calculus. If you have questions about the quantitative proficiency required, please chat with me.

Textbook and Course Materials

Textbook. The required textbook is Arthur O'Sullivan's *Urban Economics,* **9th edition**. The book has been substantially updated, so a prior edition cannot be used. You can buy or rent hard or electronic versions of the book at Amazon, VitalSource, McGraw Hill, etc.

Blackboard. As a registered student, you have access to the Blackboard page for this course. I'll post lecture notes, assignments, additional study material and announcements on this page. It is your responsibility to check the site often.

Lecture notes will generally be posted in advance of the lecture we cover them in. I recommend that you have them printed out during class so that you can take notes on them. The lecture notes are *incomplete* because we will draw and work through graphs and equations on the board. If you miss a lecture, it is your responsibility to borrow a classmate's notes to fill in the blanks.

Grading

Attendance (5%). I will conduct five random attendance checks throughout the semester. Your attendance at each check is worth 1% towards your final grade.

Is my absence excused? There are many extenuating reasons why an absence can be excused during a random attendance check: illness, medical emergencies, personal or family emergencies, and others. I encourage you to let me know of these absences in advance, if possible. Obviously, sometimes that is impossible, and it is understandable that you may need to contact me after your absence. In summary, prompt communication is the key to ensuring that you are not penalized for an unexcused absence.

If an absence does not rise to the level of an extenuating circumstance (e.g., you have to study for an exam in another class, you have a job interview, etc.), you may use a Flexibility Token, described in the next section, to offset your absence.

Assignments (20%). There will be homework assignments, which will be posted on Blackboard. You are permitted to work in a group of three students or fewer on assignments, but please hand in your own assignments, especially in questions with a written component.

Gradescope will allow you to hand in an assignment up to 24 hours late. I will apply a penalty of 25% for assignments handed in within 24 hours after the due time. Exceptions can be made for documented and justifiable reasons; otherwise you can use a Flexibility Token.

Midterm Exams (25% each). There will be two midterm exams. Exams are a combination of multiple choice, short-answer questions and longer problems. I will provide a study guide prior to each exam. The first midterm will be held on **Thursday, 14 March 2024.** The second will be held on **Thursday, 25 April 2024**.

Final Exam. There is no final exam for this class.

Urban Snapshots Project (25%). Urban structure and local public policy (both good and bad) can be observed simply by looking around. Is there congestion on city streets? Is there trash on the sidewalk? Why is there a "wrong side of the tracks?" The class project asks you to take scenes relevant to you and interpret them through the lens of the models we talk about in class.

You will find **eight** photographs of urban scenes and write accompanying text (1-2 pages of double-spaced text per scene) to interpret them using *economic concepts* from class. For example, a dilapidated house may prompt a discussion on its impact on crime. You may also juxtapose two photographs to illustrate one story (rich vs. poor, black vs. white, etc.) – those count as one scene.

- You can use photographs from your past travels and those taken by family or friends.
- You are allowed to use a photograph you find on the internet, but no more than three of your scenes may come from photos not taken by you or someone you personally know.
- Attribute your photos! Please note who took the photograph and the location/date/time.
- Tell the reader what element of the photo you want them to focus on.

No collaboration is allowed. You will save your project as a PDF file and submit it to Gradescope. Projects will be graded on: (1) your ability to transfer the concepts seen in class to photos; (2) thoroughness and thoughtfulness, including use of research, data, tables and external context; (3) photo variety and originality; and (4) quality of writing and exposition. Remember: this is not a photography assignment, but an economics one. Each scene is graded from 0 through 10, for a total of 80.

Very Important:

1. Don't expect real world phenomena to be perfectly explained by models from class. The real world is much more complex than any of our models ever are.
2. A project can be just as effective in a small town like Oberlin. "City problems" occur here as well!
3. Your safety is of paramount importance! DON'T take photos while you are driving. NEVER travel to unfamiliar or unsafe areas, especially at night. Don't go to unfamiliar places alone, do tell friends where you are going and always carry a phone. Do not be too conspicuous in taking photographs, and do not take photos of people without their permission.

Pre-Grade Option: I encourage you to seek feedback on your project. I will give you the opportunity to have part of your project graded early in the following way:

- Any time between 8 April 2024 and 30 April 2024, submit a PDF of **at most three photos and their write-ups** to Gradescope.
- I will grade them and return feedback as soon as I can.
- If you are satisfied with your grades for these scenes, you can consider these write-ups to be done and ask to have their grades be counted towards your final project without resubmitting them. If you are not satisfied, you can make edits on the write-ups and resubmit them in your final project.

Final Project Due Date: Wednesday, 15 May 2024, 4 pm ET.

Flexibility Tokens

You will each be credited with one Flexibility Token immediately, and another one after Spring Break. You may email me to say you would like to use a Flexibility Token to do any of the following **with no penalty**:

- Be excused for your absence during an attendance check date, no questions asked; or
- Get a 48-hour extension on any assignment, no questions asked.

Although advance notice is preferred, you can tell me you're using a Token no more than 24 hours after the absence or the assignment deadline. Unused Flexibility Tokens can be traded at the end of the semester for a half percentage point extra credit on your final grade for each token.

NOTE: It is **not** possible to use your token to get an extension on your final project or on any exam.

Midterm Exam Absences

If you have documented, verifiable and serious reason to miss a midterm exam, you must provide the proof to me within 24 hours of the exam, or you will receive a zero for it. Depending on the reason for excused absence, you will, at my discretion, either take a make-up in-person exam, or have the missed exam's weight shifted to another element of the course.

Departmental Final Project Policy

Courses in the Department of Economics have a common final project policy. It is the default policy that if a course has no final exam but has a final project, it is due at the official time and day set by the registrar for a final exam in that class. It is your responsibility to make sure you know the designated exam date for this class by going to https://www.oberlin.edu/registrar/final-exams before you continue with this class. The dates and times are provided so you have ample time to plan travel accordingly.

Rescheduling a final project due date is reserved for students facing extenuating circumstances. The department's policy is that you must seek an emergency or educational incomplete from the Academic Advising Resource Center (AARC).

This policy aims to accommodate genuine cases of need while maintaining the integrity and fairness of the assessment process.

Honor Code

The College requires that students sign an "Honor Code" for all turned-in work. On each item that you submit for grading, you must write "I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment" and sign your name. Here are examples of situations in which the Honor Code runs the risk of being violated:

- Sharing answers for homework assignments is dishonest. If you copy another student's answer or if you willingly let another student copy your answer, it is very dishonest. However, talking through a problem with someone or explaining to another student how you arrived at an answer is generally *not* dishonest.
- If you are working on an assignment with one or two other students (as permitted by the syllabus), but you divide up the questions so that each of you does different questions and then pool your answers together, that is dishonest.
- Plagiarizing in your project is extremely dishonest.
- Using an unauthorized device or communicating with anyone else during an exam is extremely dishonest.

All suspected violations of the Honor Code will be investigated, reported and taken seriously. If you believe you have witnessed an Honor Code violation by another student, you are reminded of your responsibility to file a report with the Student Honor Committee.

Use of AI in the Class

I, along with the rest of the College faculty, am developing a policy for the use of ChatGPT and other artificial intelligence (AI) tools in the classroom. The speed of evolution in the technology means that policy may need to be tailored and altered dynamically. The following policy is the default policy for this class; I may alter it as necessary.

You **do not** have my permission to use AI software and tools in my class. This applies to all submitted work: assignments, exams, and final project.

Please note that the Student Honor Committee recently updated the Honor Code Charter (found here), which now includes the following as an example of cheating (see B.2.vii on page 3): Utilizing artificial intelligence software or other related programs to create or assist with assignments on the behalf of a student unless otherwise specified by the faculty member and/or the Office of Disability & Access.

As you do not have my permission to use AI software in the class, instances of suspected violation will be reported to the Honor Committee.

In-Class Ethics

- Laptops in the class are okay for the purposes of note-taking and to reference lecture slides.
- Laptops and phones are not to be used for other purposes, such as e-mails, text messaging, social media, etc. I don't go out of my way to look for violations, but if I happen to spot you repeatedly using your devices for non-authorized purposes, I reserve the right to ask you to turn the device off or to leave the classroom.

- Please contribute to classroom discussion, but try not to disrupt other students' learning by arriving late, leaving the classroom frequently, going off-topic with your comments, etc. If you must arrive late or leave early, please let me know if possible.

Students with Disabilities

It is the policy and practice of Oberlin College and Conservatory to create inclusive learning environments. If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that present barriers to your inclusion or an accurate assessment of your needs to best complete course requirements (e.g., time-limited exams, inaccessible web content, use of videos without captions), please communicate this with your professor and contact the Office for Disability & Access (ODA) to request accommodations. Office: 440-775-5588, Mudd Center 205. Students can learn more about the accommodation process on ODA's website (www.oberlin.edu/disability-access).

Students with **testing** accommodations through the ODA will be asked to take their exams with accommodations at the Accommodated Testing Center, temporarily located in Stevenson Hall, Biggs Commons, for the Spring 2024 semester. Please contact the ODA with questions regarding accommodated testing policies and procedures.

Proposed Course Outline

Week	Core Concepts	Text Chp.*	Class Work
SECTION I: URBAN STRUCTURE			
1 2/6 and 2/8	Market Areas; Why Do Cities Exist?	1, 2, 3	*Please watch the Econ 101 Review on Blackboard on your own.* **A1 handed out about this week.**
2 2/13 and 2/15	Agglomeration; Where Cities Develop	4, 5	
3 2/20 and 2/22	Consumer Cities; City Size & City Systems	6, 7	**A2 handed out about this week.**
4 2/27 and 2/29	Land Rent – Manufacturing & Offices	10	
5 3/5 and 3/7	Land Rent – Housing; Monocentric City Model	11, 12, 13	**A3 handed out about this week**
SECTION II: THE CHALLENGES OF URBAN LIVING			
6 3/12 and 3/14	Monocentric City Model cont'd; Suburbanization & Sprawl	13, 14	**Midterm 1 on THURSDAY, 14 MARCH**
7 3/19 and 3/22	Transportation: Cars	18	**A4 handed out about this week.**
Spring Break			
8 4/2 and 4/4	Transportation: Transit	19	**A5 handed out about this week.**
9 4/9 and 4/11	Crime	23	*Project pre-grade option begins 8 April.*
10 4/16 and 4/18	Neighborhood Choice & Segregation	15	**A6 handed out about this week.**
SECTION III: HOUSING & PLANNING			
11 4/23 and 4/25	Housing	17	**Midterm 2 on THURSDAY, 25 APRIL**
12 4/30 and 5/2	Planning; Zoning; Growth Controls	12	*Project pre-grade option expires 30 April.* **A7 handed out about this week.**
13 5/7 and 5/9	Urban land policy; Flex day	16, 20	
FINAL PROJECT DUE: Wed. 15 May 2024, 4 pm ET			

* Caveat: The course outline and readings are subject to change. We often do not cover everything in a textbook chapter. Unless noted, you are not responsible for textbook material that wasn't in the lectures.