

University of Toronto  
St. George Campus  
Department of Economics

## **ECO331 – Behavioral and Experimental Economics**

Course Outline: Summer 2021  
Version 1.0

Professor John McNeill ([john.mcneill@utoronto.ca](mailto:john.mcneill@utoronto.ca))  
Course Website on Quercus (<https://q.utoronto.ca/>)

Note: This syllabus will periodically be updated as more information becomes available, and reuploaded to the course website when updated. If you have questions about the content of the syllabus, please first check that you are referring to the most current version.

### **About the course:**

This course is a semester-long field course intended to introduce you to the worlds of behavioral and experimental economics. Behavioral economics is a field of economics that aims to enrich traditional economics to understand behavior that is not well-described by more traditional economics models, and explain those persistent phenomena that “shouldn’t” happen from the traditional perspective, but nevertheless do. Accordingly, behavioral economics covers a wide range of topics, from temptation to cooperation and punishment. This means that what we will cover this semester can only be a part of the bigger picture – there’s more to explore out there! Experimental economics is a methodology that uses controlled experiments on human subjects to study a wide range of economic phenomena, and is an integral part of behavioral economics. Experimental economics is used in wide range of economic fields, but in this course we will focus on the applications to behavioral economics research.

### **Course Goals:**

There are three primary goals for ECO331:

- Understand a set of the key insights from behavioral economics, and how those insights enhance economists’ ability to predict and explain observed behavior.
- Understand the methods of modern experimental economics, and how to assess the results of experiments involving humans as subjects.
- Develop your ability to critically analyze economic research, and further your understanding of how modern economic is conducted.

## **Times and Dates:**

Although being an online course means that you have a lot of flexibility with when you choose to do the course work, please be aware that there are deadlines for when specific tasks must be accomplished (e.g., weekly participation on Packback, submission of term papers). All times and dates listed are relative to Toronto, so be sure you understand how that correlates to your own local time, if you are not in Toronto over the summer. **It is your responsibility to ensure that you understand when things are due – confusion over timing is not an acceptable excuse for late work.**

## **Course Website:**

In ECO331, we will be using Quercus as the primary means of distributing both content and information, so it is important that you check Quercus regularly for new content. This will include course announcements, lecture videos, links to the readings, and further information regarding assignments. Because we will be using Quercus as a mode of communication, it is important that you configure your Quercus to alert you to the messages and announcements posted on the course website.

## **Course Format:**

As you know, this course is being administered online during the summer semester of 2021. Instead of having in-person lectures and discussions, we will be using a combination of online tools to work towards the course goals. There are several main components of this:

- Online lectures: we will be recording and posting lectures covering course content. While not in the same style as traditional, in-person lectures, the function of these videos is similar – to cover course material and introduce new ideas.
- Course readings: this course involves a substantial amount of reading, due to the course material, and online, asynchronous nature of the course. In particular, we will be reading many journal articles, to help you become familiar with reading and evaluating actual economic research.
- Course discussion: although we cannot have in-person discussions, we still want to foster discourse about the course material and encourage the exchange of ideas. To that end, we will be using Packback as a discussion forum. More details on this can be found below.
- Course assessments: in this semester, you will have several writing assignments that are intended to assess your assimilation of the course material. Fair warning: there is a substantial amount of writing in this course.
- Experimental participation: in addition to reading and writing about behavioral and experimental economics, we want you to have the chance to experience what it is like to participate in economic research. To that end, you will be participating in economic experiments, to get a first-hand sense of that experience.

## Online Lectures:

In place of having in-person lectures, we will be pre-recording lectures and posting them to the course website. The plan is to post lecture videos on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Of course, you are free to view the videos whenever is most convenient for you. However, it is crucial that you stay caught up with the course material – not only for your own learning, but also because participation in course discussion on Packback will require you to be conversant in the topics under discussion. To that end, I strongly encourage you to keep current with the lectures and readings, rather than letting them accumulate and attempting to binge them all at once!

## Readings:

In addition to the lecture videos, each topic will have assigned readings, typically journal articles. As with the lecture videos, it is important that you stay up-to-date on the readings, and not let yourself fall behind. You will want to do the readings before watching the lecture videos, as the lectures will frequently refer to the readings.

## Required Materials:

- **Internet Access:** This is an online course, and so you **must** have regular and reliable access to the Internet. Technical issues will not be considered a valid reason for not completing course work, late submissions, not participating, etc. If you suspect that your Internet access may be unreliable, you should consider carefully whether taking an online course is appropriate for you. Furthermore, you should allow ample time to upload your submissions – if you start uploading your essay at 11:59 and it doesn't finish until 12:10 due to a slow connection, that is considered late.
- **Packback:** An integral part of this course is engaging in discussion with your classmates. The platform we will be using for this is Packback (<https://www.packback.co/>), we will be posting more information about registration for Packback on the course website.
- **Experiments:** As mentioned above, we will be doing a number of experiments “in-class”, which for this summer means synchronously but online. You may need to register for access to the experimental software – we will let you know about that once that has been confirmed.
- **Readings:** There is no assigned textbook for ECO331. Instead, we will primarily be reading a number of economics journal articles. The information about these readings will be posted to Quercus.

## Office Hours:

Being an online class, all office hours will be conducted through BB Collaborate, which you can access through Quercus. My office hours are currently scheduled for Wednesdays from 2:30-4:30; if we make adjustments to this time, we will let you know. I would strongly encourage you to come to office hours with any questions you have about material (or just to talk

about the material, even if you don't have specific questions). Not being able to ask questions during lecture is one of the drawbacks of online classes, so please do bring those questions with you to office hours instead!

### **Communication Protocols:**

To make communication as effective as possible, please adhere to the following protocols:

- Use either the message feature on Quercus, or your utoronto.ca email address. Messages from other kinds of emails typically get flagged as spam.
- Include "ECO331" in the subject line of your email, and include your student number in your message.
- Do not respond to an email that was sent to the course – instead it is better to start a new email rather than replying to the original mass email. Responses to mass emails are typically erroneously marked as read, and are unlikely to get a response.
- Before emailing me regarding administrative details, first check the course website. Pertinent information about the course will be posted to the website, so that should be your first resource for administrative information.
- Questions regarding content are best asked during office hours – that is what office hours are for, and in many cases it is simply impractical to respond fully to questions via text in email. If you are unable to attend office hours because you have a scheduling conflict, then please contact me about scheduling an appointment to discuss your questions.

### **Assessments and Dates:**

The marks for this course will be assessed as follows:

Packback Engagement	All Semester	20%
Experimental Participation	All Semester	10%
Term Paper 1	May 21	25%
Term Paper 2 - Draft	June 4	10%
Paper 2 - Peer Assessment	June 11	10%
Term Paper 2 – Final Draft	June 15	15%
Final Exam	TBA	10%

Note: All assignments must be submitted by 11:59pm (Toronto) on the date they are due.

## **Missed Assessments:**

There will generally be no extensions, replacements, make-ups, etc., for the written components of this course, including the Packback participation and the components of the term papers. If you find yourself unable to complete some component of the course due to pandemic related issues, please be sure to mark yourself as absent on Acorn, and get in touch with me as soon as possible. For each of the class experiments, there will be multiple time slots during which you can participate. You should make every effort to participate in the experiments! If you are unable to participate due to extenuating circumstances, it is your responsibility to contact me promptly, and we will schedule an oral discussion (online) of that week's course material as a replacement.

## **Packback:**

One of the best resources available at a university is your fellow students, and discussion with your classmates can be one of the most rewarding parts of any course. However, in an asynchronous, online course, this cannot primarily come in the form of a traditional class discussion. Instead, we will be using the Packback platform to host our class discussion. Packback is a discussion forum that uses an Artificial Intelligence algorithm to encourage high-quality discussion such as asking open-ended questions (those without a single correct answer) and supporting responses with evidence.

Starting in Week 2 (the week of May 10th), every week you will be required to post one question and two responses related to that week's content (lecture material and readings). You should post your question by Thursday at midnight, and have your question and two responses submitted by Sunday at 11:59 pm (Toronto time).

More detailed instructions on registration and how to participate will be posted to the course website. Note: we may be able to make a *limited* number of scholarships available for those students who may need financial assistance. If your financial situation would otherwise prevent you from being able to register for Packback, please let me know.

## **Writing Assignments:**

Writing is one of the fundamental skills that students should develop during their university education. Full information and instructions for the term-paper will be provided later in the semester, but be aware that you will be doing a considerable amount of writing in this course – if that does not appeal to you, this is probably not the right course for you to take.

*Plagiarism:* Plagiarism is a serious academic offense. For written assignments, we will be utilizing the anti-plagiarism software Turnitin (TI). This software is intended to detect instances of academic plagiarism in written assignments. As described by the University:

“Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to Turnitin.com for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University’s use of the Turnitin.com service are described on the Turnitin.com web site”.

### **Assistance:**

Although everything has moved online, the FAS writing centers will be operating, and offering remote instruction. For more information about the centers and how to book an appointment, you should check out:

<https://writing.utoronto.ca/writing-centres/arts-and-science>.

Over the summer, you are eligible to seek help at your home college’s center, and at other centers for your coursework, and can book up to two appointments per week.

### **English Language Learners:**

The University of Toronto has resources available to assist students who are learning English through the English Language Learning (ELL) Program. More information about this program and the services they provide can be found at:

<http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/current/advising/ell>

### **Ongoing Learning Disability or Accommodation Requirement**

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have an ongoing disability issue or accommodation need, you should register with Accessibility Services (AS) ([accessibility.utoronto.ca](http://accessibility.utoronto.ca)) at the beginning of the academic year. Without registration, you will not be able to verify your situation with your instructors, and instructors will not be advised about your accommodation needs. AS will then assess your medical situation, develop an accommodation plan with you, and support you in requesting accommodation for your course work. Remember that the process of accommodation is private: AS will not share details of your condition with any instructor, and your instructors will not reveal that you are registered with AS.

### **Academic Integrity:**

As a member of the University of Toronto, you will be held to the standards of academic integrity established by the University. The University is committed to upholding these

standards, and accordingly takes these policies very seriously – be aware that violation of these standards will result in disciplinary action taken in accordance with university policy.

All students, faculty and staff are expected to follow the University's guidelines and policies on academic integrity. For students, this means following the standards of academic honesty when writing assignments, citing and using source material appropriately, collaborating with fellow students, and writing tests and exams. Ensure that the work you submit for grading represents your own honest efforts. Plagiarism, representing someone else's words as your own, or submitting work that you have previously submitted for marks in another class or program is a serious offence that can result in sanctions. Speak to me or your TA for advice on anything that you find unclear. Also, see the U of T writing support website at [www.utoronto.ca/writing](http://www.utoronto.ca/writing). Consult the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters for a complete outline of the University's policy and expectations.

More information on the University of Toronto's policy on academic integrity can be found at:

<http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/osai/The-rules/what-is-academic-misconduct>