ECO367H1 – The Economics of Inequality

Fall 2024

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Lectures	Monday, 3.10 - 5:00 OI 2212[1]
Tutorials	Wednesday 1:00 - 2:00 (or 3:00 according to schedule)

This version of syllabus: August 13, 2024

Description

Overview

Has global inequality increased or decreased? How do we measure inequality between countries, within countries, and between individuals? In most developed countries, economic inequality has risen to historic levels in recent decades, becoming one of the most pressing issues in the political debate and a key topic in economics. However, its analysis remains complex and multifaceted. In this course, we will use tools developed in economic theory and the most up-to-date empirical technics to (i) investigate and unfold the long term historical evolutions of economic inequality as well as recent trends, (ii) evaluate possible interventions and policies targeting inequalities. In this second part, we will look at the potential causes of the recent increase in economic inequality, and how they are affected by policy. We will focus on the role of traditional market forces (globalization, technological change) as well as the role of institutions (erosion of the minimum wage, role of unions). Finally, we will focus on labor income inequality, looking deeply into the role of race and gender in shaping disparities between individuals within countries. The entire course will cover various econometric methods which have been used in the most recent literature, giving the students a working knowledge of theories, empirical strategies, and policy solutions.

Learning Objectives

The primary objective of the course is to introduce students to the main theories and empirical methods used by economists to understand the scope and evolution of global inequality.

1. Gain an understanding of how inequality varies across countries and evolves over the path of development;
2. Gain an understanding of the theories that can explain the degree of economic inequalities and its dynamic, as well as the underlying debates in economic thought pertaining to inequality;
3. Develop a critical approach of the data and methods used to measure inequality;
4. Learn how to use primary sources of individual and aggregate data and extract key statistics;
5. Learn to apply econometric/statistical methods to describe, summarize, and estimate relationships between key labour market variables. This includes a critical understanding of the limits to attributing causality between these variables;
6. Communicate effectively, especially in written work.

The course is designed to support these learning outcomes, with a blended focus on basic modelling, "hands on" experience working with data, and opportunities to develop writing skills.

Prerequisites

Students must have the following prerequisites, as listed in the Calendar to take this course:

- *Intermediate Microeconomics*: (ECO200Y/ECO204Y/ECO206Y);
- *Intermediate Statistics*: (ECO220Y/ECO227Y/ (STA220H1, STA255H1)/ (STA237H1, STA238H1)/ (STA257H1, STA261H1);
- ECO372 is highly recommended.
- See: `https://fas.calendar.utoronto.ca/course/ECO367h1`

The Department of Economics checks prerequisites in all courses, and students who do not have them will be removed from the course.

[1] Please make sure to read the complete schedule at the end of the syllabus.

Software

The use of `Stata` (a common statistical package) is required for the assignments. This is a very standard statistical software used by the majority of economists. You can purchase a six-month license for `Stata` (approx. $CAD 65), available at:

- `https://www.stata.com/order/new/edu/gradplans/student-pricing/`
- You can also use computers at Robarts Library 5-053.[2]

Please contact your TA if you are facing difficulties acquiring it. We will provide assistance and learning opportunities in tutorials. There are also many excellent online resources that you could familiarize yourself with, including:

- `https://www.stata.com/links/resources-for-learning-stata/`

Remember that you are expected to complete several assignments using this software so don't wait until the last week to start using it.

I. Course Content

The class content will be provided via lectures, podcast episodes and compulsory readings.

1. Lectures

ECO367, section L0101

- Monday, 3.10-5:00 or Wednesday 1:10-3:00.[1]
- Lectures are front-loaded at the beginning of the semester to allow for as much in-person time with me. Therefore, the two slots will be used for lectures until the end of October.
- Please make sure to look at the detailed schedule at the end of the syllabus.

The slides for each lecture will be posted in advance on Quercus. Lectures typically last for 1:50 minutes with room for discussions. The active engagement of each student is expected during the weekly discussions. Participation accounts for 5 percent of the final grade.

2. Podcast

INEQUALI≠TALKS

- The course also builds upon episodes of **InequaliTalks**, a podcast I created to present accessible research done by young economists on inequality.
- The podcast is free access here: `https://inequalitalks.fireside.fm/` and on Apple Podcast, Spotify, and most podcast apps.
- Several episodes will be assigned and will supplement the weekly readings. They will also serve as basis for discussion during the Class Meetings.
- Part of my goal in recording this series is to demystify economics and to present some of the tools that economists use in their research. So, in every episode, there will be a sequence called la **"minute technique"**, where researchers will explain one technical aspect of their work in one minute.
- These sequences are therefore part of the preparation to the final exam.

3. Required Readings

There is no textbook that covers all the material that we will see in class, so to succeed in this course it is essential to watch all the recorded lectures and to participate to the course activities. Lecture notes will be posted on Quercus as well as required readings. The list of references at the end of the syllabus is not a compulsory reading list but some of these articles will be assigned throughout the course. Additional references are also specified for each week, with links through Quercus.

[2] See `https://mdl.library.utoronto.ca/technology/computer-lab`

II. Meetings

Regular meetings are scheduled for:

- **ECO367H1S, section L0101**
  - Lectures and Discussions: Monday, 3.10-5:00[1]
  - TA-led Tutorials: Wednesday 12:10-2:00 (see complete schedule at the end)

1. Lectures and Discussions

In each meeting, you will submit a quick written assignment on the lecture's content (see the Student Assessment section). During the class discussions, you will be assigned to a group. Each group will be asked to perform a specific task or to lead a discussion based on the course content and the readings/podcast of the week. In your groups, you will determine a time-keeper and someone in charge of presenting the group contribution. You are expected to engage with one another with respect and trust, to be attentive and to take notes during discussions. We will finish with a Q&A session.

2. TA-led Tutorials

The slot will be used for a variety of purposes, including reviewing problem set questions, `Stata` tutorials, and workshops in support of the term paper. Details will be provided on Quercus. The tutorials will be led by your teaching assistant.

Abdelrahman Amer `abdelrahman.amer@mail.utoronto.ca`

Course Policy

Email

The use of email should be restricted to private matters, or to notify problems (e.g. broken links, typos, etc.).

- **All emails should be addressed to the Teaching Assistant (Abdelrahman Amer `abdelrahman.amer@mail.utoronto.ca`) via Quercus "Inbox"**.
- I will answer questions related to course materials in person during lectures.
- For e-mails asking for a reply, if Abdo can answer briefly (e.g., requiring a one-sentence reply), then he will reply within two business days (except on weekends). If a response requires more detail, then tutorial, or office hours are the more appropriate forum;
- Use the Quercus "Inbox" functionality to contact instead of regular email.
- Always identify yourself in your email. The email must have your name and student number.
- Abdo will not respond to emails that request information that can be found on Quercus or the syllabus.
- Please also note that it is not appropriate to request marks, or the solutions to problem sets or midterm questions by email.

Quercus

Announcements, tutorial problems, term paper materials, outlines of lectures, answers to in-class tests, and other course materials will be posted on Quercus.

Student Assessment

Student grades are based on the following assessments:

Assessment	Date	Weight
Weekly Short Written Assignment	Every Lecture	10%
Class Participation + podcast takeaways	Every Lecture	10%
Empirical Exercise	Friday, October 11th	25%
Term Paper	Friday, November 22nd	30%
In-class Test	Monday, December 2nd	25%

Assignments will be posted on Quercus and students will also submit their take-home assignments on Quercus.

Short Written Assignment

These in-class papers will be given at some point during each lecture. The in-class papers begin the second class, September 9th, 2024. Further details:

- I will collect questions each week;
- Questions will be graded very coarsely (pass - one point / fail - zero point); zero points will be awarded to students who do not hand in a paper in class (no other way of submitting papers is accepted);
- The TEN best scores for a student will count. This accommodates for students unable to attend a lecture.
- Grades will not be communicated before the end of the term.

Readings/Podcast takeaways

In preparation for in-class discussions, you are expected to write up four main takeaways for each assigned article or podcast episode.

- I will randomly collect some papers each week so you are expected to bring them in class.

Empirical Exercise

This empirical assignment consists in replicating an empirical analysis pertaining to the issue of economic inequality using `Stata`. You will be asked to submit your codes ("do-files") in the `.do` format, as well as the formatted tables and figures of the replication exercise with interpretations in a separate `.pdf` document. Students are allowed to work on this exercise in groups, but each student should submit her own code and her own written analysis. Please refer to the Academic integrity section. Details of the required analysis and the dataset will be provided during the first in the course.

Term Paper

Details of the Term Paper assignment will be provided later in the course. At this point, however, I can provide a sketch of the nature of the assignment, as well as the associated deadlines and ground rules. You would be expected to perform a simple empirical analysis on `Stata` and a technical summary of an assigned papers. Details of the required analysis and the dataset will be provided during the first in the course.

In-class Test

The in-class test will take place on December 2nd, from 3 to 5pm, and covers the entire course.

Problem Sets

In order to be prepared to the in-class test, it is important to do practice problems. To help with this, we will assign problem sets in the second half of the term. Solutions to the problems will not be made available, except in tutorials, nor will the problem sets be graded. The objective is to provide tangible “homework" (including practice with `Stata`) to help guide your own learning.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is essential to the pursuit of learning and scholarship in a university, and to ensuring that a degree from the University of Toronto is a strong signal of each student’s individual academic achievement. As a result, the University treats cases of cheating and plagiarism very seriously. The University of Toronto’s Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters[3] outlines the behaviours that constitute academic dishonesty and the processes for addressing academic offences. Potential offences include, but are not limited to:

- In papers and assignments:
  - Using someone else’s ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgement. This includes verbatim copying of any lecture notes distributed by the instructor.

[3] `https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/code-student-conduct-december-13-2019`

  - Submitting your own work in more than one course without the permission of the instructor.
  - Making up sources or facts.
  - Obtaining or providing unauthorized assistance on any assignment, including from paid or non-paid tutors.
- On tests and exams:
  - Using or possessing unauthorized aids.
  - Communicating with someone else during an exam or test.
  - Misrepresenting your identity.
- In academic work:
  - Falsifying institutional documents or grades.
  - Falsifying or altering any documentation required by the University, including (but not limited to) doctor's notes

Please have a look at these sections on Perils and Pitfalls
`https://www.academicintegrity.utoronto.ca/perils-and-pitfalls/`
and Smart Strategies `https://www.academicintegrity.utoronto.ca/smart-strategies/`. Also, see the U of T writing support website at `https://writing.utoronto.ca/`. The term paper must be submitted for review through Turnitin (integrated with Quercus).

Policy Regarding Generative AI tools. In this course, you may use generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, including ChatGPT and GitHub Copilot, as learning aids and to help complete assignments. You will not be permitted to use generative AI on your in-class test. While some generative AI tools are currently available for free in Canada, please be warned that these tools have not been vetted by the University of Toronto and might not meet University guidelines or requirements for privacy, intellectual property, security, accessibility, and records retention. Generative AI may produce content which is incorrect or misleading, or inconsistent with the expectations of this course. These tools may even provide citations to sources that don't exist—and submitting work with false citations is an academic offense. These tools may be subject to service interruptions, software modifications, and pricing changes during the semester. Generative AI is not required to complete any aspect of this course, and we caution you to not rely entirely on these tools to complete your coursework. Instead, we recommend treating generative AI as a supplementary tool only for exploration or drafting content. Ultimately, you (and not any AI tool) are responsible for your own learning in this course, and for all the work you submit for credit. It is your responsibility to critically evaluate the content generated, and to regularly assess your own learning independent of generative AI tools. Over-reliance on generative AI may give you a false sense of how much you've actually learned, which can lead to poor performance on the midterm test or final exam, in later courses, or in future work or studies after graduation. The work you submit for academic assignments must be your own, and may not include any content from generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, either verbatim or with edits. You may, however, use generative AI to support your work on this assignment in the following ways:

- To answer general questions about high-level concepts covered in this course or assignment
- To provide examples of the usage of the library's API
- To summarize information
- To generate test cases for your code
- To assist with understanding and debugging errors.

Please note that any uses of generative AI beyond the ones listed above are not permitted, and will be considered use of an unauthorized aid, which is an academic offense. If you choose to use any generative AI tools while working on this assignment, **you must acknowledge which generative AI tools you used and how you used them**. It is an academic offence to not credit sources—including generative AI—in work that you submit. This acknowledgment should take the form of: In-text and bibliographic entries for any generative AI tool used following Chicago citation style.

University disclaimer concerning Turnitin: "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."

Accommodations for Religious Observances

As a student at the University of Toronto, you are part of a diverse community that welcomes and includes students and faculty from a wide range of cultural and religious traditions. For my part, I will make every reasonable effort to avoid scheduling tests, examinations, or other compulsory activities on religious holy days not captured by statutory holidays. Further to University Policy, if you anticipate being absent from class or missing a major course activity (such as a test or in-class assignment) due to a religious observance, please let me know as early in the course as possible, and with sufficient notice (at least two to three weeks), so that we can work together to make alternate arrangements.

Ongoing Learning Disabilities or Accommodation Requirements

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have an acute or ongoing disability issue or accommodation need, you should register with Accessibility Services (AS) at the beginning of the academic year by visiting `http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/as/newregistration`. 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 assess your 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 needs or condition with any instructor, and your instructors will not reveal that you are registered with AS. Students cannot petition to re-write a quiz/test once the test has begun. If you are feeling ill, please do not start the online or in-class test, seek medical attention immediately, and the policy on Missed Term Work will apply.

Missed Term Work

You are expected to complete all required work as scheduled in the Student Assessment section. You do not need to provide medical documentation or reasons for missing synchronous activities: the accommodation for missed weekly online discussions is accounted for entirely by the requirement of only ten written tests. Accommodations for missing more than 2 lectures are extremely limited: (A) an ongoing and substantial injury, illness, or personal/family problem seriously affecting the student's ability to complete term work across all courses over an extended period of time, where the student's College Registrar[4] writes to each professor after reviewing the documentation and meeting with the student; or (B) more than one conflict not related to injury, illness or personal/family problems where I am contacted by the student very far in advance. In these limited situations, I will consider whether accommodations can still meet all course requirements or whether the student must be advised to drop the course and retake it when able to complete the required work. Regarding assignments, a student who misses an assignment deadline should come forward to me in the course as soon as possible, and no later than one week after the due date, or should notify to me by email if the absence is extended beyond one week.

If you become ill and it affects your ability to do your academic work, consult me right away. Normally, I will ask you for documentation in support of your specific medical circumstances. This documentation can be an Absence Declaration (via ACORN) or the University's Verification of Student Illness or Injury (VOI) form. The VOI indicates the impact and severity of the illness, while protecting your privacy about the details of the nature of the illness. If you cannot submit a VOI due to limits on terms of use, you can submit a different form (like a letter from a doctor), as long as it is an original document, and it contains the same information as the VOI (including dates, academic impact, practitioner's signature, phone and registration number). For more information on the VOI, please see `https://registrar.utoronto.ca/policies-and-guidelines/verification-of-illness-or-injury/`. For information on Absence Declaration Tool for A&S students, please see `https://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/absence`. If you get a concussion, break your hand, or suffer some other acute injury, you should register with Accessibility Services as soon as possible.

Late Penalties

Assignments (empirical exercise and term papers) are due on Friday October 11th and on Friday November 22nd respectively. In the absence of medical documentation, a late penalty of 5 percentage points per calendar day will be applied, starting with the deadline of the assignment. As stated above, a student who misses an

[4]For ongoing injury, illness, or personal/family problems you must contact your College Registrar `http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/hello/people` immediately.

assignment deadline should come forward to me in the course as soon as possible, and no later than one week after returning to class, or should notify to me by email if the absence is extended beyond one week.

Appeal Procedure

If after receiving your graded term paper assignment you believe that there is an error in grading, the following procedure will apply:

- Your request must be in writing, with a detailed explanation. With direct reference to your paper and the grading rubric, you must explain why your score should be higher.
- Appeals must be submitted to the TA no later than two weeks after the grades are released.
- The entire paper will be re-graded. Thus, it is possible to lose points as well as to gain points through re-grading.

Mental Health and Well-Being

As a student, you may experience challenges that can interfere with learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, substance use, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation, financial concerns, family worries and so forth. These factors may affect your academic performance and/or reduce your ability to participate fully in daily activities. Everyone feels stressed now and then – it is a normal part of university life. Some days are better than others, and there is no wrong time to reach out. There are resources for every situation and every level of stress. There are many helpful resources available through your College Registrar or through Student Life (`http://studentlife.utoronto.ca` and `http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/feeling-distressed`). An important part of the University experience is learning how and when to ask for help. Please take the time to inform yourself of available resources.

Recommendation Letter

If you contact me for recommendation letters, make sure to:

- contact me *at least* ten days in advance before the submission deadline
- clearly indicate the due date
- clearly indicate the submission process (website, submission link)
- attach your updated resume and your most recent transcript.

I will write recommendation letters only to students with a grade of A- or more. Be aware that I won't be able to submit recommendation letters before March 1st, 2025.

Course content

PART I

Lecture 1: Introduction — Sept 4, 12-2pm

Lecture 2: Normative approaches of inequality — Sept 9, 3-5pm

Readings:

- "The difference principle", Rawls (2009)

Tutorial 1: Stata refresher — Sept 11, 12-1pm

Lecture 3: Measuring inequality: historical evolution & recent trends — Sept 16, 3-5pm

Readings:

- InequaliTalks Episode 3 with Lydia Assouad

Lecture 4: Core concepts: income and capital — Sept 18, 12-2pm

Readings:

- InequaliTalks Episode 11 with Juliana Londoño-Vélez

Tutorial 2: Stata refresher 2 + office hour empirical exercise — Sept 23, 3-4pm

Lecture 5: Trends in inequality between countries — Sept 25, 12-2pm

Readings:

- InequaliTalks Episode 5 with Yajna Govind

Lecture 6: Global income inequality dynamics — Sept 30, 3-5pm

Readings:

- Alvaredo et al. (2018*a*)

PART II

Lecture 7: Education and the college wage premium — Oct 2, 12-2pm

Readings:

- InequaliTalks Episode 6 with Kadeem Noray

Lecture 8: The role of technology and automation — Oct 7, 3-5pm

Readings:

- Autor (2019)

Lecture 9: Globalization and inequality — Oct 9, 12-2pm

Readings:

- Autor, Dorn and Hanson (2013)
- InequaliTalks Episode 36 with Mathilde Muñoz

Empirical exercise due — Oct 11, 23:59pm

Thanksgiving - no class — Oct 14

Lecture 10: The role of minimum wage, market power, and unions — Oct 16, 12-2pm

Readings:

- InequaliTalks Episode 26 with Ellora Derenoncourt

Lecture 11: Gender inequality — Oct 21, 3-5pm

Readings:

- InequaliTalks Episode 30 with Nina Roussille

Lecture 12: Racial inequality — Oct 23, 12-2pm

Readings:

- InequaliTalks Episode 21 with Evan K. Rose

Reading week, no class — Oct 28

Tutorial: Review session Empirical exercise — Nov 4, 3-4pm

Tutorial: Problem set 1 — Nov 6, 12-1pm

Tutorial: Office hour — Nov 11 3-4pm

Tutorial: Problem set 2 — Nov 13, 12-1pm

Tutorial: Office hour for the term paper — Nov 18, 3-4pm

Tutorial: Problem set 3 — Nov 20, 12-1pm

Deadline Term paper — Nov 22, 23:59pm

Tutorial: Problem set 4 — Nov 25, 3-4pm

Tutorial: Review Session for test — Nov 27, 12-2pm

In-class test — Dec 2, 3-5pm

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Resources

Online tools:

- Our world in data `https://ourworldindata.org/`
- Mapping inequality `https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=5/36.8/-95.249`
- World Inequality Data Base `https://wid.world/`
- World Bank Open Data `https://data.worldbank.org/`