Course Outline
Economics 336
Public Economics

Professor Michael Smart

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Learning objectives

In this course you will learn:

- basic facts about taxation, revenues, and expenditure programs of governments in Canada and around the world
- theoretical and quantitative tools used by economists for government policy analysis
- how to marshal economic arguments and statistics and communicate them effectively to an audience
- how to evaluate policy arguments of others – what unstated assumptions are being made, what objectives are being sought, what factors are causal, and so on.

At the broadest level, students come out of this course with a better sense of what government does, and a more sophisticated understanding of the arguments about government policy used by politicians, experts, and the media – at least, that is the hope!

Grading

The grading scheme is

Weekly quizzes	22%
Tutorial problem sets	12%
Policy essay	15%
Essay peer reviews	3%
Class debate	15%
Participation	8%
Final exam	25%

Students will join groups of about five to participate in an in-class mock debate on a chosen policy issue.

Students will individually write an essay of about 2500 words on a policy topic. These essays will be marked principally on how well they apply concepts taught in class to real-world policy issues. Topics are to be selected from a list provided on Quercus. Students will provide peer feedback on 3 other essays. Peer reviews should address economic issues rather than writing style and should be designed to prompt additional thinking by the author.

From the Office of Academic Integrity:
"Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to the University's plagiarism detection tool 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 tool's reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site." Additional information can be found at http://academicintegrity.utoronto.ca/. **Late papers will be assigned a penalty of 10% per week.**

Participation scores will be determined based on the following activities:

- attendance at mock debate sessions, lectures, and tutorials
- contributions to informal in-class discussions

Students missing in-class graded assignments must present a written request for special consideration by the beginning of the next lecture, together with valid documentation. **Failure to adhere to these procedures will result in a grade of zero for the assignment.**

The final exam will take place in class in the final week of lectures. Students absent must submit a U of T Verification of Illness or Injury form within 72 hours. If the absence is accepted, the makeup exam will take place the following Monday, 5-7 pm at my office.

Lectures and tutorials

Lectures take place on Wednesdays during the scheduled class time. Graded quizzes on lecture content will be due before each class meeting. Discussion questions have been provided for each lecture. It is recommended that you prepare for lectures by reviewing the provided discussion questions. **The use of cellphones is prohibited at all times during class – including during mid-class health breaks.**

Lectures will normally be two hours in length, but will extend into the third hour from time to time. There will be occasional tutorials scheduled during the third hour, as noted on the course website. In the tutorials, our TAs will take up solutions to problem set questions. Attendance at tutorials is strongly encouraged. As well, the tutorial hour may be used for our mock debate presentations. Attendance on these days in mandatory.

Readings

The recommended textbook:

> Rosen, Wen, and Snodden, 2016, *Public Finance in Canada*, Fifth Edition, (McGraw-Hill Ryerson).

It is strongly recommended that students read the textbook. You can purchase it from Amazon or other retailers – any recent edition will do. It will also be available at Robarts library on short-term reserve.

Some students may also wish to consult:

> Gruber, 2016, *Public Finance and Public Policy*, (Worth Publishers).

This is an excellent book which covers much of the same material – but it is written for a US rather than a Canadian audience.

Required readings other than the textbook are available from the course website.