Syllabus for Economics 449W – Economic Literacy
Spring 2011

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W 2:00-3:15pm
Th 9-10:30am
and by appointment

Course Description and Objectives:
The goal of this course is to make you better economists by making you better writers. Class discussions will explore the economic way of thinking, largely by examining how economists write. Economics 101 (Principles of Macroeconomics), Economics 102 (Principles of Microeconomics), and at least two upper-division Economics courses are pre-requisites so it is expected that you are familiar with the basic theoretical building blocks of the discipline. This course will focus on how to apply and use that knowledge, by incorporating economic material and the economic way of thinking into writing for a more general audience.

Specifically, by the end of this course, you should be able to:
1. Interpret and explain quantitative and graphical information, in language accessible to non-economists;
2. Distinguish between positive and normative arguments;
3. Recognize examples of good economic writing and critically edit examples of bad writing;
4. Identify the appropriate context for your writing by tailoring the presentation of economic material to different audiences;
5. Identify, explain and interpret economic concepts in general news media articles;
6. Identify the thesis and supporting arguments in both economic journal articles and non-scholarly writings;
7. Formulate economic analysis of a public policy issue and communicate to both a knowledgeable and general audience

This course satisfies the Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement for students who have completed 60 units, passed Transfer Writing Assessment or Writing Proficiency Assessment with a score of 8 or better or earned a C or higher in RWS 95 or 96 or 280 or 281, and completed the General Education requirement in Composition and Critical Thinking.

Required Readings:

Additional assigned articles and readings will be posted on the course website. Throughout the semester, students are also encouraged to read economic writing by reading coverage of economic news, for example, in The Economist, New York Times and Wall Street Journal, and economic blogs (see the course website for links).
**Course Requirements:**
This is obviously a writing-intensive course. Correspondingly, your grade for this course will depend heavily on your successful completion of writing assignments. In addition, you will be assigned readings and short exercises that will be the basis for class discussion; you are expected to come to class prepared for these discussions. Class meetings will be heavily interactive and it is essential that students make a sincere effort to attend all classes, particularly since many meetings will be devoted to group work and your classmates will be relying on you. **More than two absences (for any reason) may reduce your semester grade by one full letter grade.**

Your course grade will be based on the quality of assignments, participation in group work and class discussion, and what I call “professional responsibility”, which means fulfilling the expectations of this course in a timely and responsible fashion. Evaluation of student work will emphasize both its economic content and the quality of its exposition. The relative weights of the components are:

- SWoRD writing assignments: 64%
- Group presentation project: 16%
- Shorter assignments: 12%
- Class assignments and participation: 8%

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100%

I reserve the right to made adjustments if circumstances require but this rarely happens and you would be given plenty of advance notice. Final semester letter grades will be based on a traditional grading scale (e.g., 95-100% = A, 90-95% = A-, 87-90% = B+, 83-87% = B, etc.). Note that grades on individual writing assignments may be curved.

**Writing Assignments:** Each student is expected to complete several writing assignments, both individually and in collaboration with classmates, and most assignments will require multiple drafts. Assignments will range in length from roughly 300 to 1500 words. Detailed instructions for each assignment will be distributed later.

- **Data summary (Exercise 1 in Chapter 5 of Wyrick):** Short descriptive report (roughly 300 words), including collecting data and preparing a graph or chart showing the trend in the data for the last ten years.
- **Media article analysis (Exercises 2 and 6 in Chapter 8 of Wyrick):** Analyze a news article that discusses/uses economic concepts, using the framework outlined in Wyrick, Chapter 8.
- **Journal article summary:** Summary report of assigned economic journal article (750-800 words or less).
- **Policy debate outline and summary (Exercise 3 in Wyrick, Chapter 7):** Synthesize and interpret recent articles on a policy topic (4-5 pages). This will also be presented orally to the class in small groups.
- **Policy brief:** Persuasive memo in support of a public policy (500-800 words).

**Collaborative writing:**
For all assignments, you will review the writing of several classmates and provide feedback (this means that your writing will be reviewed by several classmates as well). To facilitate this process, we will be using an online site called Scaffolded Writing and Reviewing in the Discipline (SWoRD). You will need to create an account on the SWoRD site (link is on
Blackboard; there is also a user guide if you need it). Once you have created an account, look for Economic Literacy in the list of courses; the class password is Econ449W.

For most assignments, you will submit a first draft by 9pm Sunday night; late papers submitted by 9pm on Monday will be penalized 25% and papers will not be accepted at all after 9pm on Monday (take note: the way SWoRD works, if you do not submit a first draft, you CANNOT submit a final draft and you will essentially receive a zero on the writing portion of the assignment). SWoRD will randomly assign five reviewers to each paper and reviews must be completed by 9pm on Friday of that week (both authors and reviewers will be anonymous); again, late submissions up to 24 hours will be penalized 25% and no late submissions will be accepted past 9pm on Saturday. Final drafts will be due by 9pm the following Wednesday and you will have an additional day to ‘back evaluate’ the reviews (that is, you will give reviewers feedback on how helpful their comments were but only after you have submitted your final draft). Final drafts will be reviewed by the same five reviewers; those reviews must be completed by the following Monday, and you will have another day to ‘back evaluate’. Both first and second drafts are weighted equally and SWoRD applies a curve to all grades.

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<td>First Draft</td>
<td>Reviews (5)</td>
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Reviews will consist of both written comments and numerical ratings; the numerical ratings will be the primary basis of the writing grade for the authors. It is important to recognize that your role as a reviewer is just as important as your role as a primary author for two reasons. First, revising and rewriting is part of good writing; however, it is often easier for students to revise someone else’s work than their own. Reviewing the work of others will help you learn how to apply that critical eye to your own writing as well. Second, after you graduate, there are a wide range of situations where you will find that you must produce a product as part of a team and even though someone else may have primary responsibility for a project, the final product will reflect on the entire team. Several assignments in this course are designed to replicate these situations. For these reasons, grades on most assignments will be based on both your own writing and your reviews of other’s work. Your reviews will be graded for consistency (for example, if you give grades that are all too high or all too low, or you do not seem to be able to tell the difference between good papers and poor papers, you will receive a low reviewing grade), and for how helpful your written comments are to the authors.

This system of collaboration obviously can only work if each individual acts in a responsible manner. Primary authors must complete their drafts on time and reviewers must take their responsibilities seriously. In addition, all students must be willing to engage actively in discussion during class meetings. The success of the course depends upon the class' interdependence and, hence, on each student's commitment to making the course a worthwhile experience.
**Academic misconduct:** Although I am sure this won’t apply to anyone in this class, I will state for the record that academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to: (a) using assignments that you wrote for another class, (b) representing work done by someone else as your own (i.e., plagiarism), and (c) copying someone else’s work on an assignment, basic cheating. Please see me if you have questions.

**A note about the writing requirement:** If you are taking this course to satisfy the Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement, you must receive a grade of C or better to meet the requirement. Please keep in mind that your grade will be dependent on your accomplishments with both writing and economics; you will not receive a separate grade for each component.