

EC1410 Urban Economics
Course Outline

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Course objectives and requirements:

About 50% of the world's population lives in cities and about 80% of Americans. Why? And why are cities organized as they are? This course documents the structure and growth of cities, and investigates how economics can help to explain how cities function. The central problem is that we are more productive if we work at higher densities than those at which we want to live. This tension gives rise to commuting and various forms of congestion. We will investigate how employment and residence is organized in the landscape of cities in the developed and developing world, and try to explain these patterns with simple economic models. We will also use these models to address particular policy relevant questions such as: How should we set a property tax? How should we respond to gentrification or central city blight? How important is the urban landscape as a determinant of preferences over consumption goods or the accumulation of human capital?

Prerequisites:

The prerequisite for this course is ECO1110. If you have not taken this course, I am generally willing to waive the prerequisite for students with a technical background. The course will assume familiarity with intermediate micro-economics and facility with the material of a first year calculus course.

Course website:

The course website is here,

https://matthewturner.org/ec1410/eco1410_main.htm

This website is also where you will find supplementary readings, homework assignments and solutions, lecture notes, and announcements. The schedule on this site provides a detailed schedule of the material to be covered during the term. You should check this schedule at least weekly for updates and changes.

Lectures:

There is a single section of this course. Lectures are in Andrews House #310, MW 8:30-9:50am. Lecture attendance is a required part of the course and the course will rely heavily on lectures and my online lecture notes.

I do not anticipate missing class during the term. I will announce any unforeseen changes to the schedule in class and on the course website.

COVID/Illness:

I am trying to organize the course to accommodate students who miss class because of illness or quarantine. In particular,

- The grading scheme allows you to miss two problem sets without penalty.
- I will (try to) record lectures and make them available on Canvas to students who are not able to come to class because of illness or quarantine. Do not plan to rely on recorded lectures any more than absolutely necessary. My experience has been that technical problems wreck about every 5th or 6th lecture recording.
- If I am quarantined (but not sick) I will give lectures remotely via zoom. These lectures will be held in my personal zoom room, 'mturner1'.
- I will hold online office hours remotely, as needed.

Texts:

Required

- Lectures on Urban Economics, Jan Brueckner, MIT Press, 2011 (< 50\$)

This book should be available at the bookstore.

Office hours:

I will have office hours regularly during the term. For a schedule and location, please check here,

https://matthewturner.org/office_hours.htm

I will also, usually, be available to talk after class.

- I will try to maintain a regular schedule of office hours, but will occasionally need to deviate from this schedule. In this case, I will make a note at the link above. I encourage you to check before you come to my office.
- I plan to hold office hours, primarily, in person. If you would like to talk on zoom, be sure to send me an email letting me know. Otherwise, I will not know to turn on my zoom room.
- You do not need to ask permission to come to office hours. You might want to make an appointment at the link above. I will try to give priority to people who make appointments. If my office hour slots are full, come anyway. I can almost always stay until I have seen everyone.

The TAs for the course are Annie Herring and Alexia Embiricos. Their office hour schedules will also be available at the link above.

Grading:

You should plan to attend class and you should expect to hand something in almost every week. There are approximately weekly problem sets along with a midterm and a final.

Weights assigned to each are as follows:

- Best 7 of 9 (or 8 of 10) homework assignments 40%.
- Midterm 25% (March 10, 2025, regular classroom.)
- Final 35% (2pm May 9, Exam group #2.)

I will collect problem sets through the course canvas site located here

<https://canvas.brown.edu/courses/1098127>.

I will post solutions shortly after problem sets are due and so cannot accept late problem sets. The marking scheme allows you to miss one or two assignments without penalty, so expect me to enforce this rule.

You are welcome to ask chatGPT or other LLMs for help with assignments. I think it is important to learn how to use these tools, and asking them for help with assignments is a reasonable thing to do. However: (1) do not submit machine generated answers as you own; (2) be careful, chatGPT is not always very helpful and is sometimes wrong; (3) remember that you won't have these tools available for exams, so the object is to use them to help you learn the material.

Over 14 weeks, students will spend 3 hours per week in class (42 hours total). Homework, reading, and studying for midterm examinations will take approximately 9.5 hours per week (133 hours total). In addition, there is a 2-hour final exam for which approximately 18 hours of review is assumed.

Email Policy:

I will try to reply to email within 24 hours, except on weekends. For me to be able to do this, I need some rules about email correspondence:

- Please look on the website to see if you can find an answer to your question before you write.
- Try to formulate questions that require short answers. If it takes more than a few sentences to answer, then the question is too hard for email. Please come to office hours instead.
- No emails about grading. Please come to office hours for this.

Academic misconduct:

Copying or plagiarizing or other forms of academic misconduct will not be tolerated. Students caught engaging in these activities will be subject to academic discipline. The Brown University Academic code is here

<https://college.brown.edu/design-your-education/academic-policies/academic-code>

Students with disabilities:

Please inform me if you have a disability or other condition that might require some modification of any of these course procedures. You may speak with me after class or during office hours.