

EAS 677.022: Economics and Environmental Justice

Fall 2021 A Course Syllabus
(Version: October 5th, 2021)

Logistics

Class meeting time: Mondays 3:00-5:00pm from 8/30 through 10/11

Class meeting location: Mason Hall 3463

Instructor: Samuel Stolper (sstolper@umich.edu)

Website: <https://umich.instructure.com/courses/465114>

Office Hours: Mondays 11:00am-12:00pm and Wednesdays 1:00-2:00pm, in Dana 3006

Credit-hours: 1; prerequisites: none

About this course

What is the relationship between economics and environmental, energy, and climate justice? In what ways can economic analysis and perspective contribute to the pursuit of justice? This half-semester seminar is meant to be a group exploration of these questions. Economics, through its focus on human decision-making and welfare, provides a potentially valuable lens through which to examine and judge outcomes on the grounds of justice. Economists and economic logic are very often a part of important policymaking – including regulation of the natural environment – that has great consequences for justice. At the same time, the field of economics is often seen as too conservative, and it is not known for centering justice in its practice. We will learn about and discuss the pitfalls and promise of economics as an instrument for achieving environmental justice.

This course will proceed in person. Inclusive, open-minded engagement on important, yet sensitive, issues will be the top priority in class meetings. Outside the classroom, you will be responsible for course readings, short weekly written reflections, and two additional assignments – one qualitative and one quantitative.

My teaching goals in this course are four-fold:

1. Facilitate reflection and mutual learning about what constitutes justice
2. Teach students fundamentals of positive and normative economic analysis
3. Develop insights about real-world issues in environmental justice
4. Give practice in verbal and written engagement on important, sensitive subjects

I consider myself the facilitator of this course, and otherwise someone who is learning right there alongside students. We each come to the classroom with different expertise, experience, and perspective. I am excited to learn from you all!

Course activities

Readings

You will be asked to complete multiple readings ahead of each class, chosen to convey important concepts, illustrate relevant applications, and provide multiple perspectives. The readings will be the main source of new content in the course and discussion in class, so it is important that you complete them. I will post additional (fully optional) readings of interest on Canvas, and I welcome *your* suggestions on relevant readings as well.

Reflections

A one-page, double-spaced reflection on the week's assigned readings is due every week by the start of class. The point of this exercise is to prompt you to prepare some thoughts that you'd be willing to share in the classroom. There is no "right answer" to include in these reflections; you need only engage with some part of the assigned material (or its implications in other settings) to get full credit (✓+). One page of double-spaced writing is not a lot of space; one or two substantive thoughts is sufficient.

In the classroom

I will lecture very infrequently and in short increments. We will devote the rest of the time to discussing readings and applying course concepts to real-world environmental challenges. I expect each student to participate semi-regularly in all-class discussion and contribute actively to break-out group activities. The course will be more fun and more valuable if we all share our perspectives, our questions, our ideas. If participation intimidates you, I encourage you to talk to me about it.

Relatedly, this course will proceed with a "no device use in class" policy as a general rule. I believe that on net, [devices would make for a worse classroom experience](#) in this course. Again, please communicate with me if this is going to be a significant hardship for you.

Substantive assignments

There will be two further assignments to complete on your own, beyond weekly readings and reflections. The first of these will be an opinion piece focused on the cause(s) of and solution(s) to some type of disproportionate pollution exposure. The second will be a quantitative "problem set" in which you manipulate and answer questions about data pertaining to water bills and shutoffs in Detroit.

Canvas discussion

I will, at times, start discussion threads on the Canvas website. These will provide an alternative venue for the sharing of questions, perspectives, and resources relevant to the course. I encourage you to add to and start new threads as you desire – especially if this venue offers you a more comfortable way to make your voice heard.

Course policies

Mask policy: University policy is that all individuals must wear a mask at all times when indoors on campus, with rare exceptions. We will follow this policy and use masks at all times when indoors. I will try to arrange for some outdoor activities – for example, breakout groups – to give us the opportunity to, at times, see each other's faces.

Lecture recording: Our classroom is set to audio/video record our classes, so, barring unforeseen technical issues, these will be posted to the course website for viewing. If you do not wish to be recorded, please email me to discuss alternative arrangements.

Grading: As this course is short, I think the fairest thing is to assign course grades primarily based on your effort rather than mastery of new material. Your performance on the two substantive assignments will also contribute to your final grade. The weight of each assignment is as follows:

- In-class participation: 20%
- Reflections: 40%; I will drop the lowest reflection score when calculating your grade.
- Assignment #1: 20%
- Assignment #2: 20%

Submissions are due at the beginning of class, unless otherwise stipulated. Unexcused late submissions will be penalized 5 percentage points per day. I strongly encourage you to tell me ahead of time if you are not going to be able to meet a deadline. I will be flexible!

Final grades will be given according to the following rubric: A: 95-100; A-: 90-94; B+: 85-89; B: 75-84; B-: 65-74. I may adjust final grades upwards, if assignments turn out to have been harder than expected. I will not adjust final grades downwards. For other graduate-school grading policies in the current academic year, please see <https://rackham.umich.edu/academic-policies/section3/#3>.

Grade grievances: You must submit requests for a re-grade within one week of receiving the original grade. You must also attach the original graded item and provide a clear written explanation of what you would like to be re-evaluated and why. Your adjusted grade may be higher or lower than the original.

Correspondence: I will try to get back to your emails within 24 hours. Please note EAS 677 in your subject line. If you plan on asking multiple involved questions, please come to office hours or schedule a meeting.

Office hours: I will plan to hold office hours at the times listed above (M 11am-12pm, W 1-2pm) in person, in my office. I invite you to use these office hours to talk with me about anything related to the course, current events, careers, or well-being. If you'd like to meet but your schedule does not allow you to attend regular office hours, email me and we can find a time either in person or via zoom.

Work ethic: Do not plagiarize. If you paraphrase or copy work that is not your own, you must reference that work. The risk of plagiarizing is not worth the reward. More generally,

cheating and academic dishonesty in any form will not be tolerated. Any student found to have cheated or behaved unethically or dishonestly will be given a zero on the assignment involved and referred to the appropriate disciplinary committees at U of M.

Resources for learning, well-being, and inclusion

I am actively trying to create an economics course that reflects a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. To that end, I aspire to build a reading list that features diverse perspectives, create a classroom environment that promotes open and respectful dialogue, and shine a light on distributional considerations in climate change and climate policy. Please tell me if any element of your course experience does not match this stated intent. I will very much appreciate your thoughts.

Below are a few learning resources available through the University that may be helpful:

- The [Sweetland Center for Writing](#) offers [one-on-one writing assistance](#), among many other services. It also offers [mini-courses and casual conversation groups](#) for international students or anyone wanting to improve their English.
- The [English Language Institute](#) provides a variety of resources for international students.
- The [Services for Students with Disabilities](#) (SSD) office coordinates accommodations for disability. Come talk to us if this applies to you, so that we can make those accommodations as soon as possible.

I also want to acknowledge how challenging the world is right now for many of us. We have some shared experience, and we also each have our own unique set of physical and mental challenges. We should all try to internalize this fact and give each other the benefit of the doubt. If at any point you are having difficulty participating, engaging, or meeting course expectations, please let me know. I promise to be understanding and flexible.

Below are some resources for well-being and inclusion at UM:

- [Campus Maize and Blueprint](#) is the online hub for UM news and information related to COVID-19.
- The UM Office of Student Life provides [resources for student well-being](#).
- The Rackham Graduate School offers a resource for [Supporting Graduate Students During Stressful Times](#), prepared by the Mental Health Task Force.
- [Counseling and Psychological Services](#) (CAPS) provides confidential support options for any issue including stress, mood changes, and problems with eating and/or sleeping. CAPS now has a dedicated staff member for SEAS, Andrea Sieg (andsieg@umich.edu).
- [CEW+](#) provides immediate, ongoing services and financial support, especially to women and nontraditional students, but also to any students who encounter education and career obstacles based on their non-linear paths to the University community.
- [Students of Color of Rackham](#) (SCOR) is a network for graduate and professional students dedicated to the social, cultural, and academic well-being of students of color.
- [Spectrum Center](#) works to enhance the campus climate and support services for LGBTQ+ students, staff, and faculty through education, advocacy, and community building.
- The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion offices at [U of M](#) and [SEAS](#) maintain a large collection of excellent resources.

Course calendar

Date	Day	Topic	Assignment
8/30	1	Introduction	
9/6	2	NO CLASS – Justice and economics	
9/13	3	Causes of disproportionate exposure	
9/20	4	Resolving disproportionate exposure	
9/27	5	Water affordability	Assignment #1
10/4	6	Carbon pricing	Assignment #2
10/11	7	Markets and capitalism	

Detailed course schedule

Class #1 – August 30th. Introduction

Class #2 – NO MEETING (Labor Day), September 6th. Justice and economics

Note: I will try to reschedule class (or a fraction thereof) to some other time this week.

Readings

1. **Chapters 1-3** of Miller, David (2021). “**Justice**”, in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University.
2. **Pp. 44-65** of Keohane, Nathaniel and Sheila Olmstead. “The Benefits and Costs of Environmental Protection”, in *Markets and the Environment*. (2nd ed.). Island Press: Washington, 2016.
3. **Pp. 74-76** of Freeman III, A. Myrick, Joseph A. Herriges, and Catherine L. Kling. “Aggregation and Social Welfare”, in *The Measurement of Environmental and Resource Values*, (3rd ed.). Resources For the Future: Washington, D.C.: 2014.
4. Gamble, Joelle. “How Economic Assumptions Uphold Racist Systems.” *Dissent Magazine*. June 9, 2020. <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/how-economic-assumptions-uphold-racist-systems>.

Class #3 – September 13th. Causes of disproportionate exposure

Readings

1. Taylor, Dorceta E. “Toxic Exposure: Landmark Cases in the South and the Rise of Environmental Justice Activism”, in *Toxic Communities: Environmental Racism, Industrial Pollution, and Residential Mobility*. New York University Press: New York, 2014. Pp. 69-97.
2. Banzhaf, Spencer, Lala Ma, and Christopher Timmins (2019). “Environmental Justice: The Economics of Race, Place, and Pollution.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 33(1): 185-208.

Class #4 – September 20th. Resolving disproportionate exposure

Readings

1. Mock, Brentin. “Can We Green the Hood Without Gentrifying It?” *Grist*, February 9th, 2015. <<https://grist.org/cities/can-we-green-the-hood-without-gentrifying-it/>>.
2. *Sections I, II, and V* in Christensen, Peter, Ignacio Sarmiento-Barbieri, and Christopher Timmins (2021). “Housing Discrimination and the Toxics Exposure Gap in the United States: Evidence from the Rental Market.” *Review of Economics and Statistics*.
3. Darity Jr., William and Dania Frank (2003). “The Economics of Reparations.” *American Economic Review Papers and Proceedings* 93(2): 326-329.

Class #5 – September 27th. Water affordability

Readings

1. Swain, Marian, Emmett McKinney, and Lawrence Susskind (2020). “Water Shutoffs in Older American Cities: Causes, Extent, and Remedies.” *Journal of Planning Education and Research*: 1-8.
2. Stafford, Kat. “Controversial water shutoffs could hit 17,461 Detroit households.” *Detroit Free Press*. March 26, 2018. <<https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/detroit/2018/03/26/more-than-17-000-detroit-households-risk-water-shutoffs/452801002/>>.

Assignments

1. Assignment #1 due

Class #6 – October 4th. Carbon pricing

Readings

1. Weisman, Jonathan and Coral Davenport. “Democrats Consider Adding Carbon Tax to Budget Bill.” *The New York Times*. September 24, 2021. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/24/us/politics/carbon-tax-democrats.html>>.
2. Stolper, Samuel. “Who Bears the Burden of Energy Taxes? The Distributional Impacts of Environmental Policies.” *Sense and Sustainability*. May 4, 2015. <<https://www.senseandsustainability.net/2015/05/04/who-bears-the-burden-of-energy-taxes-the-distributional-impacts-of-environmental-policies/#>>.
3. Hernandez-Cortes, Danae and Kyle C. Meng (2021). “Do Environmental Markets Cause Environmental Injustice? Evidence from California’s Carbon Market.” NBER Working Paper 27205.
4. Climate Justice Alliance and Indigenous Environmental Network (2017). “Carbon Pricing: A Critical Perspective for Community Resistance.” Volume 1.

Class #7 – October 11th. Markets and capitalism

Readings

1. Hausman, Daniel, Michael McPherson, and Debra Satz. Chapter 4: “The Ethical Limits of Markets”, in *Economic Analysis, Moral Philosophy, and Public Policy* (third edition). Cambridge University Press: New York, 2017. Pp. 92-104.
2. Kimmerer, Robin. “The Gift of Strawberries”, in *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*. Milkweed Editions: Minneapolis, MN, 2013. Pp. 22-32.
3. Lowy, Michael (2005). “What is ecosocialism?” *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 16(2): 15-24.

Assignments

1. Assignment #2 due