

EAS 677.022: Economics and Environmental Justice

Fall 2020 A Course Syllabus
(Version: September 1st, 2020)

Logistics

Class meeting time: Tuesdays 1:00-3:00pm from 9/1 through 10/13

Class meeting URL: <https://umich.zoom.us/j/92348340952>

Professor: Samuel Stolper (sstolper@umich.edu)

Website: <https://umich.instructure.com/courses/386806>

Office Hours: Thursdays 1:00-2:00pm, via Zoom: <https://umich.zoom.us/j/99735016284>

Credit-hours: 1; prerequisites: none

About this course

What is the relationship between economics and environmental, energy, and climate justice? This half-semester seminar is meant to be a group exploration of this question. 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. It is therefore vital that we understand how it *is* used and how it *could* be used.

This course will proceed fully remotely. Inclusive, open-minded engagement on important, yet sensitive, issues will be the top priority in class meetings. Outside the virtual 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 three-fold:

1. Teach students fundamentals of positive and normative economic analysis
2. Facilitate reflection and mutual learning about what constitutes justice
3. Develop insights about important, real-world issues in environmental justice

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!

Learning during a pandemic

For many reasons – including (but not limited to) a global pandemic, repeated episodes of police violence, and an upcoming U.S. presidential election of unprecedented consequence – now is a difficult time for us all. 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. For guidance and information about safety and health at UM during the pandemic, please see [Campus Maize and Blueprint](#).

I have chosen to administer this course remotely, in the interest of private and public health as well as effective and equitable teaching during a pandemic. Remote learning formats, of course, pose their own challenges. In particular, it can be difficult to foster robust, free-flowing discussion, which has been a key component of this course in the past. I will try my best to facilitate community- and trust-building and help folks feel comfortable engaging. We will devote time to getting to know each other; we will break out into small groups regularly; and we will practice empathetic communication at all times.

We will conduct class using Zoom, sometimes in conjunction with Google Slides. The Canvas course website will host all course materials and discussion threads. If access to any of these is a challenge for you – regularly or suddenly – you need only communicate that to me, and together we can determine an alternative arrangement for completing course activities.

Our Zoom classroom norms will be as follows:

1. Keep your audio muted when you are not speaking to the class.
2. In general, keep your video on (virtual backgrounds welcome!). If something comes up that calls for turning your video off temporarily, that is totally fine. If you are unable to or do not want to keep your video on more generally, that is also totally fine – in that case, please let me know why, if you are comfortable doing so.
3. Use the “raise hand” function in Zoom to signal to me that you have something to say or ask; I will prompt you periodically when I would like you to share via the chat box.
4. In the interest of equity and access, all class sessions will be recorded and posted to the Canvas website. These recordings are not to be shared outside of the course (by me or by you), to protect everyone’s privacy. Still, your image and voice may be a part of these recordings. If you do not wish to be recorded, please contact me in the first week of class to discuss alternate arrangements. For more information, please see [UM’s page on class recording protocol](#).

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. I have attempted to choose readings from authors of diverse identities; I encourage your feedback on representation in this course.

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 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 will use Zoom chat, polls, and break-out rooms in addition to discussion prompts amongst the full class to engage you. 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. I'm an introvert; I can empathize!

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 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

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:

- Engagement: 60%. This part of your grade will be based on the aggregate degree to which you engage with the course, which includes written reflections, in-class attendance and participation, and Canvas discussion.
- Assignment #1: 20%
- Assignment #2: 20%

Submissions are due at the beginning of class, unless otherwise stipulated. Late (unexcused) submissions will be penalized 5 percentage points per day; please let me know if you are having trouble keeping up with deadlines.

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 set aside 1:00-2:00pm on Thursdays for a Zoom office hour; see the top of this syllabus for the meeting URL. There will be a waiting room, and I'll "let you in" as soon as any previous attendee leaves. I am also happy to meet at a different time in the week if the regular office hour time does not work for you – just shoot me an email. During these office hours, I am happy to answer questions about any element of the course. You are also welcome to come talk to me about other relevant subjects, such as careers, environmental issues in general, or your well-being at school or otherwise.

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.

Creating an environment of 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 and create a classroom environment that promotes open and respectful dialogue. 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 some resources for student support available through the University:

- 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.
- 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.
- [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.
- The [Students with Children](#) website is dedicated to the needs of student caregivers at the University of Michigan who juggle parenting, other family care, work, and study.
- The University offers a [Child Health Care Subsidy](#) with revised terms of eligibility in recognition of altered circumstances this year.
- Students with unexpected costs related to COVID-19 may request [CARES Act Emergency Funding](#) through the Student Self-Service Page of Wolverine Access. Eligible costs include the cost of child care, and supporting documentation requirements are not extensive.
- [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
9/1	1	Introduction	Assignment #1
9/8	2	Economics and valuation	
9/15	3	Causes of disproportionate exposure	
9/22	4	Resolving disproportionate exposure	
9/29	5	Water affordability	
10/6	6	Judging policies	Assignment #2
10/13	7	Markets and capitalism	

Detailed course schedule

Class #1 – September 1st. Introduction

Class #2 – September 8th. Economics and valuation

Readings

1. Keohane. Nathaniel and Sheila Olmstead. “The Benefits and Costs of Environmental Protection”, in Markets and the Environment (2nd ed.). Island Press: Washington, 2016. Pp. 44-65.
2. 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. Pp. 74-76.
3. Hausman, Daniel, Michael McPherson, and Debra Satz. “Efficiency”, in Economic Analysis, Moral Philosophy, and Public Policy (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press: New York, 2017. Pp. 144-154.
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 15th. 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 22nd. 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. Parramore, Lynn. “Here’s What Economists Don’t Understand About Race.” Institute for New Economic Thinking, October 18th, 2016. <<https://www.ineteconomics.org/perspectives/blog/heres-what-economists-dont-understand-about-race>>.
3. TBD

Class #5 – September 29th. 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 6th. Judging policies

Readings

1. Fullerton, Don (2011). “Six Distributional Effects of Environmental Policy.” *Risk Analysis* 31(6): 923-929.
2. Cushing, Lara, Dan Blaustein-Rejto, Madeline Wander, Manuel Pastor, James Sadd, Allen Zhu, and Rachel Morello-Frosch (2018). “Carbon trading, co-pollutants, and environmental equity: Evidence from California’s cap-and-trade program (2011-2015).” *PLOS Medicine* 15(7).
3. Hernandez-Cortes, Danae and Kyle C. Meng (2020). “Do Environmental Markets Cause Environmental Injustice? Evidence from California’s Carbon Market.” NBER Working Paper 27205.
4. Climate Justice Alliance and Indigenous Environmental Network. “Carbon Pricing: A Critical Perspective for Community Resistance.” Volume 1, 2017.

Class #7 – October 13th. Markets and capitalism

Readings

1. Hausman, Daniel, Michael McPherson, and Debra Satz. Economic Analysis, Moral Philosophy, and Public Policy (third edition). Cambridge University Press: New York, 2017. Pp. 92-104.
2. Bell, Karen (2015). “Can the capitalist economic system deliver environmental justice?” *Environmental Research Letters* 10: 1-9.
3. Kimmerer, Robin. “The Gift of Strawberries”. In Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teaching of Plants. Milkweed Editions, 2013.

Assignments

1. Assignment #2 due