Environmental Policy: Economic Perspectives

This course meets Tuesday and Thursday from 9-10:20am in McConnell 102. The one required text for the class is Keohane & Olmstead, Markets and the Environment, Washington: Island Press, 2007. Additional readings will be posted on Moodle.

Grading

Your grade will have four components:
25% Class participation (includes completion of in-class activities and short assignments)
20% Midterm (Thurs, March 4)
25% Paper/Presentation
30% Final exam

Course Goals

The goal of this course is to explain how economists think about environmental problems. The course is designed to develop the skills and knowledge that will allow you to understand and evaluate economic arguments and analyses of major environmental problems. The course will use some mathematical and graphical analysis, but the emphasis will be on developing intuition for the basic results.

Each chapter of your text introduces key economic concepts and explains how they apply to environmental problems. For each concept and result, you will be expected to: (1) know the basic result or concept, (2) understand how it applies to economic analysis of environmental issues, and (3) be able to *explain* the intuition behind the result or concept in your own words. Expect to be asked to provide explanatory answers on the exams.

Along the way, we will engage in extensive classroom discussions about the strengths and weaknesses of economic analysis of environmental issues. This will include discussions of what economics can and cannot tell us, what it does well and what it does poorly, and the philosophical implications of using economic analysis to address environmental issues.

Office Hours

Mondays 3:30-4:30pm and Thursdays 2:30-3:30pm, Pierce 103. I am also available by appointment other times.

Course Policies

Missed exams

Please check the date of the midterm and come see me by Feb 5 if you have any unavoidable conflicts. If a genuine emergency arises, notify me as soon as possible.

Class participation

As noted above, 25% of your grade in this class will be based on class participation. There are many ways to participate and your participation will reflect a mix of these. If you are uncomfortable speaking up in large group discussions, make sure you participate in class activities, including short assignments.

Regular attendance in class is very important. While I will not explicitly take attendance, I will keep track of who completes various in-class assignments and who participates regularly in discussion. If you miss class frequently, your class participation grade will reflect your absence. Missing one or two classes will not affect your grade, but more absences may.

Email

I encourage you to email me with questions. I will make every effort to respond to your emails within one business day (i.e. within 24 hours during the week and on Monday for emails received over the weekend). I generally will not answer detailed conceptual questions in emails but will ask you to make an appointment to come by my office.

Please check the syllabus and the course page on Moodle before emailing with questions about course logistics. Please include the words EVS 205 in your email subject line. I make extensive use of email filters and emails without this tag may get filtered into a folder that is checked rarely.

Honor Code

All students are expected to abide by Smith's Honor Code, which is available at http://www.smith.edu/sao/handbook/socialconduct/honorcode.php. I take the honor code very seriously and will report any suspected violations to the Honor Board. Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns relating to the Honor Code.

Disabilities

Please contact me by February 5 if you need accommodations related to a disability.

Disclaimer

The policies in this syllabus are subject to change. Any changes will be announced to the class and posted on Moodle.

Paper/Presentation

25% of your grade in this course will be based on a paper and accompanying presentation. Presentations will take place during the last three weeks of class and your papers are due on the final day of class (**April 29**). Papers must be turned in electronically.

The papers and presentations will address a real-world environmental policy question, covering the different sides of the debate, with a focus on the economic arguments involved in the debate. More information will be provided as the semester progresses.

The papers will be 7-10 pages in length and each student will have 10 minutes to present their work plus additional time for questions.

You will be able to select your own topic in consultation with me. Each student will be asked to provide three possible topics and make an appointment to discuss which topic is most feasible. Your topic should be a specific environmental policy question, not a general topic. For instance, instead of "climate change" or even "should the US reduce its carbon emissions?" you might consider a topic like "Should the US adopt a cap-and-trade program to reduce carbon emissions?"

Your three topic ideas must cover at least two different types of pollution or resources. Topic ideas must be emailed to me **by 5pm on Friday, February 5**. I will provide a sign-up sheet for topic appointments during the week of February 8-12.

You may work with another student on your paper and presentation but are not required to do so. If you work together, both students must participate in the presentation. Joint presentations will be 20 minutes in length, although you do not need to split the time exactly equally. In joint projects, I will award both students the same grade.

Topic list

The following topic list is tentative and may change depending on how quickly we move through material.

1. Introduction
2. Benefits and Costs of Environmental Protection
3. Markets and Efficiency
4. Market Failures
5. Market-Based Environmental Policy
6. Exhaustible Resources
7. Replenishable Resources
8. Sustainability