

# **ECON 4350: Economics of Poverty and Public Policy**

Georgia State University, Fall 2024

CRN: 81630

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**Instructor:** Olanrewaju Yusuff

**Email:** [oyusuff4@gsu.edu](mailto:oyusuff4@gsu.edu) (Must put “ECON 4350” in subject line)

**Course Meeting Time:** Tuesday & Thursday (2:15 - 3:30pm)

**Course Meeting Place:** Petit Science Center 255

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**Office Hours:**

Thursday 11:00 am - 12:00 pm

or by appointment

The course syllabus provides a general plan for the course; deviations may be necessary.

## **Required Text**

1. Poverty & Income Distribution, 2nd Edition, (2009). Wolff. ISBN: 9781405176606
2. Poor Economics: A radical rethinking of the way to fight global poverty, (2011). Banerjee & Duflo. ISBN: 9781610390934

## **Readings**

Because this is a seminar (not a lecture), your attendance and participation is key. You will have weekly readings (on which exams and problem sets will partly be based).

## **Additional Books of Interest**

- Acemoglu, D. & Robinson, J. Why Nations Fail: The origins of power, prosperity, and poverty. Crown Publishers.
- Banerjee, A. & Duflo, E. Poor Economics: a radical rethinking of the way to fight global poverty. Public Affairs.
- Collier, Paul. The Bottom Billion: Why the poorest countries are failing and what can be done about it. Oxford University Press.
- Easterly, William. The Elusive Quest to Growth: Economists’ adventures and misadventures in the tropics.
- Sachs, Jeffrey. The End of Poverty: Economics possibilities of our time. The Penguin Press.

## **Prerequisites**

ECON 2105 or ECON 2106 (or equivalent to be approved by instructor).

## Course Description

This course applies economic principles to exploring the debate surrounding the concept of poverty in the United States and, to a lesser extent, elsewhere in the world. Some of the questions that we will study include:

- How is poverty defined?
- How is poverty measured?
- Why are some people poor and not others?
- How well do poverty alleviation programs work?

Topics include but are not limited to living standards, income distribution, measuring poverty, inequality, discrimination, economic mobility, savings and wealth, charitable giving, public policy, taxation, income redistribution, and policy reform.

## Learning Outcomes and Goals

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

1. Describe the extent of poverty in the United States and how it is measured.
2. Critically analyze the causes of poverty.
3. Evaluate the actual and potential responses of the private and public/government sectors to poverty.

With these goals in mind, the course is broken up into a few main components (Introduction, Definitions, Measuring Poverty, Origins of Poverty, Policies & Programs, and Special Topics, including Global Poverty)

## Course Requirements and Grading

Items	Percentage of Grade	Date
Problem Sets (2)	15%	PS1: Posted (Sep 10)— PS1: Due (Sep 17) PS2: Posted (Oct 18)— PS2: Due (Oct 31)
Reading Quizzes	15%	Throughout the semester (about 5)
Class Participation	5%	Throughout the semester
Midterm	20%	October 10, 2024
Final Exam	30%	December 12, 2024
Group Presentation	15%	Proposal due: December 05, 2024 @ 11:59pm
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	

**Group Policy Assignment & Presentation:** You will work in a group of 4-5; you will need to choose a specific policy, whether education, health, public, labor, etc., in the US or abroad, that is related to our class material. The topic must be approved by me in advance. The presentation should include thorough background research and good economic thinking. The proposal should be a 2-4 page (12pt TNR). Provide references in an attached bibliography (not included in page count).

**Exams:** There will be two exams given throughout the semester. Your final exam grade may replace your midterm exam grade. That is, I will drop your midterm exam score if you perform better on the final. Make-up exams will **NOT** be given. Because the final exam grade can replace your midterm grade, the final serves as a second chance. If you missed the midterm because of unforeseen circumstances or just did not score as high as you would have liked, then you can use the final to make up for it. Any content covered in class or assigned for homework (e.g., problem sets, readings, podcasts) is fair game. I will provide more details as we approach the dates of the exams.

**Attendance:** Attending class is highly encouraged to do well in this course. Any concerns about grading other than miscalculated points must be submitted in writing via email within 24 hours of receiving your graded exam and subsequently discussed with me one-on-one outside of class time. Class attendance is highly encouraged. Materials for exams and homework will come from both class lectures and readings. Missed in-class activities, class exit quizzes, and discussions **CANNOT** be made up.

**Class Participation:** This course involves discussions on various policies. You can earn points by actively participating in class discussions and answering questions from the instructor. There will also be short **Exit Class Quizzes** at the end of some classes to keep everyone engaged. Remember, class participation makes up 5% of your total grade.

**Reading Quizzes & Problem Sets:** The reading quizzes and problem sets will be posted and required to be submitted on iCollege. They will be short. Make sure you've done the readings. If you read, they'll be easy. There are five quizzes and two problem sets this semester. If you miss a quiz or problem set for a legitimate reason like illness, an emergency, or a pre-approved commitment, please notify me as soon as possible and provide documentation. Then, the missed quiz or problem set score will be replaced by the next one. You will receive zero for both if you miss two quizzes in a row or miss both problem sets. Remember, reading quizzes and problem sets makeup 30% of your total grade (15% each).

**Email Communication:** You are expected to check your GSU **email daily**. The university sends important messages about road closings, safety, and inclement weather conditions. I will occasionally use this method to send announcements, miscellaneous assignments, or contact students individually. There is a way to set up your account so that GSU emails get forwarded to your personal email. More importantly, when writing an email to a professor/instructor or colleague, remember to be professional. There should be an appropriate heading and closing. Write in complete sentences, use punctuation, and reread before sending. An email is not a text message. Checking your email regularly and being professional are important habits to develop not only for my class but also for life in the "real world." When emailing me about class, always **write "ECON4350" on the subject line**. I will try to respond to your

email in a timely manner (within 24 hours), but I cannot guarantee an immediate response. I may not reply to emails sent after 5pm until the next day.

Learning is a reciprocal process: what you put in it is what you get out.

## Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Number Grade	GPA Quality Points
A+	97 – 100	4.3
A	93 – 96.99	4.0
A-	90 – 92.99	3.7
B+	87 – 89.99	3.3
B	83 – 86.99	3.0
B-	80 – 82.99	2.7
C+	77 – 79.99	2.3
C	73 – 76.99	2.0
C-	70 – 72.99	1.7
D	60 – 69.99	1.0
F	0 – 59.99	0.0

## Class Policies

**iCollege:** Our course page on iCollege will be the central resource for you to stay updated and on-pace with the course. I will post announcements, assignments, grades, and other class material and maintain an updated course timeline on iCollege.

**Life Happens:** If you become seriously ill, experience the death of a loved one, or have a life-altering experience that is negatively influencing your participation, please contact me as soon as possible so we can discuss your options.

**Respect:** In the classroom setting, respect means paying attention, not engaging in side conversations with others while someone is speaking, and not engaging in disruptive behavior. It is beneficial to the entire class for students to ask questions and make comments that relate to the material. At no time is it acceptable to mimic, embarrass, intimidate, or mistreat other students. I expect mutual respect and civility in all communications with me and other students.

**Rules are Non-Negotiable:** The rules of the syllabus, the content of the exams, the content of the lectures, and the calculation of the grade you earned are not a starting point for negotiations. While I am

always willing to work with students on an individual basis, I cannot negotiate individual terms with each student. Commercialization of lecture notes and university-provided course materials is not permitted.

## **How to be Successful in This Class**

1. Engage with the content on a weekly basis. Because the material builds on itself, missing a week of content can and probably will confuse you later on down the road. We will be moving through the material relatively quickly, and all content covered in lectures, discussions, the textbook, or materials provided via iCollege is fair game for exams.
2. Do not hesitate to ask questions or make thoughtful contributions. Your participation is NOT an imposition; it is encouraged and welcomed and helps make lectures more interesting. If you're confused, chances are other people are too. When you have a question, please "raise your hand." If you feel uncomfortable asking questions in class, please make arrangements to talk with me during office hours or by appointment.
3. Do the assigned readings before class! Sometimes, it will take multiple encounters with the material for it to sink in. Lectures, discussions, and assignments will make more sense if you have already reviewed the material.
4. Review your notes after every class. This will force you to go over everything while it is still fresh in your memory. When you have questions, write them down and ask me as soon as possible.

## **Expectations of Outside Time Required for Class**

This class is set up for the typical student, and the typical class is 3 hours outside class for every hour in class. This is a 3-credit hour class, so on average, you should spend 9 hours a week studying and preparing outside of class.

## **Academic Honesty**

Students are expected to be familiar with Georgia State University's Policy on Academic Honesty. Here is a link to that policy: [Georgia State University's Policy on Academic Honesty](#)

## **Course Evaluations**

Your constructive assessment of this course plays an indispensable role in shaping education at Georgia State. Upon completing the course, please take time to fill out the online course evaluation.

## **Disability Accommodations**

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for responsible accommodation of their disabilities. Students who wish to request accommodation for a disability may do so by registering with the Office of Disability Services. Students may only be accommodated upon issuance by the Office of Disability Services of a signed Accommodation Plan and are responsible for providing a copy of that plan to instructors of all classes in which accommodations are sought.

## **Basic Needs Statement**

Any student who faces challenges securing their food or housing and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Dean of Students for support. Furthermore, please notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable us to provide resources that we may possess. The Embark program at GSU provides resources for students facing homelessness.

## **FERPA**

In keeping with USG and university policy, the course website will make every effort to maintain the privacy and accuracy of your personal information. Specifically, unless otherwise noted, it will not actively share personal information gathered from the site with anyone except university employees whose responsibilities require access to said records. However, some information collected from the site may be subject to the Georgia Open Records Act. This means that while we do not actively share information, in some cases, we may be compelled by law to release information gathered from the site. Also, the site will be managed in compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), which prohibits the release of education records without student permission.

## **Sexual Harassment**

In instances of sexual misconduct, the present instructor(s) and teaching assistants are designated as Responsible Employees who are required to share with administrative officials all reports of sexual misconduct for university review. If you wish to disclose an incident of sexual misconduct confidentially, there are options on campus for you to do so. For more information on this policy, please refer to the Sexual Misconduct Policy, which is included in the Georgia State University Student Code of Conduct.

## Life Learning Outcomes:

Students will:

1. develop professional communication and writing skills.
2. develop/enhance their time management skills.
3. learn how to engage and work with students different from themselves.
4. gain a better sense of community with GSU to create a sense of belonging.
5. continue to understand which learning and study techniques work best for them. Everyone learns differently and at different paces.
6. to better understand their individual interests and strengths.

## Additional Notes:

1. Again, this course syllabus provides a general plan for the course; deviations may be necessary
2. Your constructive assessment of this course plays an indispensable role in shaping education at Georgia State. Upon completing the course, please take time to fill out the online course evaluation.
3. Students who withdraw after the midpoint of each term will not be eligible for a “W” except in cases of **Emergency Withdrawal**.
  - (a) Withdrawal Policy: <https://advisement.gsu.edu/self-service/policies/withdrawal-policy/>
  - (b) Repeat to Replace Policy: <https://advisement.gsu.edu/self-service/policies/repeat-to-replace-policy/>
  - (c) Grade Appeal and Change (including Incomplete Grades) Policy: <https://registrar.gsu.edu/academic-records/grading/grade-appeals-and-changes/>
4. Important University dates can be found at <https://registrar.gsu.edu/registration/semester-calendars-exam-schedules/>
5. Georgia State University values diversity and is committed to fostering and maintaining an educational environment that appreciates individual differences in all areas of operation, including classroom instruction, texts, and materials. To this end, any actions, practices, or processes by any faculty, staff person, or student that discriminates against or is prejudicial toward any person or group based on race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, nationality, disability, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status will not be tolerated.

## Course Outline

**Note:** This provides a general plan for the course; deviations may be necessary. These will be determined in the coming days/weeks and communicated to you accordingly.

Date	Topic	Material
<b>Topic 1: Introduction, Definitions, Measurement</b>		
Lecture 1 Aug 27	Introduction – Poverty vs. Inequality	Wolff Chapter 1
Lecture 2 Aug 29	Measuring Inequality	Wolff Chapters 2, 3; Norton & Ariely (2011)
Lecture 3 Sep 03	Defining & Measuring Poverty	Wolff Chapters 3, 4; Haveman & Mullikin
Lecture 4 Sep 05	Counting the Poor	Wolff Chapters 3.3-3.6; 4.3-4.4
<b>Topic 2: Origins &amp; Determinants of Poverty &amp; Inequality</b>		
Lecture 5 Sep 10	Education (1a) – Human capital theory and returns to schooling (PS 1 POSTED)	Wolff Chapter 8; Ehrenberg, ch. 9. (similar to Wolff but easier.)
Lecture 6 Sep 12	Education (1b) – Trends in Education	Reardon (2011); Kalil (2014)
Lecture 7 Sep 17	Education (cont.) (PS 1 DUE)	
<i>Neighborhood Effect, Role of Discrimination &amp; Intergenerational Transfers</i>		
Lecture 8 Sep 19	Families, Neighborhoods, & Moving to Opportunity	Chetty & Hendren (2015)
Lecture 9 Sep 24	Inequality and Intergenerational Mobility	Wolff Chapter 10; Moretti, E. (2013)
Lecture 10 Sep 26	Role of Discrimination – Race	Wolff Chapters 12, 13; Lang and Spitzer (2020)
Lecture 11 Oct 01	Role of Discrimination – Race: [U.S. Government Accountability Office Class Visit]	Wolff Chapters 12, 13; Lang and Spitzer (2020)
Lecture 12 Oct 03	Role of Discrimination – Gender	Wolff Chapter 14; Blau (2017)
Lecture 13 Oct 08	Role of Discrimination – Gender	Wolff Chapter 14; Blau (2017)



Date	Topic	Material
Oct 10	Midterm Exam	(Final presentation groups lottery. Make sure you're in class.)
<b>Topic 3: Alleviating Poverty and Inequality through Public Policies and Programs</b>		
Lecture 14 Oct 15	Anti-Poverty Programs: Wages & Min Wage; What should the minimum wage be? (Last Day to Withdraw with a "W")	Wolff Chapter 15.7; Dube, A.
Lecture 15 Oct 17	Anti-Poverty Programs 1: Wages & Min Wage & EITC (PS 2 POSTED)	Wolff Chapter 15.6; Hoynes (2014)
Lecture 16 Oct 22	Anti-Poverty Programs 2: Unemployment Benefit & TANF	Wolff Chapters 15.1-3, 15.5; Ziliak, J. et al. (2000)
Lecture 17 Oct 24	Anti-Poverty Programs 3: SNAP & WIC (Final presentation topics. Make sure you're in class.)	Wolff Chapter 15.8; Herring & Moffitt (2018)
Lecture 18 Oct 29	Taxation and Redistribution (PS 2 DUE)	Wolff Chapter 16
<b>Topic 4: Global Poverty</b>		
Lecture 19 Oct 31	Global poverty – Causes/symptoms and Poverty traps	Banerjee & Duflo Chapters 1-2
Lecture 20 Nov 05	Global poverty – Causes/symptoms and Poverty traps	Banerjee & Duflo Chapters 1-2
Nov 07	No Class	Prepare for Presentations
Nov 12	No Class	Prepare for Proposal
Lecture 21 Nov 14	Global poverty – Health (Last Lecture)	Banerjee & Duflo Chapter 3
Nov 19	Presentations	
Nov 21	Presentations	
Nov 26	Thanksgiving Break (No Class)	
Nov 28	Thanksgiving Break (No Class)	
Dec 03	Presentations	
Dec 05	Presentations: Last Day of Class, Wrap Up, & Work Day	<b>Summary of Proposal due at 11:59pm</b>
Dec 12	<b>Final Exam (01:30 PM - 04:00 PM)</b>	Fall 2024 Final Exam Schedule

## Public Materials and Additional Resources for Undergraduates

1. Brendan M. Price [Resources for Undergraduates](#)
2. National Bureau of Economic Research [NBER](#)
3. Economics at UCT: A Toolkit [A Collection of Tips, Tricks and Resources to Help you Get Your Degree](#)
4. Susan Athey Advice for Applying to Grad School in Economics ([Advice](#))
5. Moving to Opportunity [ECONOFACT](#)