

Economics 249
Public Expenditures
Spring 2008

Course Meetings: MW 2–3:20

Web Site: <http://www.socsci.uci.edu/%7Embitler/teaching.html>

Syllabus: <http://www.socsci.uci.edu/%7Embitler/syllabus-public.pdf>

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Office Hours: Tuesday and Wednesday 11 am–12 pm and by appointment

Course Objectives:

This course is part of the sequence in public economics. In this course, we will study the effects of government interventions. We will primarily focus on public assistance programs, the tax system, and social expenditures, paying particular attention to the US and the rest of the OECD. I hope this class will help you become a critical consumer of the existing literature and will teach you about empirical techniques that can be applied to your own original research.

Course requirements

1. Reading and class discussion. I will provide you with a fairly comprehensive reading list. However, in class we will focus on only a couple of papers, which I expect you to read before class so you are prepared to discuss them in class. Class participation will count for 10% of your grade.
2. Paper summaries: Each student will hand in two paper summaries of a paper we will discuss in class. These will be handed in at the beginning of class, and will be limited to one page (typed). In this summary, you should summarize the paper (touching on data, methods, and findings) and point out any issues with the approach or conclusions. The paper summaries are worth 10% of

your grade.

3. Problem sets. There will be 2–3 problem sets. Some will involve using STATA or another package to estimate models like those we discuss in class. Some will be standard pencil and paper problem sets. You are free to collaborate on the problem sets, but everyone must turn in their own answers and write the name of their collaborators on the top of their problem set. Answers involving empirical work should include key output and well-commented STATA do or other files for performing the estimation. The problem sets are worth 30% of your grade.
4. Referee report. You will choose an unpublished empirical paper to referee that is on a topic we will cover in class. You cannot choose a paper we will discuss in class, but can choose one off the reading list or from the NBER or IZA or SSRN working paper series. The referee report can be at most 5 typed pages and will preferably be shorter. The purpose of a referee report is to help the editor of a journal decide if they should reject the paper or request revisions (and if so, what revisions to request). Your report should discuss the paper critically, pointing out what (if anything) it contributes to the literature as well as any important flaws in the approach it takes. It should also include suggestions to improve the paper. The referee report will count for 20% of your grade.
5. Final exam. This will be worth 30% of your grade.

Course Materials:

Seminars. You should be attending the workshop in your area as often as possible. This is where many people learn to think critically about other people's research. You should also try to meet with outside speakers whose work is close to yours (and/or very interesting to you).

Readings. The required readings are mostly journal articles or working papers. I will typically assign one or two articles per class meeting. Your job is read these articles before class and come in ready to discuss them. Most will be available at JSTOR or one of the working paper sites or through the

library. The reading list is posted at <http://www.socsci.uci.edu/%7Embitler/reading-public.pdf>

Review of undergraduate public finance: There are a number of undergraduate texts. I recommend Gruber (**Public Finance and Public Policy**) or Rosen (**Public Finance**).

Other useful references:

Handbook of Public Economics, Volumes 1–4, Alan Auerbach and Martin Feldstein, editors. (Available online)

Atkinson, A. and J. Stiglitz. *Lectures in Public Economics*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1980.

Laffont, J. *Fundamentals of Public Economics*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988.

What's New in Econometrics? NBER Summer Course, Guido Imbens and Jeffrey Wooldridge.

Schedule:

Note that this schedule is preliminary. Keep checking the web page for updates.

- Introduction, methods (1 class)
- Taxes and labor supply, effects for low-income and high-income groups (3 classes)
- Welfare and welfare reform, other safety-net programs (3 classes)
- Theory of social insurance (1 class)
- Unemployment insurance (2 classes)
- Worker's compensation (1 class)
- Disability insurance (2 classes)
- Social Security (3 classes)
- Medicare and Medicaid (3 classes)
- Tax subsidies for health care, retirement, and other savings (1 class)