

## ECONOMICS 238 – Public Economics, Spring 2025

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Class: TuTh 10:00-11:15am (RLY 106)  
Office Hours: By appointment  
Course website: <http://courses.furman.edu>

### WELCOME!

Welcome to Public Economics! I am thrilled to have you in this course as we explore the vital and fascinating role of government in shaping economic outcomes. This class builds on the fundamental principles of economics you encountered in ECN 111 and invites you to examine how public policies are designed, implemented, and analyzed through an economic lens.

Whether your interest lies in public policy, law, business, social justice, or simply understanding the world around you, this course will provide valuable insights and tools to help you critically evaluate the role of government in society. My goal is to create a learning environment where all voices are valued, where we engage respectfully with complex and sometimes contentious topics, and where curiosity drives our exploration of economic theory and its real-world applications.

Public economics allows us to address questions of equity, efficiency, and justice in the design of policies and programs. Together, we'll use theoretical models, empirical tools, and current policy debates to unpack some of the biggest challenges facing governments today. I look forward to learning with you and from you this semester as we tackle these important topics!

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

Why do governments intervene in the economy? How should they intervene? And what are the consequences of these interventions? Public Economics examines the role of the government in addressing market failures, promoting social welfare, and redistributing resources through taxation and spending.

In this course, we will analyze three major areas of public economics:

1. Market Failures and Government Solutions: Externalities, public goods, and other cases where markets alone cannot deliver efficient outcomes.
2. Social Insurance and Redistribution: Government programs such as Social Security, unemployment insurance, and public health initiatives that aim to address risks and economic inequality.
3. Taxation and Revenue: The design, implementation, and economic impacts of tax policies at the federal, state, and local levels.

We will combine theoretical frameworks with real-world data to explore these topics, considering both the intended and unintended effects of government intervention. By the end of this course, you will have the tools to evaluate public policies critically and a deeper understanding of the trade-offs involved in their design.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This course provides a foundation in economic theory, empirical analysis, and public policy evaluation, equipping you with the skills to analyze the role of government in the economy. By the end of the course, you will be able to:

1. Reflect on and evaluate the theoretical justifications for government intervention in the economy.
2. Use economic theory and real-world data to analyze market failures and assess the effectiveness of public policies designed to address them.
3. Understand and critique the design and impact of social insurance and redistribution programs, including their implications for equity and efficiency.

4. Analyze the principles and consequences of taxation, including its effects on individual behavior, markets, and government revenue.
5. Explore the distinctions between federal, state, and local government roles in public policy, and consider how these differences shape economic outcomes.
6. Develop quantitative, analytical, and critical thinking skills that enhance your ability to assess and propose public policy solutions.
7. Enhance your ability to communicate complex economic concepts clearly and persuasively, both orally and in writing.

## **REQUIRED TEXTS**

All required readings are posted on Moodle.

## **PREREQUISITES**

ECN-111

*If you need a review of any ECN-111 concepts, free online textbooks can be found at [OpenStax](#) and [Core Economics](#).*

## **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

All activities and assignments that you complete during this course are governed by the Furman University academic integrity policy ([www.furman.edu/integrity](http://www.furman.edu/integrity)). Furman University asks all students to abide by the integrity pledge ([found here](#)). You should familiarize yourself with the important definitions and examples of plagiarism found on the University academic integrity website (see above). Trust and respect are vital to the success of collaborative learning endeavors. As such, any and all integrity violations will be taken extremely seriously and will be adjudicated according to Furman's policy 190.6. I expect all students to review Furman's policies on academic integrity. You are responsible for upholding these standards as you complete the lab assignments, conduct your research, take the quizzes, and complete the case studies for this course. You should be aware of the consequences of cheating, fabrication, facilitation, and plagiarism. I will report all academic integrity violations to the Associate Academic Dean. In this class, any academic integrity violation results in an F for the course.

## **GENERATIVE AI**

In this course, generative artificial intelligence (GenAI)-based assistance, such as ChatGPT, is treated the same way as collaboration with others: for most assignments you are welcome to talk about your ideas and work with other people, both inside and outside the class, as well as with GenAI-based assistants. GenAI is a subset of AI that utilizes machine learning models to create new, original content, such as images, text, or music, based on patterns and structures learned from existing data. However, as is indicated in the University academic integrity policy, all work you submit must be your own. You should never include in an assignment anything that was not written directly by you without proper citation (including quotation marks and in-line citation for direct quotes). By submitting assignments in this class, you pledge to affirm that they are your own work and you attribute use of any tools or sources. Violations will be considered academic misconduct.

Generative AI use is explicitly prohibited for use in exams.

It is your responsibility to assess the validity and applicability of any GenAI output that is submitted. You bear the final responsibility. You should be aware that all GenAI tools have a tendency to make up incorrect facts and fake citations or confidently reassert factual errors, that code generation models have a tendency to produce inaccurate outputs, and that image generation models can occasionally come up with highly offensive products. You will be responsible for any inaccurate, biased, offensive, or otherwise unethical content you submit regardless of whether it originally comes from you or a GenAI tool. Please also note that different

classes at Furman may implement different GenAI policies, and it is your responsibility to conform to expectations for each course.

*While GenAI offers valuable learning opportunities, if you have specific concerns about GenAI use, including those about data privacy or security, please contact me.*

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

### **Grades will be based on the following**

Pre-Class Preparation	10%
Problem Sets	15%
Class Participation	10%
Country Project:	35%
In-class exams (at midterm and final)	30%

#### **(1) Pre-Class Preparation (10%)**

To ensure meaningful engagement with the course material, you will complete weekly pre-class preparation tasks. These tasks may include reading an article, listening to a podcast, reviewing data, or completing other activities designed to introduce that week's topic. Your preparation will be assessed through a variety of formats, such as submitting brief reflection questions before class, participating in a short in-class response, or contributing to a group activity at the start of class.

Each week, your preparation will be graded on a 10-point scale, with half-point increments used to reflect the thoughtfulness and thoroughness of your engagement. Expectations for the week's preparation will be clearly outlined in advance on the course Moodle page.

The goal of these assignments is not to test for right or wrong answers but to encourage thoughtful preparation and readiness to participate in class discussions and activities. By preparing ahead of time, you will gain the most from our time together in class and contribute to the learning environment.

#### **(2) Problem Sets (15%)**

There will be four assignments that have you explore the topics we covered in class in more depth. This type of assignment may contain questions that vary from traditional problem set questions to data exercises to short essays to reflections. If you turn an assignment in on time, the minimum grade you will earn is a 60.

Assignments not turned in on the due date will be given a zero.

#### **(3) Class Participation (10%)**

Students are expected to attend class in-person unless there is an excused reason (for example, documented health issue or representing Furman at an official event). Students are expected to play an active role in learning. This includes showing up on time, being prepared, participating in class discussions, paying attention to the instructor and your peers, and respecting the opinions, needs, and rights of others. I anticipate that you give any pre-class reading your fullest attention so that when you enter class you are ready to engage in a thoughtful discussion. Your participation and preparedness are critical to individual and class success as meaningful class discussions are influenced by your inquiry, experience and insight.

You will receive two grades for class participation, one at midterm and one at the end of the course. You will have an opportunity to reflect on your class participation at each point to demonstrate and document how you think you have done before I assign a grade. Class participation has multiple components as seen by the following rubric:

<b>Category</b>	<b>What it assesses</b>	<b>Met</b>	<b>Partially met</b>	<b>Not met</b>
Respect and Engagement	Evaluates your attitude and behavior in the classroom, focusing on creating a constructive and respectful environment.	Consistently respectful, engages actively without dominating, encourages others, and challenges ideas respectfully to foster collaboration.	Generally respectful and engaged but may occasionally dominate, disengage, or struggle to respond constructively to challenges.	Often disengaged, disrespectful, or argumentative. Behavior disrupts or discourages others from contributing.
Preparation and Contribution	Assesses the depth and quality of your contributions, measuring preparation, understanding of material, and discussion advancement.	Demonstrates thorough preparation through well-reasoned, evidence-based arguments that deepen discussion, analyze ideas, or introduce new perspectives.	Contributions show preparation but may rely on surface-level understanding, lack evidence, or occasionally misunderstand key ideas.	Contributions lack preparation, are unsupported opinions, or misunderstand key points. Little familiarity with material.
Listening and Collaboration	Evaluates how well you engage with others' ideas, including active listening, thoughtful responses, and building on discussions.	Actively listens and engages by building on, clarifying, or responding thoughtfully. Frequently connects earlier comments to advance discussion.	Generally listens but may occasionally miss or repeat points. Contributions don't consistently connect to the discussion flow.	Frequently inattentive or disengaged. Repeated comments, non sequiturs, or failure to build on others' ideas.

#### (4) Group Project (35%)

You will be working on a group project that involves the application of topics we cover in class to a country other than the United States. Information on the structure of this project can be found in a [separate document that describes the country project](#).

#### (5) Exams (30%)

Two exams will be given and each will be worth 15% of your total grade. One will occur at shortly after midterm (Thursday, March 13<sup>th</sup>) and one will happen during finals period (Monday, May 5<sup>th</sup> at 8:30am). They will be open-note exams. You may use any printed materials, including readings, class notes, problem sets, and other course handouts. However, access to online resources or devices during the exam is not permitted.

### **Grade Categories (from the *Furman University Catalog*):**

Grade	Description
A	Excellent. The mark of highest distinction earned by those students whose work represents the best that can be expected of a student at Furman.
B	Good. The mark of distinction earned by those students whose work represents a high degree of achievement in meeting the characteristic demands of the course.
C	Satisfactory. The mark earned by those students who have attained such familiarity with the content of the course and such ability to apply this knowledge as may be expected of a student who gives to the course a reasonable amount of time, effort, and attention.
D	Marginal. The lowest passing grade representing inferior work. It indicates that the student would be seriously handicapped in attempting subsequent courses for which this work is a prerequisite.
F	Failure. The mark indicates unconditional failure. No credit earned.

Grades will be determined by the following scale: A (93-100), A- (90-92), B+ (88-89), B (83-87), B- (80-82), C+ (78-79), C (73-77), C- (70-72), D+ (68-69), D (63-67), D- (60-62), F (0-59).

### **Late Assignments:**

If a student misses an assignment due to serious illness or other compelling circumstance beyond the student's control as communicated to me by Furman, late assignments will be permitted and new due dates will be assigned accordingly. If you have an anticipated absence (required extra-curricular activity, official representative of Furman), you are responsible for turning in assignments on schedule.

### **Makeup Exam Policy:**

If you have an anticipated absence (required extra-curricular activity, official representative of Furman), you must talk to me in advance so we can make alternate arrangements. If you don't talk to me until after the missed exam, you will receive a zero for that exam. If a student misses an exam due to serious illness or other compelling circumstance beyond the student's control as communicated to me by Furman, an alternate makeup exam date will be agreed upon.

### **Final Exam Schedule Changes:**

Any changes in the schedule of the final examination for a course must have the approval of the Associate Academic Dean. You can email [academic.deans@furman.edu](mailto:academic.deans@furman.edu) to complete a request form, except in the following two cases (in which case just talk to me)

- Students with approved SOAR accommodations for extended time on exams that have two final exams on the same day.
- Students with approved University sponsored events that are scheduled over the exam time.

### **Student Resources:**

Many excellent, additional resources and services, including writing, speech, and technology consultations, are provided at Furman. Please take advantage of these services.

- The [Writing and Media Lab](#) is available to support students with writing and multimedia projects. Students may schedule individual appointments with consultants.
- The [Center for Academic Success](#) employs professional staff who work with students to assist with executive functioning skills, test-taking strategies, study strategies and other academic success-related skills. Students can directly access resources on the website at any time.

- Library Support is provided by a dedicated team of librarians who can assist locating documents, information, and resources for your course or research projects. For more information about how to utilize these resources, visit the [Library website](#).
- Empowering and equipping students to manage their mental health and academic success, the Trone Center for Mental Fitness's stepped care model offers an array of evidence-based services. The resources listed below are free, confidential and accessible to all enrolled students. Go to the [Trone Center for Mental Fitness Website for details](#).
- Paladin Peer Support is a student peer mentoring organization focused on wellness and self-efficacy. Follow them on Instagram and connect for support in reaching personal well-being goals.
- The [Office for Spiritual Life](#) provides individual confidential counseling for students in person and online.
- Whether you are still exploring career paths or looking to land that first position after Furman, the [Malone Center](#) has resources to help you in each step of your career journey.

### **Accommodation Requests**

It is my goal to fully include everyone in our classroom. The Student Office for Accessibility Resources (SOAR) is committed to helping qualified students with disabilities achieve their academic goals by providing reasonable academic accommodations under appropriate circumstances. If you have a disability and anticipate the need for an accommodation in order to participate in this class, please register with the Student Office for Accessibility Resources. They will assist you in getting the resources you may need to participate fully in this class. You can contact the SOAR office at 864.294.2320 or at [soar@furman.edu](mailto:soar@furman.edu). You can find additional information and request academic accommodations at the [SOAR webpage](#).

### **Name/Pronoun Use:**

I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate/preferred name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.

### **Classroom Technology:**

*ITS and Help Desk:* If you have technical problems with Moodle, or if you have any other computer issue that is preventing your access to course materials and sessions, please contact the ITS Service Center by calling 294-3277 or by emailing [service.center@furman.edu](mailto:service.center@furman.edu).

Devices such as phones, laptops, tablets, iPads, etc., should only be used if their use is immediately relevant to a specific task related to what we are doing in class. In other words, *if you aren't using it to perform a task specifically related to what we are doing in class at that very moment, please put it away.*

### **Course Notifications:**

Announcements related to the class will be communicated via email. Changes made to assignments and deadlines will also be updated in Moodle.

### **Nondiscrimination Policy and Sexual Misconduct:**

Furman University and its faculty are committed to supporting our students and seeking an environment that is free of bias, discrimination, and harassment. Furman does not unlawfully discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, pregnancy, disability, age, religion, veteran status, or any other characteristic or status protected by applicable local, state, or federal law in admission, treatment, or access to, or employment in, its programs and activities.

If you have encountered any form of discrimination or harassment, including sexual misconduct (e.g. sexual assault, sexual harassment or gender-based harassment, sexual exploitation or intimidation, stalking, intimate partner violence), we encourage you to report this to the institution. If you wish to report such an incident of misconduct, you may contact Furman's Title IX Coordinator, Melissa Nichols (Trone Center, Suite 215; [Melissa.nichols@furman.edu](mailto:Melissa.nichols@furman.edu); 864.294.2221).

If you would like to speak with someone who can advise you but maintain complete confidentiality, you can talk with a counselor, a professional in the Student Health Center or someone in the Office of Spiritual Life. If you speak with a faculty member, understand that as a mandated reporter of the University, the faculty member **MUST** report to the University's Title IX Coordinator what you share to help ensure that your safety and welfare are being addressed, consistent with the requirements of the law. However, unless there is an ongoing safety risk to you or to the Furman community, you will determine whether the university initiates any formal process. You are entitled to supportive measures (such as a no contact order or academic accommodations) regardless of whether you decide to initiate a formal process.

Additional information about Furman's Sexual Misconduct Policy, how to report sexual misconduct and your rights can be found at the Furman Title IX Webpage at [www.furman.edu/titleix](http://www.furman.edu/titleix). You do not have to go through the experience alone.

### **Consent to Use Student Materials**

Your work in this class may be used for future research purposes and will be kept confidential. Use of your materials is completely voluntary. You have the right to choose not to allow the use of your materials for future research. Please know that if you choose not to have your materials used, your grade will not be affected in any manner. There are no anticipated risks to you, beyond those encountered in everyday life. All records will be maintained securely on Box. The results of any research using these materials may be published but will not include your name or any identifiable references to you. If you choose to allow me to use your materials this semester, you have the right to opt out at any time by notifying me. You have the opportunity to ask questions about your materials or any related research at any time.

If you **DO NOT** wish for your materials to be used in future research, please complete and return [this form](#) either in print or digital form to me before the end of the course. If you do not return this form, you give consent for me to use your materials for future research.

## **HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS COURSE**

*“Learning results from what the student does and thinks, and only from what the student does and thinks. The teacher can advance learning only by influencing what the student does to learn.” – Herb Simon.*

This course invites you to explore the critical role of government in shaping economic outcomes, blending theory, empirical analysis, and policy evaluation. To fully benefit from this experience, consider the following strategies:

1. **Be Prepared and Present:** Engaging class discussions start with preparation. Complete the readings, podcasts, or data exercises before class, and review any discussion prompts posted on Moodle. Approach each session with curiosity and a willingness to connect the material to your prior knowledge and personal interests.

2. **Engage Actively:** Take ownership of your learning by asking questions, sharing insights, and respectfully challenging ideas during class. Thoughtful participation helps you deepen your understanding and contributes to a collaborative and vibrant learning environment.
3. **Develop a Habit of Reflection:** After each class, reflect on what you've learned. Identify key takeaways, clarify lingering questions, and think about how the material relates to broader economic and societal issues. These reflections can guide your work on problem sets, the group project, and class discussions.
4. **Collaborate Effectively:** Public Economics is rich with opportunities for group work and peer discussions. Engage with your classmates to share perspectives, refine ideas, and tackle complex problems. Practice active listening and constructive dialogue to maximize what you and others gain from collaboration.
5. **Approach the Group Project Strategically:** The group project is a key opportunity to apply course concepts to a real-world context. Start early, set clear goals with your group, and approach the project with curiosity and purpose. Use this as a chance to hone your analytical and communication skills while learning from your peers.
6. **Seek Support and Resources:** If you find a topic particularly challenging or want to explore it further, don't hesitate to reach out to me or your peers. Make use of Furman's resources, such as the Writing and Media Lab, library services, or academic coaching, to strengthen your understanding and performance in this course.
7. **Embrace a Growth Mindset:** Public Economics is both theoretical and applied, and it can feel challenging at times. Be patient with yourself as you encounter new material, view mistakes as opportunities to learn, and celebrate your progress along the way. Developing these skills will not only help you succeed in this course but also in your future academic, professional, and civic endeavors.

**COURSE SCHEDULE (Any important changes will be announced in class)**

	<b>New Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Assignments</b>
Week 1	1/14 1/16	Introduction to Public Economics	
Week 2	1/21 1/23	Budgets, Deficits and Debt	
Week 3	1/28 1/30	Theories of Social Welfare	<b>Project: Country Proposal</b>
Week 4	2/4 2/6	Social Insurance: Social Security and Disability	<b>Problem Set #1 Due</b>
Week 5	2/11 2/13	Social Insurance: Unemployment Insurance, SNAP, UBI	<b>Project: Intial Research Reflection</b>
Week 6	2/18 2/20	<b>Project: Cross-Country Discussion</b> Health Insurance: Medicare, Medicaid, Affordable Care Act	<b>Project: Cross-country synthesis</b>
Week 7	2/25 2/27	Health Insurance: Medicare, Medicaid, Affordable Care Act <b>Project: Global Roundtable</b>	<b>Problem Set #2 Due</b>
Week 8	3/4 3/6	No class - Spring Break	
Week 9	3/11 3/13	Education <b>Exam #1</b>	
Week 10	3/18 3/20	Introduction to Taxation	
Week 11	3/25 3/27	Taxes on Labor	
Week 12	4/1 4/3	Taxes on Capital	
Week 13	4/8 4/10	Fiscal Federalism <i>No class - Furman Engaged switch</i>	<b>Problem Set #3 Due</b>
Week 14	4/15 4/17	Externalities and Public Goods	<b>Project: Final individual report</b>
Week 15	4/22 4/24	Political Economy <b>Project: Group presentations</b>	
Week 16	4/29	Debrief Group presentations and Review for Exam 2	<b>Problem Set #4 Due</b>
Final	5/5	<b>Exam 2 - Final Exam period 8:30-11:00am</b>	