

Economics 150: The Economics of Bad Behavior

Fall 2021

MW 2-3:20 pm; Chancellors 121

Instructor Information

Professor Jennifer Mellor

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Office hours: M/W 3:30-4:30 (in-person or Zoom) and by appointment

Office location: Chancellors 433

Zoom meeting room: <https://cwm.zoom.us/my/jenmellor>

Course Description

Economics is a social science that examines how individuals make decisions and interact in society. This seminar, intended for students with no background in economics, uses economic models and principles to study so-called “bad behaviors” -- decisions people make with harmful consequences for themselves and/or others around them. We will study the economics of various topics, including smoking, drinking and drug use, obesity, risky sex, and crime, among others. These applications will illustrate how economics can be used a) to explain why individuals engage in certain behaviors, b) to evaluate the consequences of these behaviors for society, and c) to identify/evaluate potential solutions.

Course Objectives

- To learn and apply economic models/tools to explain individual choices and population trends in certain behaviors.
- To learn and apply economic considerations regarding government interference with private behaviors.
- To think critically about the consequences of government policies directed at bad behaviors.
- To explore the writing and research process in the discipline of economics.

COLL 150 Requirement

This course is designated as a COLL 150 seminar. The goal of COLL 150 is to initiate students into the culture of critical thinking, persuasive writing, and independent inquiry that is at the core of the W&M undergraduate program. COLL 150 seminars highlight student discussion. Students must receive a C- or better for the course to apply to their degree requirements.

The Writing Resources Center provides free services to help W&M students with communication skills. Trained consultants will give individual assistance with writing, presentation, and other communication assignments at any stage, from generating ideas to polishing a final product, and across disciplines. To make an appointment, visit the WRC webpage (www.wm.edu/wrc).

Course Assignments/Due Dates

- 15% In-class participation
- 20% Short writing assignments (5)
- 30% In-class exams (2)
- 5% Research paper inputs (topic proposal, skeleton, partial draft)
- 5% Presentation of preliminary research findings (week of December 6)
- 25% Final version of research paper (December 20 9 am). *There is no final exam in this course.*

Other Useful Dates: Add/drop period ends on September 10; Withdrawal period ends on November 1.

Course Policies

Attendance. Your presence at class meetings is essential for an effective seminar. Unexcused and/or excessive absences will affect your participation grade. If you do miss class, it's your responsibility to follow-up with me about absences. If you miss class for COVID-19 related reasons, I will work with you to make any necessary adjustments.

Participation. Your participation during class benefits you (and your grade) as well as everyone else's understanding of concepts and materials. Before coming to class, read the assigned materials, reflect on any assigned questions, and identify any points you would like to share with others.

Completing work on time. Assignments often set the stage for subsequent class discussion or other assignments in a sequence. As a result, turning in work late doesn't help you and it doesn't help the class. Additionally, it's not fair to others. Therefore, late work will generally not be accepted.

Grading scale. Letter grades for the course will be based on a standard 100-point scale where: [93-100] implies an A; [90-93] implies an A-; [88-90] implies a B+; [83-88] implies a B, and so on.

PolLEV. We will use PolLEV to facilitate discussion and check understanding of concepts. Please bring a smart phone, tablet, laptop, or other web-capable device to every class. If you use an Apple or Android device, please download the [free Poll Everywhere app](#) (not required, but it'll be convenient). See the information on registering for a Poll EV account and associating your account with my class on Blackboard, in the module covering 9/1/21.

Writing Resources Center: The Writing Resources Center, located on the first floor of Swem Library, is a free service provided to W&M students. Trained consultants offer individual assistance with writing, presentation, and other communication assignments across disciplines and at any stage, from generating ideas to polishing a final product. The WRC's goal is to help you become a better writer and communicator. To make an appointment, visit the WRC webpage (www.wm.edu/wrc).

COVID-19. The health and safety of our community remain top priorities at W&M. I encourage everyone to review [university guidelines](#) and resources to help mitigate COVID-19 on campus. Face coverings are currently required in all public spaces including classrooms. Please dress for class accordingly.

Mental Health: W&M recognizes that students juggle many different responsibilities and can face challenges that make learning difficult. There are many resources available at W&M to help students navigate physical/medical, emotional/psychological, material/accessibility concerns. Asking for help is a sign of courage and strength. If you or someone you know is experiencing psychological/emotional stress, please consider reaching out to the [W&M Counseling Center](#). For physical/medical concerns please consider reaching out to the [W&M Health Center](#). If you or someone you know is in need of additional supports or resources, please contact the Dean of Students by submitting [a care report](#). As your professor, I also ask you to reach out to me if you are facing challenges inside or outside the classroom; I will guide you to appropriate resources on campus.

Disabilities. W&M accommodates students with disabilities in accordance with federal laws and university policy. Any student who feels they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a learning, psychiatric, physical, or chronic health diagnosis should contact Student Accessibility Services

staff at 757-221-2512 or at sas@wm.edu to determine if accommodations are warranted and to obtain an official letter of accommodation. For more information, please visit www.wm.edu/sas.

Honor Code. Academic integrity is at the heart of W&M, and we all are responsible for upholding the ideals of honor and integrity. The Student Handbook (www.wm.edu/studenthandbook) includes your responsibilities as a student and the full Code. I expect your full participation and observance of the Honor Code. In this class, completing graded quizzes and graded writing assignments with the aid of other students is considered a violation of the Honor Code. Plagiarism on a writing assignment (presenting someone else's words or ideas as your own) is also a violation of the Honor Code. When you write a document and distribute it, you imply that its words and ideas are your own, except where explicitly noted in the text (as with citations to others' work). Please do not plagiarize. Please avoid the temptation and mistake of plagiarizing by starting your writing assignments early. We will have more to say about avoiding plagiarism later in the semester.

Texts/Readings

A Pocket Style Manual (8th edition), by Diana Hacker and Nancy Sommers. ISBN-13: 978-8925598406; ISBN-10: 1319057403.

Principles of Microeconomics, v. 2.0, a free on-line text attributed to Libby Rittenberg and Tim Tregarthen (I will refer to this as the "Saylor" text, after the publisher). The whole text is available at: https://saylordotorg.github.io/text_principles-of-microeconomics-v2.0/index.html. Links to the specific chapters you will need to read are located in each week's Blackboard module.

A variety of other required readings are also available on Blackboard.

Blackboard

The Blackboard website is the central repository for the course. I will use it to communicate to the class as a group, to hold office hours and other synchronous meetings, to post announcements, and grade quizzes, journals, and papers. You will use it to submit work and complete other non-graded work (e.g., readings, optional quizzes). Make sure that you regularly check both it and the email account associated with Blackboard.

The Blackboard website for this course is organized using the modules listed on the left. Each module spans 1-2 weeks of the semester, and the module page lists what steps to complete and when, and provides links and/or attachments for reading assignments during the module period. Assignments due during the module period will be clearly noted. Not all modules can be viewed at this time.

Contacting Me

My W&M email address (jimmell@wm.edu) is the best way to get in touch with me. In your subject line, please mention Econ 150 since I don't know all students by name at first. For emails sent on weekdays, you can usually expect a response within 24 hours; it may take me a bit longer to reply if your email comes in on the weekend, so plan ahead. I will host office hours in my Chancellors Hall office at the times on page 1; I'll also open up a Zoom session at those same times if you prefer to meet online. No appointment is needed for those times.. Students who would like to meet outside of those hours can email me to setup an appointment.

Summary Schedule

Detailed Schedule Available on Blackboard

<i>Module</i>	<i>Module Dates</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Class meetings</i>
	9/1-9/5	Course Introduction	9/1
1	9/6-9/12	What is Economics?	9/6, 9/8
2	9/13-9/19	Economics and Individual Choice	9/13, 9/15 (WA)
3	9/20-9/26	Economic Models and Societal Behavior	9/20, 9/22 (WA)
4	9/27-10/4	Public Policy and Behavior Change	9/27, 9/29 (WA), 10/4 (exam)
5	10/5-10/24	Economic Models of Addictive Goods 10/18: No class due to Fall Break	10/6, 10/11, 10/13 (WA), 10/20 (Swem) topic proposal due 10/24
6	10/25-10/31	Should Government Interfere w/ Bad Behavior? Pt. 1	10/25, 10/27
7	11/1-11/14	Should Government Interfere w/ Bad Behavior? Pt. 2	11/1, 11/3 (WA), 11/8, 11/10 (exam)
8	11/15-11/29	Issues Regarding Public Policy Design and Evaluation 11/24: No class due to Thanksgiving Break	11/15 (skeleton), 11/17, 11/22, 11/29 (partial draft)
9	11/30- 12/10	Writing and Research Workshops	12/1, 12/6, 12/8 (presentation)
	12/20	Final Research Paper due at 9 am	