

Economics 150: The Economics of Bad Behavior
Fall 2020
TR 11-12:20 pm; Tyler 123

Instructor Information

Professor Jennifer Mellor

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Office hours: Zoom: Tues 11-noon/Thurs 12:30-1:30, and by appointment

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. Applications will illustrate how economics can be used to explain why individuals engage in certain bad behaviors, to evaluate the consequences of these behaviors for society, and to identify/evaluate potential solutions.

Course Objectives

- To learn and apply economic models/tools to explain individual behavior and population trends in these behaviors.
- To learn and apply economic arguments for/against 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

10%	In-class participation
20%	Quizzes (your lowest grade will be dropped)
20%	Journal posts
10%	Short papers (due dates: September 3, September 17)
10%	Group projects (due dates: August 27, October 22, November 5)
5%	Presentation of preliminary research findings (week of November 9)
25%	Final version of research paper (includes checklist items) November 24 2 pm.

Other Useful Dates: Add/drop period ends on August 28; Withdrawal period ends on October 12.

Course Policies

Course mode. This course delivery attribute is MIX, meaning that in-person components on campus will be used along with digital learning experiences facilitated through approved remote/distance methods (such as Blackboard, Zoom, and other digital tools/resources). Some course content will be synchronous; some will be asynchronous. Synchronous meetings will *typically* occur on Thursdays from 11-12:20, but some will occur on Tuesdays at that time. Optional office hours will also occur on Tuesdays at 11 am. Therefore, do not schedule other activities during the T/R 11-12:20 block.

Staying Healthy Together. During in-person meetings, it is essential that you follow the mask-wearing and social-distancing guidelines that W&M has established.

Attendance. Your presence in synchronous class meetings is essential. Except for reasonable cause, students are expected to be present at all class meetings. Irregular attendance will affect your in-class participation grade. If you do miss class, it is your responsibility to follow-up with me about absences. If you miss class because you become sick with COVID-19 or due to COVID-19 related matters (e.g., quarantining because a roommate is sick), I will work with you to make the necessary adjustments.

Participation. Your participation in synchronous class meetings benefits everyone. Before coming to class, read the assigned materials and reflect on any assigned questions; also identify points you would like to share with other students in community.

Extra Classes. Due to the shortened semester, three extra meetings will be held. These will all be small group meetings and they have been designed to coincide with small group projects and the research paper. They will take place the one-week period prior to 8/27, 10/15, and 10/22. More details to follow.

Completing work on time. Course material in one week lays the foundation for the following week's focus. Assignments (quizzes, journals, short papers, group assignments, research paper checklist items) are intended to set the stage for subsequent class discussion or assignments. 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 "Information for 1st Day of Class" section.

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 organized using 12 modules, one for each of the 12 full-length weeks of the semester. In each weekly module, you will find information on what steps to complete and in what order, and by what date. All readings will be posted here as well. Each week "starts" at 12:01 AM on Monday morning and ends at 11:59 PM of the following Sunday. All due dates for the given week will be during that window. Not all modules can be viewed at this time. I will make new modules available no later than the Sunday afternoon prior to the start of that week.

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). Make sure that you regularly check both it and the email account associated with Blackboard.

Contacting Me

My W&M email address is the best way to get in touch with me. My address is jmmell@wm.edu. In your subject line, please mention Econ 150 since I don't know all students by name at first. I will generally respond within 24 hours to emails received during the week; 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 by Zoom on most Tuesdays from 11-noon and most Thursdays from 12:30-1:30. No appointment is needed. Office hours are accessible through Blackboard and are first-come, first-served. Students who would like to meet with me at times other than these can email me to setup an appointment. I have a physical office (Tyler 433), but I do not intend to use it much this semester.

Summary Schedule

Detailed Schedule Available on Blackboard

<i>Week</i>	<i>Dates</i>	<i>Theme</i>
0	8/19-8/23	Course Introduction
1	8/24-8/30	What is Economics?
2	8/31-9/6	Economics and Individual Choice
3	9/7-9/13	Economic Models and Societal Behavior
4	9/14-9/20	Public Policy and Behavior Change
5	9/21-9/27	Economic Models of Addictive Goods
6	9/28-10/4	Self-Control Problems
7	10/5-10/11	Should Government Intervene to Stop Bad Behaviors? Part 1
8	10/12-10/18	Should Government Intervene to Stop Bad Behaviors? Part 2
9	10/19-10/25	Evaluating the Effects of Public Policy
10	10/26-11/1	Can the Government Nudge Us Toward Better Behaviors?
11	11/2-11/8	Writing Workshops
12	11/9-11/16	Presentations of Preliminary Research Findings
Finals	11/24	Research Paper due at 2 pm
