

Syllabus for ECON 100
Understanding Global Poverty
William & Mary
Spring 2025

Instructor: Ranjan Shrestha
Office: Chancellors Hall 461
Class Meeting: MW, 2:00-3:20pm, Boswell 201 (Sec 01)
MW, 3:30-4:50pm, Boswell 201 (Sec 02)
Office Hours: MW, 5:00-6:00pm; or by appointment
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Course Description

A significant fraction of the world's population lives in poverty. Over 600 million people, that is around 8 percent of the global population, live on less than \$2.15 per day, the criterion used by the World Bank to define extreme poverty. If we use a slightly higher criterion of less than \$3.65 per day, almost a quarter of the global population would be classified as poor. The poor lead lives characterized by undernutrition, illiteracy, unemployment, poor health, insecurity, and exclusion from many markets. In this course, we will explore different aspects of global poverty to understand its prevalence, its causes, and the various ways that have been proposed to fight it. First, we will explore how poverty is defined and measured. Second, we will discuss the causes of poverty and the factors that perpetuate it within a society. Finally, we will discuss policies to improve the lives of the poor, and whether these policies have been effective in reducing the incidence of poverty.

This is a COLL 100 course and has a strong non-written communication component. Students will work on a project that will involve searching for publicly available data for their assigned country to determine how it has performed economically over the last few decades. They will also conduct a literature search on anti-poverty programs/interventions in the country/region. They will then present their findings to their peers during in-class presentations and a poster session over the course of the semester.

Objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- compute various social indicators in order to demonstrate their understanding of the value as well as the limitations of commonly used measures of economic well-being.
- locate and process country-specific data in order to demonstrate how the economic performance and well-being in that country has changed over time.
- explain various economic terminology and concepts to effectively engage in discussions about poverty reduction policies/interventions.

Text and Course Materials

The following book is required for this course.

- *Poor Economics* by Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo

Students will also be directed to journal articles that are accessible to William & Mary affiliates or are available at the library. The following books are recommended if you want to further your understanding of poverty, inequality, and development economics in general:

- *The Bottom Billion* by Paul Collier
- *The Elusive Quest for Growth: Economists' Adventures and Misadventures in the Tropics* by William Easterly
- *Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism* by Anne Case and Angus Deaton

I will post links to the readings related to topics covered in class on Blackboard.

Course Projects

The course provides you an opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of the institutional background of a low- or middle-income country, gauge its economic progress over the last few decades, and evaluate the country's policies to tackle poverty. You will be placed in a group (of around 3-4 students) that will be assigned a particular country. You will work with your group to make a presentation that provides a broad overview of the country, the wellbeing of its people, and its economic progress in the last few decades. You will also work individually to conduct a literature search on a particular policy-relevant topic and present a research poster.

The course will consist of two major components discussed below:

First, you will work with your group to provide a general overview of the country, providing information on demographics, political system, colonial history, economic development, etc. Each member of your group will work with data to create charts and graphs to provide an overview of the country's socioeconomic progress in the last 3-4 decades. This part will also include a comparative analysis with equivalent data from another country of your choosing (for instance, it could be a neighboring country or a developed countries such as the United States, Japan, or a western European country).

Second, each student will conduct a literature search on papers using a randomized controlled trial (RCT) on a policy-relevant issue in their assigned country or another country in the same region. They will then focus on one specific paper, summarize it, create a research poster, and present it to the class during a poster session. You have some flexibility in choosing the papers as long as the RCT has a poverty-related component to it and the paper is published in a reputed economics journal. The papers that you choose can be related to a transfer program (such as a cash transfer program, food subsidy program), health subsidy or health insurance program, workfare program, educational subsidy program, among others.

Project Due Dates

Mon, Feb 3: Group formation

Part 1: Country overview and trends

Country trends group presentations are scheduled for the Wednesdays of weeks 5, 6, and 7. Group presentation files are due by 11:59pm the day before each group's presentation.

Part 2: Policy evaluation

Fri, Mar 7: Literature search due by 5:00pm: list five journal articles (at least three involving RCTs) conducted in your assigned country (or a neighboring one). I will pick one of the five for you to focus on. If I feel that your literature search is inadequate, I will pick a separate article for you.

Fri, Apr 4: Summary of assigned article due by 11:59pm

Fri, Apr 18: Poster on assigned article due by 11:59pm

Week of Apr 21: Poster presentations

Week of Apr 28: Poster presentations

Note: The dates are set provisionally and may be adjusted during the semester. If the dates have to be changed, I will announce the revised dates in class.

Quizzes and Final Exam

The course includes three quizzes and a final exam. The three quizzes will contribute a total of 10% towards your overall score. The final exam will be two-hour long and will contribute 20% towards your overall score. Please see the course schedule at the end of the syllabus for the date and time for your section. The exam will consist of multiple-choice questions, short essay/graphical analysis questions, and mathematical problems. It will be held in our regular classroom. I will provide study guides over the course of the semester to help you prepare for the quizzes and the final exam.

Student Assessment and Grading

Numeric scores on the assessments will be converted to a weighted average overall course score using the following weights:

Part 1: Country overview and trends: total 20%

Part 2: Policy evaluation: total 40%

- Literature search (10%)
- Summary of research article (10%)
- Poster presentation (20%)

Quizzes: 10%

Final Exam: 20%

Feedback to peers: 5%

Participation and attendance: 5%

At the end of the semester, your weighted average course score will be calculated by applying the weights, listed above, to your scores on the assessments. Your weighted average course score will then be converted to a letter grade using the following scale: 93% and higher = A, 90%-92.9% = A-, 87%-89.9% = B+, 83%-86.9% = B, 80%-82.9% = B-, 77%-79.9% = C+, 73%-76.9% = C, 70%-72.9% = C-, 67%-69.9% = D+, 63%-66.9% = D, 60%-62.9% = D-, and 59.9% and below = F.

The last date to add/drop classes on Banner is **Friday, Jan 31**. The last day to withdraw from the course is **Monday, Mar 24**.

Late submission policy

Please plan to submit your work well before the deadline. If you submit an assignment after the deadline has passed, there will be no penalty if both of the following conditions are met:

- 1) You present credible, documented evidence that an unforeseeable, extenuating circumstance beyond your control, e.g., illness, prevented you from submitting the assignment on time.
- 2) You submit the assignment as soon as it is feasible to do so.

If either of the two conditions is not met, I will deduct five percent of the score for each day (or fraction of a day) that the assignment is submitted late. For example, if an assignment is due at 5:00pm on Friday, and you submit it at 5:01pm on Friday, then I will deduct five percent of the score.

Procedures for Accommodating Disabilities

William & Mary 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.

Support for Mental and Physical Well-Being

William & Mary recognizes that students juggle different responsibilities and can face challenges that make learning difficult. There are many resources available at W&M to help students navigate emotional/psychological, physical/medical, material/accessibility concerns, including:

- The W&M Counseling Center at (757) 221-3620. Services are free and confidential.
- The W&M Health Center at (757) 221-4386.



- For a list of other [resources](#) available to students, see:

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. To make an appointment, visit the WRC webpage www.wm.edu/wrc.

Honor Code

You are expected to follow the William & Mary Honor Code. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. Please refer to the Student Handbook and the [William & Mary Honor Council website](#) for information regarding the Honor System.

The presentations along with the summaries you produce for this course should be your own constructions. The use or incorporation of any AI-generated content (from ChatGPT, Dall-e, etc.) in assignments is not allowed. Suspected cases of plagiarism of outside sources on any of the class projects will be deemed a violation of the College's Honor Code. Any submitted work can be reviewed, as needed, for plagiarism, lack of citation, and improper use of AI-generated content.

Course Schedule[†]

Week 1:	Introduction	
Week 2:	National income: GDP, GNP, income per person	
Week 3:	Economic growth: from Malthus to Solow	Quiz 1 (Wednesday, Feb 5)
Week 4:	Randomized controlled trials (RCTs)	
	<i>Library visit (Wednesday, Feb 12)</i>	
Week 5:	Example of an RCT	
	<i>Country trends group presentations</i>	
Week 6:	Health/Nutrition	
	<i>Country trends group presentations</i>	
Week 7:	Education	
	<i>Country trends group presentations</i>	Quiz 2 (Wednesday, March 5)
Week 8:	Spring break	
Week 9:	Empirical research methods	
Week 10:	<i>STLI workshop (Monday, March 24)</i>	
	Poverty: poverty line, headcount ratio, depth of poverty, absolute vs. relative	
Week 11:	Inequality: Gini coefficient, absolute vs. relative, Kuznets curve	
Week 12:	Demographic transition: explaining global population growth from 600 million in 1700 to 8 billion now	Quiz 3 (Wednesday, April 9)
Week 13:	Gender inequality	
Week 14:	<i>Poster presentations</i>	
Week 15:	<i>Poster presentations</i>	
Final exam:	Section 01: Tuesday, May 13	(2:00 – 4:00pm)
	Section 02: Friday, May 9	(9:00 – 11:00am)

Note: Readings for each week will be posted on Blackboard.

[†] I will adjust speed and coverage of materials as we proceed, so deviations from the schedule are possible. The main purpose of the course schedule is to provide an outline of what we intend to cover.

SYLLABUS VERSION 1.0.

The syllabus is a dynamic document that may be revised over the course of the semester. This version of the syllabus is active starting on January 22, 2024.