EAS 677.022: Economics and Environmental Justice

Fall 2023 A Course Syllabus
(Version: October 10th, 2023)

Logistics

Class meeting time: Mondays 11:00am-1:00pm from 8/28 through 10/16

Class meeting location: Dana 2024

Instructor: Samuel Stolper (sstolper@umich.edu)

Website: https://umich.instructure.com/courses/627753

Office Hours: Mondays 2:00pm-4:00pm or by appointment, in Dana 3006

Credit-hours: 1; prerequisites: none

About this course

What is the relationship between economics and environmental, energy, and climate justice? In what ways can economic analysis and perspective contribute to the pursuit of justice? This half-semester course is meant to be a group exploration of these questions. Economics, through its focus on human decision-making and welfare, provides a potentially valuable lens through which to examine and judge outcomes on the grounds of justice. Economists and economic logic are very often a part of important policymaking – including regulation of the natural environment – that has great consequences for justice. At the same time, the field of economics is often seen as too conservative, and it is not known for centering justice in its practice. We will learn about and discuss the pitfalls and promise of economics as an instrument for achieving environmental justice.

My teaching goals in this course are four-fold:

1. Facilitate reflection and mutual learning about what constitutes justice
2. Convey fundamentals of positive and normative economic analysis
3. Collectively develop insights about real-world issues in environmental justice
4. Foster inclusive, open-minded engagement on important, sensitive subjects

Class meetings will feature lecture as well as small- and large-group discussion. Though I will devote time to "instructing" you on economics concepts and research via lecture, we each come to the classroom with different expertise, experience, and perspective, and I will be learning from you all as well. Outside the classroom, you will be responsible for course readings, short weekly written reflections, and two additional assignments – a writing prompt, and a quantitative exercise.

Course activities

Readings

You will be asked to complete multiple readings ahead of each class, chosen to convey important concepts, illustrate relevant applications, and provide multiple perspectives. The readings are a key source of new content in the course and discussion in class, so it is important that you complete them. I will post additional (fully optional) readings of interest on Canvas, and I welcome *your* suggestions on relevant readings as well.

Reflections

A one-page, double-spaced reflection on the week's assigned readings is due every week by the start of class. The point of this exercise is to prompt you to prepare some thoughts that you'd be willing to share in the classroom. There is no "right answer" (nor a right writing style) in these reflections; you need only engage with some part of the assigned material (or its implications in other settings) to get full credit. One page of double-spaced writing is not a lot of space; one or two substantive thoughts is sufficient.

In the classroom

I will plan to devote a portion of each class meeting to lecture, in order to (a) provide context for the discussion ahead and (b) vary learning modes over the course of a two-hour class. The remainder of class time will largely be devoted to breakout group discussion and collective debrief, and full-class discussion (I may also bring a guest speaker to class at some point). I expect each student to participate semi-regularly in all-class discussion and contribute actively to break-out group activities. The course will be more fun and more valuable if we all share our perspectives, our questions, our ideas. If participation intimidates you, I encourage you to talk to me about it.

Relatedly, this course will proceed with a "no device use in class" policy as a general rule. I believe that on net, devices would make for a worse classroom experience in this course. Again, please communicate with me if this is going to be a significant hardship for you.

Substantive assignments

There will be two further assignments to complete, beyond weekly readings and reflections. The first of these will be a writing exercise focsued on the cause(s) of and possible solution(s) to some type of disproportionate pollution exposure. The second will be a quantitative exercise in which you manipulate and answer questions about data pertaining to water bills and shutoffs in Detroit.

Canvas discussion

I may, at times, start discussion threads on the Canvas website. These will provide an alternative venue for the sharing of questions, perspectives, and resources relevant to the course. I encourage you to add to and start new threads as you desire – especially if this venue offers you a more comfortable way to make your voice heard.

Course policies

Lecture recording: Our classroom is set to record audio and video from our class meetings, and these will be posted to the course website for viewing (if you do not wish to be recorded, please email me to discuss alternative arrangements). However, the microphone(s) will not capture your voices very well, and the course will favor discussion, so the recordings will be a poor excuse for class attendance.

Grading: As this course is short, I think the fairest thing is to assign course grades primarily based on your effort rather than mastery of new material. Your performance on the two substantive assignments will also contribute to your final grade. The weight of each graded course acitivity is as follows:

- In-class participation: 20%

- Reflections: 40%; I will drop the lowest reflection score when calculating your grade.

- Assignment #1: 20%

- Assignment #2: 20%

Reflections are due Mondays at 8am (so that I have the opportunity to review them before that day's class). The two other assignment submissions will be due at the beginning of class on the specified date. Unexcused late submissions will be penalized 5 percentage points per day. I strongly encourage you to tell me ahead of time if you are not going to be able to meet a deadline. I will be flexible!

Final grades will be given according to the following rubric: A: 94-100; A-: 90-93; B+: 85-89; B: 80-84; B-: 75-79; C: 60-75; I may adjust final grades upwards, if assignments turn out to have been harder than expected. I will not adjust final grades downwards. For other graduate-school grading policies in the current academic year, please see https://rackham.umich.edu/academic-policies/section3/#3.

Grade grievances: You must submit requests for a re-grade within one week of receiving the original grade. You must also attach the original graded item and provide a clear written explanation of what you would like to be re-evaluated and why. Your adjusted grade may be higher or lower than the original.

Correspondence: I will try to get back to your emails within 24 hours. Please note EAS 677 in your subject line. If you plan on asking multiple involved questions, please come to student drop-in hours or schedule a meeting.

Student drop-in hours: I will plan to hold these "office" hours Monday afternoons from 2-4pm in person, in my office. I invite you to use these hours to talk with me about anything related to the course, current events, careers, or well-being. If you'd like to meet but your schedule does not allow you to attend regular drop-in hours, email me and we can find a time either in person or via zoom.

Work ethic: Do not plagiarize. If you paraphrase or copy work that is not your own, you must reference that work. The risk of plagiarizing is not worth the reward. More generally, cheating and academic dishonesty in any form will not be tolerated. Any student found to

have cheated or behaved unethically or dishonestly will be given a zero on the assignment involved and referred to the appropriate disciplinary committees at U of M.

Generative AI: Effective use of generative artifical intelligence tools, such as the large language model (LLM) ChatGPT, seems likely to become a valuable and/or important skill in many professions. In this course, you are welcome to use these tools to aid in your completion of the substantive assignments, with the following expectations:

- You are taking full responsibility for AI-generated materials as if you had produced them yourself: ideas must be attributed and facts must be true.

- Fully document your use. For instance, you could use UM's LLM (UM GPT), which generates a log of your interaction by default. You could then submit this alongside your main assignment submission.

- By submitting an assignment for evaluation:
  - You assert that it accurately reflects the facts and to do so you need to have verified the facts, including if they originate from generative AI resources
  - You assert that all your sources that go beyond common knowledge are suitably attributed. Common knowledge is what aknowledgeable reader can assess without requiring confirmation from a separate source
  - You assert that you have respected all specific requirements of your assigned work, in particular requirements for transparency and documentation of process, or have explained yourself where this was not possible
  - If any of these assertions are not true, whether by intent or negligence, you have undermined the academic integrity of your work. Under U-M and Rackham rules, which apply to SEAS, this may constitute academic misconduct.

Resources for learning and well-being

I am actively trying to create an economics course that reflects a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. To that end, I aspire to build a reading list that features diverse perspectives, create a classroom environment that promotes open and respectful dialogue, and shine a light on distributional considerations in climate change and climate policy. Please tell me if any element of your course experience does not match this stated intent. I will very much appreciate your thoughts.

Below are a few learning resources, available through the University, that may be helpful to you:

- The Sweetland Center for Writing offers one-on-one writing assistance, among many other services. It also offers mini-courses and casual conversation groups for international students or anyone wanting to improve their English.

- The English Language Institute provides a variety of resources for international students.

- The Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office coordinates accommodations for disability. Come talk to us if this applies to you, so that we can make those accommodations as soon as possible.

And here are some resources for well-being at UM:

- Campus Maize and Blueprint is the online hub for UM news and information related to COVID-19.

- The UM Office of Student Life provides resources for student well-being.

- The Rackham Graduate School offers a resource for Supporting Graduate Students During Stressful Times, prepared by the Mental Health Task Force.

- Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) provides confidential support options for any issue including stress, mood changes, and problems with eating and/or sleeping. CAPS now has a dedicated staff member for SEAS, Andrea Sieg (andsieg@umich.edu).

Course calendar

Date	Day	Topic	Assignment
8/28	1	Introduction	
9/4	–	NO CLASS – Labor Day	
9/11	2	Justice, race, and (environmental) economics	
9/18	3	Causes of disproportionate exposure	
9/25	4	Policy responses to EJ issues	
10/2	5	Water affordability	Assignment #1
10/9	6	Markets and environmental justice	
10/23	7	Markets and capitalism	Assignment #2

Detailed course schedule

Class #1 – August 28th. Introduction

No readings

NO MEETING (Labor Day) – September 4th.

Class #2 – September 11th. Justice, race, and (environmental) economics

Assigned readings

1. **Chapters 2-3** of Miller, David (2021). "Justice", in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University.
2. **Pp. 44-65** of Keohane, Nathaniel and Sheila Olmstead. "The Benefits and Costs of Environmental Protection", in Markets and the Environment. (2nd ed.). Island Press: Washington, 2016.
3. Valandra, Edward (2019). "Mni Wiconi: Water is [More Than] Life." In Standing with Standing Rock: Voices from the #NoDAPL Movement (eds. Estes, Nick and Jaskiran Dhillon). University of Minnesota Press, 2019. Pp. 71-89.

For further reading:

1. Pp. 74-76 of Freeman III, A. Myrick, Joseph A. Herriges, and Catherine L. Kling. "Aggregation and Social Welfare", in The Measurement of Environmental and Resource Values, (3rd ed.). Resources For the Future: Washington, D.C.: 2014.
2. Fleurbaey, Marc and Rossi Abi-Rafeh (2016). "The Use of Distirbutional Weights in Benefit-Cost Analysis: Insights from Welfare Economics." *Review of Environmental Economics and Policy* 10(2): 286-307.
3. Gamble, Joelle. "How Economic Assumptions Uphold Racist Systems." Dissent Magazine. June 9, 2020. <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/how-economic-assumptions-uphold-racist-systems>.
4. Ando, Amy W., Titus O. Awokuse, Nathan W. Chan, Jimena Gonzalez-Ramirez, Sumeet Gulati, Matthew G. Interis, Sarah Jacobson, Dale T. Manning, and Samuel Stolper (2023). "Environmental and Natural Resource Economics and Systemic Racism." Resources for the Future Working Paper 23-06. <https://www.rff.org/publications/working-papers/environmental-and-natural-resource-economics-and-systemic-racism/>.

Class #3 – September 18th. Causes of disproportionate exposure

Readings

1. Taylor, Dorceta E. "Toxic Exposure: Landmark Cases in the South and the Rise of Environmental Justice Activism", in Toxic Communities: Environmental Racism, Industrial Pollution, and Residential Mobility. New York University Press: New York, 2014. Pp. 69-97.

2. Banzhaf, Spencer, Lala Ma, and Christopher Timmins (2019). "Environmental Justice: The Economics of Race, Place, and Pollution." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 33(1): 185-208.

For further reading:

1. Christensen, Peter, Ignacio Sarmiento-Barbieri, and Christopher Timmins (2022). "Housing Discrimination and the Toxics Exposure Gap in the United States: Evidence from the Rental Market." *Review of Economics and Statistics* 104(4): 807-818.
2. Hausman, Catherine and Samuel Stolper (2021). "Inequality, information failures, and air pollution." *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management* 110: 102552.

Class #4 – September 25th. Policy responses to EJ issues

Readings

1. Fenston, Jacob. "The Consequences of Cleaning Up the Anacostia River." *National Public Radio*, May 7th, 2018. <https://www.npr.org/2018/05/05/608723599/the-consequences-of-cleaning-up-the-anacostia-river>.
2. The White House (2023). "Justice40." <https://www.whitehouse.gov/environmentaljustice/justice40/>.
3. Darity Jr., William and Dania Frank (2003). "The Economics of Reparations." *American Economic Review Papers and Proceedings* 93(2): 326-329.

For further reading:

1. The White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council (2021). "Final Recommendations: Justice40 Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool & Executive Order 12898 Revisions." <https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2021-05/documents/whiteh2.pdf>.

Class #5 – October 2nd. Water affordability

Readings

1. Swain, Marian, Emmett McKinney, and Lawrence Susskind (2020). "Water Shutoffs in Older American Cities: Causes, Extent, and Remedies." *Journal of Planning Education and Research*: 1-8.
2. Rahman, Nushrat. "After 3-year moratorium, Detroit set to resume water shutoffs for high-debt customers." *Detroit Free Press*. August 9, 2023. <https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/detroit/2023/08/09/detroit-water-shutoffs-payments/70550090007/>.

Assignments

1. Assignment #1 (writing) due

Class #6 – October 9th. Markets and environmental justice

Readings

1. Hausman, Daniel, Michael McPherson, and Debra Satz. Chapter 4: "The Ethical Limits of Markets", in Economic Analysis, Moral Philosophy, and Public Policy (third edition). Cambridge University Press: New York, 2017. Pp. 92-104.
2. Resources Radio. "Does Cap and Trade Exacerbate Environmental Injustice in California?, with Danae Hernández-Cortés." January 10, 2023. <https://www.resources.org/resources-radio/does-cap-and-trade-exacerbate-environmental-injustice-in-california-with-danae-hernandez-cortes>.
3. Climate Justice Alliance and Indigenous Environmental Network (2017). "Carbon Pricing: A Critical Perspective for Community Resistance." Volume 1.

Class #7 – October 23th. Markets and capitalism

Readings

1. (Optional) Lowy, Michael (2005). "What is ecosocialism?" *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 16(2): 15-24.

Assignments

1. Assignment #2 (quantitative) due