

Please note that this syllabus should be regarded as only a general guide to the course. The instructor may have changed specific course content and requirements subsequent to posting this syllabus. Last Modified: 15:57:36 08/26/2008

Boston College
Department of Economics

EC331.01: Theories of Distributive Justice

Fall 2008

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Lectures M 3:00-5:50, with the following exceptions.

1. No lecture on Sept 29.
2. Extra lecture on Sept 24, 3:00–5:50.

Website All problem sets, solutions, lecture notes, old exams, sites of relevant articles etc. will be loaded to the course site at WebCT. Please familiarize yourself with it and make sure to check it at least twice a week (better check it daily).

Office Hours TBA.

Exams There will be two exams.

1. Midterm: Oct 20, class time.
2. Final: TBA.

You have to attend both exams. If you know in advance that you will not be able to take an exam, come and see me as early as possible. If you do not take an exam and you do not have a just reason for it, your grade for that exam will be zero. If you take the exam, its grade, whatever it is, will not be waived.

Homework There will be 10 problem sets. You have to solve and submit all of them. You'll get 1 point for each submitted set, provided you answered at least half of it. You have to submit each problem set one week after the day it was circulated.

All problem sets must be submitted electronically (exact email address for submission TBA). You may choose whatever software you wish, but I strongly recommend L^AT_EX (or any other version of T_EX. I'm using WinEdt and MiK_TE_X).

A Note On L^AT_EX T_EX based softwares are designed to enable writers of formal texts to concentrate on what they what to write and not on layout. Their major drawback is that (most of them) are not wysiwyg. So the equation

$$\frac{\partial u}{\partial x} = \ln x + e^{x^2-1} - \sin \alpha$$

will be written by you as

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\begin{eqnarray*}
\frac{\partial u}{\partial x} = \ln x + e^{x^2-1} -
\sin \alpha
\end{eqnarray*}
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It takes some time to get used to it (a week at most), but once you get used to it, you won't understand how you ever used anything else.

There are online tutorials and there are printed books that make using L^AT_EX a very friendly experience.

Lecture Notes Every week, I will distribute (electronically) a short summary of the previous week's lecture. *These notes are not supposed to substitute for the lectures.* Rather, the idea is that you'll have a handy summary of what we did. Also, I will provide you with solutions to the problem sets. Their aim is to help those of you who tried to solve a problem and want to check their solution (or to find out where they've gone wrong). Please let me know if you find any mistakes in the notes or the solutions.

Some Other Points

1. I very strongly encourage you to participate and ask questions.
2. I encourage you *not* to use computers in class. They are disruptive, and not very helpful as it is very hard to type math quickly.

3. The best way to communicate with me (except of course for during the lectures or office hours) is by email. I tend to answer emails until 1 or even 2am. Emails sent on Friday afternoon will not be answered till Saturday night. I'll be off-line from September 29 in the afternoon to October 1 in the evening, and similarly October 8–9, 13–15, and 20–22. When you send me an email, make sure that the subject is “331.”

Course Outline Most economic models deal with markets and the ways they function. In this course we will discuss situations where markets cannot be used, either because they fail or because we don't want to use them. Instead, we will discuss alternative methods of allocations. We will start with Arrow's impossibility theorem, showing that under some assumptions there is no social mechanism that can aggregate individual preferences into social preferences. We will discuss some alternatives, and will focus attention on utilitarianism and later on social welfare functions. A main topic of discussion will be the usefulness of lotteries in conflict resolutions. We will talk about justice from ex-ante and ex-post perspectives, and will also talk about how does a society decide who belongs to society.

The discussion will be somewhat formal. We will try to see how formal ideas are translated into possible evaluations of social situations, and what are the limitations of such evaluations.

Students are assumed to be familiar with the concept of constrained maximization, utility, and preferences.