

ECON 3190: Introduction to Health Economics

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Section	ECON 3190-090 (online)

Course Overview and Objectives

As a society, we spend a large share of our resources on healthcare, including medical care, mental health, fitness, and nutrition. In your day-to-day life, you face decisions about your health behaviors and your medical and mental health care. In your professional life, you will face job-related decisions that involve health and sickness insurance benefits. And as a voter, you are presented with alternative visions for the future of healthcare services and insurance in your state and country.

This course introduces the application of economics to understanding the major aspects of human health and healthcare in our society. While the primary emphasis is on the United States healthcare system, the course also introduces and compares healthcare systems in other countries. The main objectives are:

1. To introduce the economic theory of human health and healthcare.
2. To explore the workings of healthcare markets and the role of government in the provision of healthcare.
3. To analyze the healthcare system in the United States and in other parts of the world.
4. To explore the main socio-economic disparities in health outcomes and healthcare access.
5. To identify the main links between environmental factors, including climate change, and health outcomes.

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Understand different aspects of human health and its determinants.
2. Assess the factors that influence consumer demand for healthcare services and health insurance.
3. Describe the current institutional and regulatory structure of the US healthcare system.
4. Assess the basic benefits and limitations of the US healthcare system compared with the systems of other developed nations.

5. Identify how environmental problems such as climate change affect health and disparities in health outcomes.

Teaching and Learning Methods

This is an online class, and all requirements can be fulfilled online through Canvas. Multiple-choice quizzes, discussion activities, and short essays facilitate learning. Students are expected to be fully engaged in their own learning throughout the semester, and interaction among students and with the instructor is encouraged to create a dynamic learning experience.

Readings and Materials

- **Textbook chapters.** We refer to several chapters of Jan Abel Olsen, *Principles in Health Economics and Policy* (Oxford University Press). There is no need to buy the book: it is available through the University Library, and PDFs of the chapters we use are provided on Canvas.
- **Journal articles and reports.** PDFs are available on Canvas.
- **Newspaper articles.** We largely use the *New York Times*, which you can access for free through the University Library; set up an account so you can open the articles linked on Canvas. PDFs are provided for other articles. For articles assigned as readings, a study guide with questions is provided; in short essay assignments, you will use articles to analyze course concepts.
- **Videos.** Some videos are embedded in the lecture slides and others are stand-alone films or documentaries. Video content is covered on assignments and exams, so please take notes; a study guide with questions is provided.
- **Lecture notes and presentations** explain the readings and are posted on Canvas.

All readings are required unless marked “Recommended reading.”

Coursework and Grading

The course is organized into four modules plus a course introduction. Modules 1 and 4 each span two weeks; Modules 2 and 3 each span one week. Completion of all assignments, discussions, and the final exam in the manner specified is required. It is also essential to keep up with the readings and to follow emails and announcements sent through Canvas.

Assignment type	Share of grade
Graded discussions	30%
Short essays	30%
Quizzes	20%
Final exam (quiz and short essay)	20%
Total	100%

- **Graded discussions (30%).** One graded discussion per module (four in total). You will post a response to a question on the module’s content and reply to the posts of two other students.

Replies should move the conversation forward; “I agree” is not an acceptable reply. Detailed instructions and rubrics accompany each discussion. Ungraded discussion threads provide space for general questions and answers about each module.

- **Short essays (30%).** A short essay assignment every week, applying course concepts; for example, analyzing a newspaper article in light of a module’s material. Detailed instructions and rubrics accompany each essay.
- **Quizzes (20%).** Two open-book, multiple-choice quizzes: Quiz 1 covers Modules 1 and 2, and Quiz 2 covers Modules 3 and 4. Each has a 90-minute time limit and must be completed in one sitting. Ungraded practice quizzes are available for every module and can be taken as many times as you like.
- **Final exam (20%).** One open-book final exam covering all the material in the course.

Grading scale. A = 93–100%, A– = 90–92%, B+ = 87–89%, B = 83–86%, B– = 80–82%, C+ = 77–79%, C = 73–76%, C– = 70–72%, D = 60–69%, F = below 60%. No extra credit is available.

Late assignments and exams. All assignments are administered through Canvas, which does not accept submissions after the deadline. No late assignments, exams, or essays will be accepted. All due dates are posted in the course calendar; active, regular participation is crucial for success in this class.

Course Schedule

Week	Topics
1	Course introduction. Course activities and expectations; what is health economics and why study it? Module 1.1: Basic concepts in health and economics. What is health? Measurement of health outcomes; markets and perfect competition; opportunity cost; market analysis with demand and supply; the laissez-faire rule and its exceptions.
2	Module 1.2: Healthcare markets. What are healthcare markets, and why can’t they be perfectly competitive? Unique aspects of healthcare markets, including externalities; government interventions in healthcare markets.
3	Module 2: Demand and supply of healthcare. Demand for healthcare services (patient need, the price of medical care, income and demographic factors); supply of healthcare (resource allocation in the provider system, funding healthcare provision, expenditures and costs); why is care so expensive in the US?
4	Module 3: Health insurance. Demand for health insurance and its effect on the demand for medical care; effects of insurance on health outcomes; overview of the health insurance market; adverse selection and moral hazard; discussion of the RAND Health Insurance Experiment.
5–6	Module 4: Determinants of health. Genetic, physical, and socio-economic factors; health-related behaviors, including nutrition, fitness, and stress; socio-economic disparities in health outcomes and behaviors; the obesity epidemic; effects of climate change on human health and productivity.
7	<i>Final exam</i>

Technology Issues and Tech Help

- Contact the instructor immediately when you notice broken links or inaccessible files. Points lost because of inaccessible links or files cannot be made up if the problem was not reported before the due date.
- The instructor will fix broken links and inaccessible files as soon as possible and will post an announcement describing alternatives or new due dates if there is a significant delay.
- If a technical problem prevents you from submitting an assignment, immediately email the instructor (attaching a copy of the assignment where possible), contact the Canvas help desk, and then email the instructor an update on whether the problem was resolved. Emails about tech problems sent after the due date are not appropriate.
- Read all assignment instructions and submit work in the required file format. Work submitted in an improper format will not be considered on time.
- 24/7 help is available via the Help button in the far-left Canvas menu.

Course Material and Copyright

Course content is made available only for your personal, noncommercial, educational, and scholarly use. You may not distribute, post, or otherwise make the content available to others without any required permission from the copyright holder, and you may not circumvent restrictions on streaming or copying or remove copyright notices.

University Policies and Resources

Updated mandatory syllabus policies regarding the Americans with Disabilities Act, Safety at the U, Addressing Sexual Misconduct, and Academic Misconduct can be viewed at <https://cte.utah.edu/instructor-education/syllabus/institutional-policies.php>.

Academic misconduct. It is expected that students adhere to University of Utah policies regarding academic honesty, including but not limited to refraining from cheating, plagiarizing, misrepresenting one's work, and/or inappropriately collaborating. This includes the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools without citation, documentation, or authorization. Any student who engages in academic dishonesty may be subject to academic sanctions as per the University of Utah's Student Code: <https://regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-410.php>.

Drop and withdrawal. Students may drop a course within the first two weeks of a given semester without any penalties. Students may officially withdraw (W) from a class or all classes after the drop deadline through the midpoint of a course. A "W" grade is recorded on the transcript and appropriate tuition/fees are assessed. The grade "W" is not used in calculating the student's GPA. See the University's Academic Calendar for deadlines.

Campus resources.

- *Accommodations:* Center for Disability & Access, 162 Union Building, 801-581-5020, <https://disability.utah.edu>
- *Safety:* To report suspicious activity or request a courtesy escort, call campus police at 801-585-COPS (801-585-2677); <https://safeu.utah.edu>
- *Title IX:* Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, 383 South University Street, 801-

581-8365

- *Wellness*: Center for Student Wellness, 426 SSB, 801-581-7776, <https://wellness.utah.edu>
- *Basic needs*: Basic Needs Collective, <https://basicneeds.utah.edu>
- *Tutoring*: Learning Center, <https://learningcenter.utah.edu>; Writing Center, <https://writingcenter.utah.edu>
- *Other student support*: <https://studentsuccess.utah.edu/resources/student-support/>

Syllabus changes. This syllabus is meant to serve as an outline and guide for our course. I may modify it with reasonable notice to you, and I may also modify the course schedule to accommodate the needs of our class. Any changes will be posted to Canvas under Announcements.