

**Econ 309-602: Economic Problems and Public Policies  
Summer 2021**

**Dr. Christopher Coyne**  
Department of Economics, George Mason University  
[ccoayne3@gmu.edu](mailto:ccoayne3@gmu.edu)

**Teaching Assistants**  
Yahya Alshamy, [yalshamy@gmu.edu](mailto:yalshamy@gmu.edu)  
Nathan Goodman, [nathanpgoodman@gmail.com](mailto:nathanpgoodman@gmail.com)

**COURSE STRUCTURE:**

This is a hybrid course with a combination of online and in-person meetings and a synchronous-asynchronous structure. The weekly course structure is as follows:

Tuesday, 5 – 6:30pm (EST) – synchronous class meeting via Zoom.

Wednesday – asynchronous material posted on BlackBoard which you can access as your schedule permits.

Friday, 9 – 10:30am (EST) – synchronous meeting with in-person student meeting on the Arlington campus and remote students participating via Zoom. The first portion of the class will be led by Prof. Coyne. The second portion of class will involve break-out groups for discussion. The in-person break-out groups will be led by Yahya Alshamy and Nathan Goodman. The online discussion group will be led by Prof. Coyne.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

The goal of this course is to help you think like an economist when discussing public policy issues. It does this by applying key economic principles to a variety of contemporary public policy issues in an intuitive way. Economics is not just about money, the stock market, or business. It is a way of analyzing *all forms* of human decision-making—from profit-seeking to charity.

This class is deliberately provocative and encourages you to challenge many “conventional wisdoms.” Its approach will teach you to detect and correct fallacious economic reasoning and expose common economic myths. By the end of the course, your capacity to observe your surroundings through the lens of economics will improve. As a result, so will your appreciation for how the world works.

Upon completion of this course, you will be able to:

1. Articulate the principles of the economic way of thinking.
2. Apply this way of thinking to a variety of public policy issues.
3. Understand human behavior through the lens of economics.
4. Detect and correct fallacious economic reasoning and expose common economic myths.

5. Apply the economic way of thinking to public policy issues both verbally and in writing.

### **READINGS:**

There is one required book for this course:

Jason Brennan. 2020. [\*Why It's OK to Want to be Rich\*](#). Routledge.

All other readings are available online and free of charge. A hyperlink is included in the title of each reading listed below. I will also post slides on Blackboard.

### **GRADING AND ASSIGNMENTS:**

Your final grade is based on two exams and two written assignments.

#### Exams (80% total)

There are two exams for this course. The midterm exam (35%) will include all the material from the first meeting to the class before the exam. The final exam (45%) is cumulative. The exams, which will be administered through Blackboard, will consist of multiple-choice questions and short answer/essay questions. I will review and discuss the specifics of the exams the first day of class and again before each exam.

#### Written assignments (10% each, 20% total)

As a final assignment, each student is responsible for writing two entries as part of the “peaceableness project.” I will distribute an instruction sheet electronically with more specifics regarding content and formatting. I will review this the first day of class.

### **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:**

It is expected that students adhere to the George Mason University Honor Code as it relates to integrity regarding coursework and grades. The Honor Code reads as follows:

“To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University community and with the desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the student members of the University Community have set forth this: Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal and/or lie in matters related to academic work.”

More information about the Honor Code, including definitions of cheating, lying, and plagiarism, can be found at the Office of Academic Integrity website at <https://oai.gmu.edu>

## **SPECIAL NEEDS AND DISABILITY SERVICES:**

Students with disabilities who seek accommodations must be registered with the GMU's Disability Services (see <http://ds.gmu.edu/>). If you require accommodations, please see me in person as soon as possible so that we can discuss the specifics.

## **TENTATIVE SCHEDULE FOR SYNCHRONOUS MEETINGS:**

### **1. The Economic Approach (June 8, 11)**

Brennan, Chapter 1

Roberts, Russell. "[A Marvel of Cooperation: How Order Emerges without a Conscious Planner](#)"

### **2. Property, Trade, Coordination, and Institutions (June 11, 15)**

Brennan, Chapter 2

Alchian, Armen A. "[Property Rights](#)"

### **3. June 18, No class, University Closed**

### **4. The Market Process (June 22, 25)**

Brennan, Chapter 3

Roberts, Russell. "[The Reality of Markets](#)"

### **5. Midterm Exam (Tuesday, June 29)**

### **6. The Economics of Politics (July 2, 6)**

Brennan, Chapter 4

Roberts, Russell. "[Pigs Don't Fly: The Economic Way of Thinking About Politics](#)"

### **7. The Rule of Law, Regulation, and Development (July 9)**

Brennan, Chapter 5

Cochrane, John. 2015. "[The Rule of Law in the Regulatory State](#)"

## **8. The Economics of Terrorism (July 13 and 16)**

Brennan, Chapter 6

Hughes, Sam. 2016 “[How to Fight Terrorism](#)”

Mueller, John. 2004. “[A False Sense of Insecurity](#),” *Regulation*, Fall, p. 42-46.

## **9. Economic Nationalism, Development, and Foreign Intervention (July 20 and 23)**

Brennan, Chapter 7

Bastiat, Frederic. “[A Petition](#)”

Bastiat, Frederic. “[The Negative Railroad](#)”

## **10. Final Exam & Written Assignments Due (July 27)**

### **SCHEDULE FOR ASYNCHRONOUS MEETINGS:**

**June 9** – Walter Williams, “[The Value of Economics](#)”, Thomas Thwaites, “[How I Built a Toaster—from scratch](#)”, Hans Rosling, “[The Magic Washing Machine](#)”

**June 16** – Elise Boulding, “[Envisioning the Possible](#)”

**June 23** – Séverine Autesserre, “[Frontlines of Peace](#)”

**June 30** – Tyler Cowen, “[Elinor Ostrom: Women in Economics](#)” and Elinor Ostrom, “[Market Failure and Government Regulation](#)”

**July 7** – Jayme Lemke, “[Learning about Freedom from the History of Women’s Economic Rights](#)” and William Easterly, “[The Tyranny of Experts](#)”

**July 14** – Lynne Kiesling, “[Environmental Economics](#)”

**July 21** – Don Boudreaux and Ian Fletcher, “[Free Trade, Fair Trade or Both?](#)”