

University of Colorado - Boulder
Syllabus ECON4211 – Public Economics
Fall 2026

Instructor: Dr. Shawn Swanson

Email: shawn.swanson@colorado.edu

Office: ECON 14b

Zoom: <https://cuboulder.zoom.us/my/ask.shawn>

Office hours: Tuesday 3:00 – 4:45 PM; Thursday 3:30 – 4:45 PM

Section	Class Time	Room	Final
4211-002	05:00 PM - 06:15 PM	HLMS E260	TBD

Description

This course focuses on taxation and public expenditures. Topics include economic rationale for government action, economic theory of government behavior, and effects of government policies on allocation of resources and distribution of income.

Prerequisites

Requires prerequisite courses of ECON 3070 and ECON 3818 or one of the following approved statistics substitutes: APPM 4570, CHEN 3010, CSCI 3022, CVEN 3227, MATH 3510, MATH 4520, STAT 3100, STAT 4000, STAT 4520 (all minimum grade C-).

Required Textbook

Public Finance 10th edition by Rosen and Gayer & Connect.

Attendance

Class attendance is necessary for success in this course and therefore mandatory. To give students an external commitment device, attendance will be taken indirectly through the use of clicker questions. *If you anticipate an EXTENDED absence, please notify me prior to missing any classes, assignments, or exams. There is no need to advise me of short day-to-day absences.*

Canvas

I use Canvas extensively to keep this course organized and make announcements. Additionally, the problems sets and solutions will be available on Canvas as well. Grades will be posted on Canvas as soon as they are available.

Office Hours

Office hours are the best way to get extra help. I would be happy to schedule a time outside of office hours if a scheduling conflict prevents you from coming during the assigned hours.

Cheating

Don't do it. You will get caught, fail the course, and be reported to the Honor Code Council. This includes faking attendance on Clicker questions.

Electronic Device Policy

Please silence electronic devices during lectures. You are welcome to use electronic devices for note taking and accessing learning materials online. However, do not use electronic devices during class time for non-class activities (i.e. social media, etc.), or you will be asked to turn it off and put it away.

Communication Policy

Email will be my primary form of communication with the class:

- I will use your CU email address for class communications, so check your CU mailbox frequently.
- I will answer you as soon as possible. Please allow 24 hours for a response.
- Please refer to the syllabus to answer questions, before contacting me.
- Questions on course material are often more easily and thoroughly answered in person. Please use my office hours as your primary means of obtaining help with course material.
- Under no circumstances can I provide grades through email due to Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) regulations, since emails are not considered secure. Grades will be available on Canvas.

Grading

To provide you with flexibility throughout the semester for things such as illness, bereavement, etc., I will drop your lowest homework assignment, lowest SmartBook score, and lowest two clicker scores. There will be no makeup work or makeup exams in this class regardless of the reason. In fairness to everyone, there are no exceptions. Late assignments will not be accepted.

Your total grade in this course will be determined as follows:

- | | |
|----------------|----------------|
| • Problem sets | 20% |
| • Clickers | 20% |
| • SmartBook | 10% |
| • Midterms | 30% (15% Each) |
| • Final | 20% |

Problem Sets:

There will be 8-9 problem sets. Problem sets will be completed in groups of 3-4 students. Groups will be assigned at the beginning of the semester. Problem sets must be submitted before class on the day they are due. There is no late work.

Exams:

The exams will be completed on scantron forms, so bring a #2 pencil. Pens will not work on scantron forms. There are 2 midterm exams, and while they are not explicitly cumulative, the material does naturally build upon itself. The final exam must be held per university policy. The University's final exam policy can be found [here](#). Exams will be closed book, closed notes. Only basic scientific calculators will be permitted, no computers, cell phones, or graphing calculators. All exams will take place in the regular classroom unless otherwise noted. There will be no makeup exams. If you miss a midterm exam for ANY reason, the weight of the exam will be added to the final.

iClickers:

We will be using iClicker to enhance active learning and participation in this course. You can check a clicker remote out from the Norlin circulation desk for the semester, on a first-come, first-served basis. Alternatively, you can use the iClicker app on your mobile device. Either way you will also need to have an iClicker app student account and register your device there. Student resources for iClicker can be found [here](#). You will receive 1 point for answering a question and an additional point for answering correctly. Faking attendance will get you a 0 for Clicker scores for the entire semester. The only information that is relevant on the iClicker app is the number of points from answering clicker questions, disregard any other attendance metrics from the app.

Letter Grades:

Grades may be curved at the instructor's discretion. Your (curved) final course grade will automatically be increased up to 0.5% to meet any grade cutoff. No further grade adjustments are available. Letter grades will be assigned as follows:

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	F
94+	90-93	87-89	83-86	80-82	77-79	73-76	70-72	67-69	63-66	60-62	≤ 59

Course Resources and Recipe for Success

I want you to be successful in this course. I will do whatever I can to help you learn. Therefore, there are numerous resources for you to succeed.

Office Hours: This is an excellent opportunity to get additional clarification and get one-on-one instruction. I love working with students during office hours. It is among the most rewarding things I get to do as an instructor, so please take advantage. If a scheduling conflict prevents you from attending my office hours, I will be happy to schedule a time with you.

Econ Tutoring Lab: The Economics department provides a free tutoring lab. Information can be found on the department's website: <https://www.colorado.edu/economics/undergraduate-program>

Private Tutors: Private tutors are available for a fee. Information can be found on the department's website: <https://www.colorado.edu/economics/undergraduate-program>

There is a strong correlation between attendance and homework with a student's overall grade. The correlation coefficients are greater than 0.60. I would be remiss if I did not note that correlation does not imply causation. Nonetheless, imitating the approach of successful students

is not a bad strategy. Take this course seriously. Use the available resources. Keep up with the course and do not fall behind.

CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR

Students and faculty are responsible for maintaining an appropriate learning environment in all instructional settings, whether in person, remote, or online. Failure to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, marital status, political affiliation, or political philosophy.

For more information, see the [classroom behavior policy](#), the [Student Code of Conduct](#), and the [Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance](#).

ACCOMMODATION FOR DISABILITIES, TEMPORARY MEDICAL CONDITIONS, AND MEDICAL ISOLATION

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit your accommodation letter from Disability Services to your faculty member in a timely manner so that your needs can be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities in the academic environment. Information on requesting accommodations is located on the [Disability Services website](#). Contact Disability Services at 303-492-8671 or DSinfo@colorado.edu for further assistance. If you have a temporary medical condition, see [Temporary Medical Conditions](#) on the Disability Services website.

If you have a temporary illness, injury or required medical isolation for which you require adjustment, please notify me if you anticipate missing a week or more prior to missing any classes, assignments, or exams. There is no need to advise me of short day-to-day absences.

Preferred Student Names and Pronouns

CU Boulder recognizes that students' legal information doesn't always align with how they identify. Students may update their preferred names and pronouns via the student portal; those preferred names and pronouns are listed on instructors' class rosters. In the absence of such updates, the name that appears on the class roster is the student's legal name.

HONOR CODE

All students enrolled in a University of Colorado Boulder course are responsible for knowing and adhering to the [Honor Code](#). Violations of the Honor Code may include but are not limited to: plagiarism (including use of paper writing services or technology [such as essay bots]), cheating, fabrication, lying, bribery, threat, unauthorized access to academic materials, clicker fraud, submitting the same or similar work in more than one course without permission from all course instructors involved, and aiding academic dishonesty. Understanding the course's syllabus is a vital part in adhering to the Honor Code.

All incidents of academic misconduct will be reported to Student Conduct & Conflict Resolution: StudentConduct@colorado.edu. Students found responsible for violating the [Honor Code](#) will be assigned resolution outcomes from the Student Conduct & Conflict Resolution as well as be subject to academic sanctions from the faculty member. Visit [Honor Code](#) for more information on the academic integrity policy.

SEXUAL MISCONDUCT, DISCRIMINATION, HARASSMENT AND/OR RELATED RETALIATION

CU Boulder is committed to fostering an inclusive and welcoming learning, working, and living environment. University policy prohibits [protected-class](#) discrimination and harassment, sexual misconduct (harassment, exploitation, and assault), intimate partner abuse (dating or domestic violence), stalking, and related retaliation by or against members of our community on- and off-campus. The Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC) addresses these concerns, and individuals who have been subjected to misconduct can contact OIEC at 303-492-2127 or email CUreport@colorado.edu. Information about university policies, [reporting options](#), and [support resources](#) including confidential services can be found on the [OIEC website](#).

Please know that faculty and graduate instructors must inform OIEC when they are made aware of incidents related to these policies regardless of when or where something occurred. This is to ensure that individuals impacted receive outreach from OIEC about resolution options and support resources. To learn more about reporting and support for a variety of concerns, visit the [Don't Ignore It page](#).

RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATIONS

Campus policy requires faculty to provide reasonable accommodations for students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. Please communicate the need for a religious accommodation in a timely manner. In this class, please notify me two weeks prior to missing any lectures, coursework, or exams.

See the [campus policy regarding religious observances](#) for full details.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS

The University of Colorado Boulder is committed to the well-being of all students. If you are struggling with personal stressors, mental health or substance use concerns that are impacting academic or daily life, please contact [Counseling and Psychiatric Services \(CAPS\)](#) located in C4C or call (303) 492-2277, 24/7.

Free and unlimited telehealth is also available through [Academic Live Care](#). The Academic Live Care site also provides information about additional wellness services on campus that are available to students.

Tentative Course Schedule

Week	Topics	Due
Week 1 (8/17-8/21)	• Administration	
Week 2 (8/24-8/28)	• Introduction (Ch 1) • Tools of Normative Analysis (Ch 3)	SmartBook - Ch 1 SmartBook - Ch 3
Week 3 (8/31-9/4)	• Tools of Normative Analysis (Ch 3)	
Week 4 (9/7-9/11)	• Labor Day (No class 9/7) • Public Goods (Ch 4)	SmartBook - Ch 4 PS1 (Ch 3)
Week 5 (9/14-9/18)	• Public Goods (Ch 4)	PS2 (Ch 3)
Week 6 (9/21-9/25)	• Externalities (Ch 5)	SmartBook - Ch 5 part 1 PS3 (Ch 4)
Week 7 (9/28-10/2)	• Midterm 1 Review • Midterm 1 on Chapters 1-4 (10/1)	
Week 8 (10/5-10/9)	• Externalities (Ch 5) • Reading day (No class 10/8)	SmartBook - Ch 5 part 2 PS4 (Ch 5)
Week 9 (10/12-10/16)	• Externalities (Ch 5) • Political Economy (Ch 6)	SmartBook - Ch 6
Week 10 (10/19-10/23)	• Political Economy (Ch 6)	PS5 (Ch 5)
Week 11 (10/26-10/30)	• Political Economy (Ch 6) • Income Redistribution (Ch 12)	SmartBook - Ch 12
Week 12 (11/2-11/6)	• Income Redistribution (Ch 12)	PS6 (Ch 6)
Week 13 (11/9-11/13)	• Income Redistribution (Ch 12) • The Health Care Market (Ch 9)	SmartBook - Ch 9 PS7 (Ch 12)
Week 14 (11/16-11/20)	• Midterm 2 Review • Midterm 2 on Chapters 5,6,12 (11/19)	
Week 15 (11/23-11/27)	• Semester Break (No classes) • Woot! Woot!	
Week 16 (11/30-12/4)	• Government and the Market for Health Care (Ch 10) • Semestrial Review	SmartBook - Ch 10 PS8 (Ch 9)

***All SmartBook assignments are due prior to start of the corresponding lecture.
All problem sets are due on Thursday at the start of class unless otherwise announced.***