

Social Problems in Context

ECON-120

Summer 2020

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All activities for this section of ECON-120 are online. There are no class meetings.

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Course Support and Instructor Contact Information

Instructor: Hannah Randolph

Email: hr4964a@american.edu

Office hours: Wednesdays and Fridays, 11am - 1pm EST via Blackboard Collaborate (follow link from the Visit Virtual Office Hours tab)

Teaching Assistant: n/a

Course Description

Hopefully, you signed up for this course because you thought the catalog description sounded useful and fun. As a reminder, here's what is in the catalog:

Students learn to use the economic way of thinking to analyze how social and historical context contributed to or eased a variety of social problems. Using the economic way of thinking develops three inter-related habits to approaching problems. First is thinking about all of the kinds of costs and benefits (monetary and non-monetary) that people consider when they make choices. Second is thinking about which parts of the social and historical context are likely influence the costs and benefits. Third is thinking about what evidence about context helps to narrow down which of the possible influencers may be critical to change. The course prepares students to make plans of action for understanding and for solving problems of import to them.

More simply: **Together we'll practice how economists ask and answer questions about the past so that we can make a difference in the present.**

Socio-Historical Inquiry Learning Outcomes

You probably also signed up for this class because it is part of the AU Core. It is a Habit of Mind course on Socio-Historical Inquiry. In all Socio-Historical Inquiry courses (regardless of

the academic discipline or department), you will cultivate three Habits of Mind. Keep reading to learn how we'll cultivate each habit in ECON-120.

In ECON-120, we will:

Socio-Historical Inquiry Learning Outcomes



In this course, you will cultivate the following Habits of Mind:

1. Examine an idea, problem, policy, or institution over a defined period of time.
2. Employ a critical or systematic method to analyze the relationship between human values, ideas, institutions, policies, or perspectives and their social and historical contexts or conditions.
3. Analyze and evaluate evidence and sources to develop an argument, or other student work product, that takes into account social and historical contexts or conditions.

1. Examine an idea, problem, policy, or institution over a defined period of time.

Here we will examine the historical evolution of different types of social problems and attempted solutions for them. The period of time that we will consider depends on the problem under study. For most problems discussed in this section of the course, we examine several decades between the late 19th century and the present.

This learning outcome is assessed through the construction of a **timeline** for each problem examined in the course using materials provided by the instructor. A timeline describes one or more phases of the historical evolution of a problem, previous attempted solutions to the problem (if appropriate), and key elements of the historical contexts that are relevant to the problem.

2. Employ a critical or systematic method to analyze the relationship between human values, ideas, institutions, policies, or perspectives and their social and historical contexts or conditions.

In this course, we employ the systematic method used by economists, known as the economic way of thinking. We analyze how changes over time in technology, resources, social norms and preferences, markets, non-governmental institutions, and governments and their policies may contribute to or may ease social problems.

This learning outcome is assessed through application of **economic analysis**. In an economic analysis, students use the economic way of thinking to show how elements of the social and historical context have the potential to contribute to or ease the problem under study.

3. Analyze and evaluate evidence and sources to develop an argument, or other student work product, that takes into account social and historical contexts or conditions.

Here we will evaluate evidence from secondary sources to identify the impact of solutions and the impact of change(s) in social and historical context that likely contributed to or eased the problem under study.

This learning outcome is assessed through written assignments. Students use resources

provided by the instructor to investigate the likely effectiveness of solutions and the extent to which elements of the historical and social context are key to understanding the changes emphasized in timeline assignments. Students describe whether the evidence identifies a causal effect or suggests correlation.

Student progress in the ability to integrate the three learning outcomes will be assessed through completion of an audio or visual **electronic presentation** on a problem of the student's choosing.

In this course, you will also enhance your ability to:

- Use the vocabulary of economic analysis with precision.
- Understand the characteristics of effective teamwork.
- Communicate effectively.

To find out more about the AU Core and the role of Socio-Historical Inquiry in it, please visit the AU core and Habits of Mind pages. (Link to the [AU Core](#), and link to [Habits of Mind](#) pages.)

Required Materials and Instructional Technology

You do not have to purchase any materials for this course. All materials are available through the course Bb site. Materials include instructor-authored readings, podcasts, chapters from academic books and academic journal articles.

Blackboard Learning Management System: You will use your AU credentials to [log in to Blackboard](#). You will also use Collaborate Ultra and CourseArc, which are accessed from Bb. AU's Blackboard Support team recommends using Chrome or Firefox to optimize your experience and avoid incompatibility issues that can occur when accessing Blackboard with other browsers. Do not use Internet Explorer.

You will need the following general software: Adobe Reader, Microsoft Office (download for free from the myAU portal) or compatible word processor, spreadsheet program, and PowerPoint reader, media player, and an active e-mail account.

If you will access the course materials on your smartphone, iPad, or other device, it's a good idea to use the Bb App. ([Link to Bb app](#), and link to [Collaborate Ultra app](#).)

Accessibility Statements: To find out about the accessibility of the instructional technology and other software for this course, click on the link for the product. [Blackboard](#), [CourseArc](#), [Collaborate Ultra](#), [Microsoft Office](#), [Adobe Reader](#).

Special Note on Blackboard and e-mail

Students must have regular, reliable access to AU's Blackboard site. All aspects of this course will be managed in Blackboard. Blackboard e-mails go to your AU e-mail address. **If you do not check your AU e-mail daily, forward your AU e-mail to an account that you do check daily.**

Organization of the Course

The course is organized into units.

In the introductory unit, we explore the economic way of thinking. The basic idea is that people are more likely to do something if it benefits them more than it costs them. The “benefits” and “costs” sometimes involve money, but not always. Social and historical context greatly influences the way that people view the benefits and costs. Change in social and historical context can contribute to a problem, or it can mitigate the problem. Social and historical context includes (but is not limited to) technology, resources, social norms and preferences, markets, non-governmental institutions, and governments and their policies.

In subsequent units, we apply the economic way of thinking to study a variety of significant social problems. Regardless of which section of the Economics of Social Problems in Context you are in, you will learn about several types of problems that were important in the past and that you are likely to encounter in the future.

Expectations and Assignments

Like other [3-credit courses at AU](#), class work for ECON-120 requires an average of 7.5 hours (one full day) per week during a 16 week semester, or 120 hours. **That’s 20 hours per week during a 6-week summer session.**

Introductory Unit: In the first weeks, we develop the three inter-related habits that comprise the economic way of thinking about problems. As part of each lesson, you do some reading, listen to a podcast and/or watch a video, and complete quizzes. You then complete an **assignment** on doing economic analysis and an **assignment** on constructing timelines and evaluating evidence.

Think of the assignments as short, open book exams. Treat them as opportunities to review and leverage the lessons so that you can master the three habits.

Subsequent Units: After we learn the habits, we practice applying them to problems. Each unit has three lessons – one for each habit. As in the Intro Unit, each lesson has some reading, a podcast and/or video, and quizzes

And, for each problem, you complete one assignment in which you:

- Do the **economic analysis**.
 - Each economic analysis shows how various elements of the social and historical context have the potential to contribute to or ease the problem under study.
- Construct a **timeline**.
 - A timeline describes one or more phases of the historical evolution of a problem, the effectiveness of past solutions to the problem (if appropriate), and key elements of the historical contexts that are relevant to observed change.
- Evaluate the **evidence**.
 - Evaluating the evidence helps you to say if a potential solution might work and identifies which elements of the historical and social context are key to understanding the changes identified in timeline assignments.

Again, think of unit assignments as open book exams. Review and leverage the lessons to improve your mastery of the habits.

Complete lessons and quizzes individually. Complete the Intro Unit assignment on doing economic analysis individually. Complete all other assignments as part of a group.

Course Project: During the final weeks of the semester, you apply the economic way of thinking to analyze the past (and present) of a problem of interest to you.

- Lessons with quizzes guide your work.
- Short assignments keep you on track and provide an opportunity for instructor feedback.
- You identify unbiased and reliable sources of information about the problem, its context, and past attempts at solutions.
- You do the economic analysis, construct a timeline, and evaluate the evidence.

Think of the course project as an open book final exam. It allows you to demonstrate your ability to integrate the habits. They are the three main learning outcomes of the course.

All assignments have detailed instructions in Bb. They are be scored using rubrics that are available to you. (No surprises!) Please review the instructions and the rubrics before beginning. If you have questions about an assignment or rubric, please ask in class or visit office hours.

Complete the course project individually.

Complete all quizzes in the lessons; grades are automatically transferred to Blackboard. Submit all other assignments in Blackboard.

Grading and Assessment

Each assignment has a detailed rubric designed to make expectations transparent. The rubric is visible to you in Bb and assignment instructions prompt you to use it to revise.

Your course work contributes to your final grade as follows:

Activity	Weight
Points for engagement with content and quizzes in the 20 lessons in the course	15%
Unit assignments (The 3 assignments in the introductory unit are averaged together to create the grade for the unit. The 3 subsequent units have 1 assignment each. Units are equally weighted.)	25%
Group Contract and 5 Group Plans for Assignments (Equally weighted)	10%
The 3 short assignments leading up to Course Project Assignment (Equally weighted.)	15%
Course Project Assignment	35%

The final grading scale will be:

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D	F
93+	92 – 90	89 – 87	86 – 83	82 – 80	79 – 77	76 – 73	72 – 70	69 – 60	<60

Course Policies

Late Work

Due dates appear on the course schedule and in Bb. All course activities must be completed. A “late fee” of 30% of possible credit is assessed on work submitted late for any reason except a documented health or personal problem. See attendance policy.

Incompletes

If you have a serious health or personal problem during the semester, I may recommend, or you may request, that we plan for you to complete some course work after the semester is over.

[Academic Regulations on Incompletes](#) require (a) you to be passing the course, (2) for us to detail the work that needs to be completed and its due date prior to the end of the course, (3) for me to assign a default grade that will apply if you miss the due date.

If you have a serious health or personal problem that interferes with your coursework, please document it with the Dean of Students. Please do not share personal or health information with your instructor.

Course Plan for Emergencies

Any necessary changes to the course schedule or policies will be posted on Bb.

Course Schedule

The chart below gives the outline of the course schedule.

A complete schedule with due dates is available as a separate document. (Link to document.) The same information posted in Bb in the area labeled “Content by Week.”

Due dates are also posted on each assignment in Bb; so they appear on the Calendar on your home page in Bb.

Week	Unit
1	Intro
2	Minimum Wage
3	Pollution
4	Gender Inequality
5	Couse Project
6	Course Project

AU Policies

Student Code of Conduct: The central commitment of American University is the development of thoughtful, responsible human beings in the context of a challenging yet supportive academic community. The [Student Code of Conduct](#) is designed to benefit the American University community and to assist in forming the highest standards of ethics and morals among its members. By registering for this course, students have acknowledged their awareness of the Student Code of Conduct and they are obliged to become familiar with their rights and responsibilities as defined by the Code.

Academic Integrity: Standards of academic conduct are set forth in the university's [Academic Integrity Code](#). By registering for this course, students have acknowledged their awareness of the Academic Integrity Code and they are obliged to become familiar with their rights and responsibilities as defined by the Code. Violations of the Academic Integrity Code will not be treated lightly and disciplinary action will be taken should violations occur. This includes cheating, fabrication, and plagiarism.

Defining and Reporting Discrimination and Harassment: American University expressly prohibits any form of discrimination and discriminatory harassment including sexual harassment, dating and domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. The University is an equal opportunity, affirmative action institution that operates in compliance with applicable laws and regulations. AU does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex (including pregnancy), age, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, personal appearance, gender identity and expression, family responsibilities, political affiliation, source of income, veteran status, an individual's genetic information, or any other bases under federal or local laws in its programs and activities. As a faculty member, I am required to report discriminatory or harassing conduct to the university if I witness it or become aware of it – regardless of the location of the incident. There are four confidential resource on campus if you wish to speak to someone who is not required to report: Counseling Center, victim advocates in OASIS, medical providers in the Student Health Center, and ordained clergy in the Kay Spiritual Life Center. If you experience any of the above, you have the option of filing a report with [University Police](#) (202-885-2527), the [Office of the Dean of Students](#) (dos@american.edu or 202-885-3300), or the [Title IX Office](#) (202-885-3373 or TitleIX@american.edu). For more information, including a list of supportive resources on and off-campus, contact [OASIS](#) (oasis@american.edu or 202-885-7070) or check out the [Support Guide on the Title IX webpage](#).

Emergency Preparedness: In the event of an emergency, American University will implement a plan for meeting the needs of all members of the university community. Should the University be required to close for a period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering and extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential instruction in the traditional format and/or the use of distance instructional methods. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format of the course and the timing of the emergency. Faculty will communicate class-specific information to students via AU email and Blackboard, while students must inform their faculty immediately of any emergency-related absence. Students are responsible for checking their AU email regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies. In the event of an emergency, students should refer to the AU Student Portal, the [AU website](#), and the AU information line at (202) 885-1100 for general university-wide information, as well as contact their faculty and/or respective dean's office for course and school/college specific information.

Religious Observances: Students will be provided the opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance, provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes. Please send this notification through email to the professor. For additional information, see American University's [religious observances policy](#).

Use of Student Work: The professor will use academic work that you complete for educational purposes in this course during this semester. Your registration and continued enrollment constitute your consent.

Academic and Other Student Support Services

Academic Support: All students may take advantage of the [Academic Support and Access Center \(ASAC\)](#) for individual academic skills counseling, workshops, Tutoring and Writing Lab appointments, peer tutor referrals, and Supplemental Instruction. The ASAC is located in Mary Graydon Center 243. Additional academic support resources available at AU include the Bender Library, the Department of Literature's Writing Center (located in the Library), the Math Lab in the Department of Mathematics & Statistics, and the Center for Language Exploration, Acquisition, & Research (CLEAR) in Anderson Hall, Room B-10. A more complete list of campus-wide resources is available in the ASAC.

Writing Center: The [Writing Center](#) offers free, individual coaching sessions to all AU students. In your 45-minute session, a student writing consultant can help you address your assignments, understand the conventions of academic writing, and learn how to revise and edit your own work. (202-885-2991, Bender Library – 1st Floor Commons).

International Student Support: [International Student & Scholar Services](#) has resources to support academic success and participation in campus life including academic counseling, support for second language learners, response to questions about visas, immigration status and employment and intercultural programs, clubs and other campus resources. (202-885-3350, Butler Pavilion 410).

Students with Disabilities: If you wish to receive accommodations for a disability, please notify me with a letter from the Academic Support and Access Center. As accommodations are not retroactive, timely notification at the beginning of the semester, if possible, is strongly recommended. To register with a disability or for questions about disability accommodations, contact the Academic Support and Access Center at 202-885-3360 or asac@american.edu, or drop by MGC 243. For more information, visit AU's [Disability Accommodations web page](#).

Accessibility Statements: To find out about the accessibility of the instructional technology that may be used in this course, click on the link for the product. [Blackboard](#), [CourseArc](#), [Collaborate Ultra](#), [Zoom](#), [Microsoft Office](#).

Respect for Diversity: As stated in the [American University Discrimination and Sexual Harassment Policy](#): "American University is an equal opportunity, affirmative action institution that operates in compliance with applicable laws and regulations. The University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, pregnancy or parenting, age, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, personal appearance, gender identity and expression, family responsibilities, political affiliation, source of income, veteran status, an individual's genetic information or any other bases under applicable federal and local laws and regulations (collectively "Protected Bases") in its programs and activities. The University expressly prohibits any form of discriminatory harassment including sexual harassment, dating and domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, sexual exploitation and stalking."

The above website includes further details, including how to report instances of discrimination and your responsibilities as a member of the campus community in relation to the policy; you are strongly encouraged to familiarize yourself further with this policy. Class rosters and

University data systems are provided to faculty with the student's legal name and legal gender marker. As a student, you are able to change how your preferred/proper name shows up through email, Blackboard, and on your AU ID Card. This option is helpful for various student populations, including but not limited to: students who abbreviate their first name; students who use their middle name; international students; and transgender students. As a faculty member, I am committed to using your proper name and pronouns. We will take time during our first class together to do introductions, at which point you can share with all members of our learning community what name and pronouns you use, as you are comfortable. Additionally, if these change at any point during the semester, please let me know and we can develop a plan to share this information with others in a way that is safe for you. Should you want to update your preferred/proper name, you can do so by looking at the [guidelines and frequently](#) asked questions from the Center for Diversity and Inclusion.

Center for Diversity and Inclusion: [CDI](#) is dedicated to enhancing LGBTQ, multicultural, first-generation, and women's experiences on campus and to advancing AU's commitment to respecting and valuing diversity by serving as a resource and liaison to students, staff, and faculty on issues of equity through education, outreach, and advocacy. It is located on the 2nd floor of Mary Graydon Center (202-885-3651, MGC 201 & 202).

Counseling Center: The [Counseling Center](#) offers counseling and consultations regarding personal concerns, self-help information, and connections to off-campus mental health resources. (202-885-3500, MGC 214).

Dean of Students Office: The [Dean of Students Office](#) offers individual meetings to discuss issues that impact the student experience, including academic, social, and personal matters; making referrals to appropriate campus resources for resolution. Medical absences are to be excused, and documentation to verify the student's explanation, such documentation should be submitted to the Dean of Students, not to the faculty member. The office will then receive the documentation and verify the medical excuse.

Food and Housing Insecurity: Any student who faces challenges securing their food or housing and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the [Dean of Students](#) (dos@american.edu) for support. Furthermore, please notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable them to provide any resources that they may possess.

Office of Advocacy Services for Interpersonal and Sexual Violence: [OASIS](#) provides free and confidential advocacy services for students who have experienced sexual assault, dating or domestic violence, sexual harassment, and/or stalking. Please email or call to schedule an appointment with a victim advocate in OASIS. (oasis@american.edu, 202-885-7070, Health Promotion and Advocacy Center – Hughes Hall 105). Students can also book an appointment with one of our two confidential victim advocates.