

Syllabus for Econ 201 - Introduction to Macroeconomics

Instructor: Richard Walker

Winter 2023

created: 12/16/22

Email: richard-walker@northwestern.edu

We will meet three times a week: Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, from 9-9.50pm in Harris 107. Office hour details (mine and those of the TA, Diego Cid) will be posted on Canvas.

You are allowed to use a laptop or tablet in class, but to do so you must be sitting in one of the first two rows.

1 Course overview

This is an introductory course in economics with an emphasis on macroeconomics. The first, more ‘microeconomic’ third of the course will cover general topics such as scarcity, choice, how the market system works and the effects of government intervention. This will take us up to the first midterm. We’ll then turn to long-run macroeconomics and consider such things as economic growth and unemployment. This should take us through to the second midterm. We’ll then look at money and inflation. We’ll finish with short-run macroeconomics, with a focus on the role of monetary and fiscal policy in stabilising the business cycle. En route, time permitting, we will consider such issues as the role of economic policy in addressing environmental concerns and the 2007-8 financial crisis in the US. We might even talk about the macroeconomic effects of the current pandemic.

The only prerequisite for the course aside from an interest in the subject is high-school algebra. There will be some equations. There will also be lots of diagrams containing such things as supply and demand curves; you will have to be comfortable with this kind of graphical analysis.

1.1 Evaluation

- Three assignments, due on Friday January 20th, Friday February 10th and Monday March 6th. [10% each.]
- Two midterms in class on Friday January 27th and Friday February 17th. [21% each]
- Final exam on Monday March 13th (exam week) at 12pm in the usual lecture room. [28%]

The final exam will focus on the final third of the class, but will also touch on the first two thirds. That’s why it’s weighted more heavily than the midterms. [More precisely, ten twelfths of the final exam will be on the final third of the class material, with one twelfth on each of the first two thirds. This makes each third of the class carry equal weight in the three exams overall.]

As we proceed through the quarter I will keep you informed of your standing in the class by occasionally publishing score-grade correspondences. These will indicate the letter grade to which your current weighted average provisionally corresponds. It is possible that the score-grade correspondence will differ from the one that some of you will have seen in US high schools.

1.2 Sections

Section attendance is not mandatory but will be useful. Each week I will post supplementary questions on Canvas. The TA will go through some or all of these questions in sections; I strongly recommend that you consider them beforehand. You will get a lot more from the course, and find the midterms and final much easier, if you attend sections.

1.3 External support

There are two external sources of support for the class, both provided through Academic Support & Learning Advancement (<https://www.northwestern.edu/academic-support-learning/>). These are entirely optional.

1.3.1 Quarter-Long Virtual Study Group Opportunity – Registration Required

Any student in Econ 201 can register for a Peer-Guided Study Group. From <https://tinyurl.com/y6tztdqn>:

Students enrolled in an array of first-and second-year courses have the option of enrolling in a Peer-Guided Study Group alongside the course. Study Group participants meet weekly in groups of about 5 to 7 with a peer facilitator - another student who has taken and done well in the course (or, in some cases, an equivalent course). In the two-hour meetings, students talk through key concepts from the course, ask questions on points of confusion and help answer one another's questions, and work through practice problems or exercises together. The Study Groups are highly collaborative, comfortable environments where undergraduates can learn from one another and help one another succeed.

...

Registration for study groups is through CAESAR and begins on Wednesday, January 4th. Please note that the registration window opens at 12:00 am (midnight) Central Time.

...

Study Groups will begin meeting Monday, January 9th and all sessions will be held in-person. Study Groups end Sunday, March 12th.

Contact Borislava Miltcheva at borislava.miltcheva@northwestern.edu with any questions.

1.3.2 Virtual Drop-In Peer Tutoring – No Appointment Needed

Students can also take advantage of Drop-In Peer Tutoring:

Peer tutoring sessions provide a friendly, collaborative environment where you can come to get help, tackle homework, or study. Peer tutoring is a great way to get support with a specific question

or issue, or just talk through course material with others. Tutors are experienced with the course material, and trained to facilitate learning in inclusive, active environments.

The above is from <https://tinyurl.com/y3fxgxtth>, which also has the times and locations of the economics sessions. Contact Valerie Wolf at valerie.wolf@northwestern.edu with any questions.

2 Course materials

The textbook will be ‘*Modern Principles: Macroeconomics*’ [2nd edition, 2012] by Tyler Cowen and Alex Tabarrok. I recommend that you buy this book if you buy any book. A 3rd, a 4th and now a 5th edition are available, but I’m sticking with the 2nd as used copies might be easier to find and these textbooks are absurdly expensive. If you want to buy the later editions then that’s fine; you will have to find the appropriate readings yourself or ask me. Amazon has used copies available: <https://goo.gl/Hr2uu5>.

I think it’s possible to do the class without the textbook. I tend to wander away from the book at various points, so there won’t always be readings in it that help very much with the class material.

There will be slides for each topic posted on Canvas. These will be covered in lectures. There will be three versions of the slides available: one identical to that I use in lectures; one in ‘handout’ form that omits the dynamic overlays but otherwise resembles the version I go through; and one in ‘article’ form that’s even more compact. These slides will constitute the core material for this course. The exams will be based on their contents and on the supplementary questions I post. The textbook readings are there to supplement the slides. Again, for some topics there might be no appropriate textbook reading, and the slides may be your only resource. I may add readings from outside the textbook as we go along.

3 Lecture topics

The plan is to tackle the following topics in order. If it seems we are falling behind schedule, my preference is to drop material from the syllabus rather than speed up. I will alert you as soon as this looks likely. **CT** refers to the textbook.

[1] **Key concepts** How economists think (that people think). Tradeoffs and opportunity costs. Production possibility frontiers, specialisation and the wonders of trade.

CT ch 1 (skim), ch 2. *Notes on reading: just skim the ‘10 Big Ideas’ in chapter 1, as I won’t be paying much attention to half of them at this stage. Chapter 2 is important; if you have the 1st edition the same material is tucked away in the first half of Chapter 18, pp.381-387.*

[2] **Markets and welfare** Supply curves. Demand curves. Equilibrium prices and quantities. Consumer and producer surplus. Efficiency.

CT ch 2, ch 3. *Notes on reading: none right now.*

[3] **Government intervention** Price controls, quantity controls and taxation. Inefficiency, deadweight loss and elasticity. Externalities and the environment.

CT ch 4. *Notes on reading: the textbook is not good for the externalities/environment material; slides will be best resource here.*

[4] **National income accounting** Measurement. The circular flow: income equals output equals expenditure. Price indices.

CT ch 6. *Notes on reading: chapter 6 only covers the first half of this set of slides, i.e. the ‘Income, expenditure and production’ section. The textbook does have material on measuring inflation and CPI vs GDP deflator (see pp. 252-3, not much detail) and also on real vs nominal interest rates (see pp. 262-3)*

[5] **Growth, investment and finance** The importance of economic growth. How the financial system allocates savings to investment projects. Some basic finance. Growth, the environment and intergenerational equity (time permitting).

CT ch 7, ch 8, ch 9 (pp 175-184). *Notes on reading: these readings more or less match my slides, but with slight differences of emphasis and also in a different order; for example I will cover the Solow model (which is in ch 8) after I talk about savings and investment (which is in ch 7). If we have time I’ll also cover some material on the environment, but alas for this **CT** is not so good. It only covers ‘present values’ (which we’ll need to discuss intergenerational equity) in the bond pricing appendix to ch 9, and I don’t really want to talk about bond pricing. I think you’re better off looking at the slides. I’ll provide further readings on the environment if need be.*

[6] **Unemployment** Frictional unemployment, structural unemployment. Unions, efficiency wages, hysteresis.

CT ch 11. *Notes on reading: as usual the slides deviate a little in terms of info and presentation, but I follow the book fairly closely. The main exception: I won’t talk about determinants of the labor force, so you can skip the section on Labor Force Participation (pp.240-5). Also note that I don’t talk about firing costs on the slides, but the topic does turn up in the discussion section.*

[7] **Money and inflation** What is money? The quantity equation and the classical dichotomy. Expectations, money velocity and hyperinflations.

CT ch 12. *Notes on reading: as usual the slides deviate a little in terms of info and presentation, but the book is decent. One section I don’t really follow is the bit on wealth redistribution, pp.262-4; skim it but no more. I also talk more about (i) the role and evolution of money, and (ii) the mechanics of hyperinflations.*

[8] **Short-run fluctuations and policy** Short-run aggregate supply and aggregate demand. The role for government policy, fiscal and monetary.

*Notes on reading: the textbook is **not** useful for this topic. They approach things using a rather unusual framework for an intro macro class, one that I do like but that would only make sense to use if we had much more time. I will be **much** more concise than either book, and in fact will present things very differently. I’ve tried to make the slides as self-explanatory as possible here.*

[9] **Monetary policy and the credit crunch** How the Fed actually ‘controls’ the money supply. How did we get from subprime mortgage defaults to the financial crisis?

CT ch 15. *Notes on reading: book is pretty good here. The appendix to this chapter covers the deposit creation process in some detail, as I do on the slides (but with pictures). Note that the book mentions a recent Fed policy innovation that I do not plan to cover, namely the payment of interest on reserves.*

4 Various statements

Here are some statements that instructors have been asked to include in previous quarters.

4.1 Academic Integrity Statement

Students in this course are required to comply with the policies found in the booklet, "Academic Integrity at Northwestern University: A Basic Guide". All papers submitted for credit in this course must be submitted electronically unless otherwise instructed by the professor. Your written work may be tested for plagiarized content. For details regarding academic integrity at Northwestern or to download the guide, visit: <https://www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies/academic-integrity/index.html>

4.2 Accessibility Statement

Northwestern University is committed to providing the most accessible learning environment as possible for students with disabilities. Should you anticipate or experience disability-related barriers in the academic setting, please contact AccessibleNU to move forward with the university's established accommodation process (e: accessiblenu@northwestern.edu; p: 847-467-5530). If you already have established accommodations with AccessibleNU, please let me know as soon as possible, preferably within the first two weeks of the term, so we can work together to implement your disability accommodations. Disability information, including academic accommodations, is confidential under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

4.3 Guidance on Class Recordings

This class or portions of this class will be recorded by the instructor for educational purpose and available to the class during the quarter. Your instructor will communicate how you can access the recordings. Portions of the course that contain images, questions or commentary/discussion by students will be edited out of any recordings that are saved beyond the current term.

[Note from RW: I do not plan to record any classes, but am including the above just in case that changes.]

4.4 Prohibition of Recording of Class Sessions by Students

Unauthorized student recording of classroom or other academic activities (including advising sessions or office hours) is prohibited. Unauthorized recording is unethical and may also be a violation of University policy and state law. Students requesting the use of assistive technology as an accommodation should contact AccessibleNU. Unauthorized use of classroom recordings - including distributing or posting them - is also prohibited. Under the University's Copyright Policy, faculty own the copyright to instructional materials - including those resources created specifically for the purposes of instruction, such as syllabi, lectures and lecture notes, and presentations. Students cannot copy, reproduce, display, or distribute these materials. Students who engage in unauthorized recording, unauthorized use of a recording, or unauthorized distribution of instructional materials will be referred to the appropriate University office for follow-up.

4.5 Support for Wellness and Mental Health

Northwestern University is committed to supporting the wellness of our students. Student Affairs has multiple resources to support student wellness and mental health. If you are feeling distressed or overwhelmed, please reach out for help. Students can access confidential resources through the Counseling and Psychological Services

(CAPS), Religious and Spiritual Life (RSL) and the Center for Awareness, Response and Education (CARE). Additional information on all of the resources mentioned above can be found here:

<https://www.northwestern.edu/counseling/>

<https://www.northwestern.edu/religious-life/>

<https://www.northwestern.edu/care/>