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# ECON 354

## Issues in Urban and Regional Economics

January 3<sup>rd</sup> - March 11<sup>th</sup>

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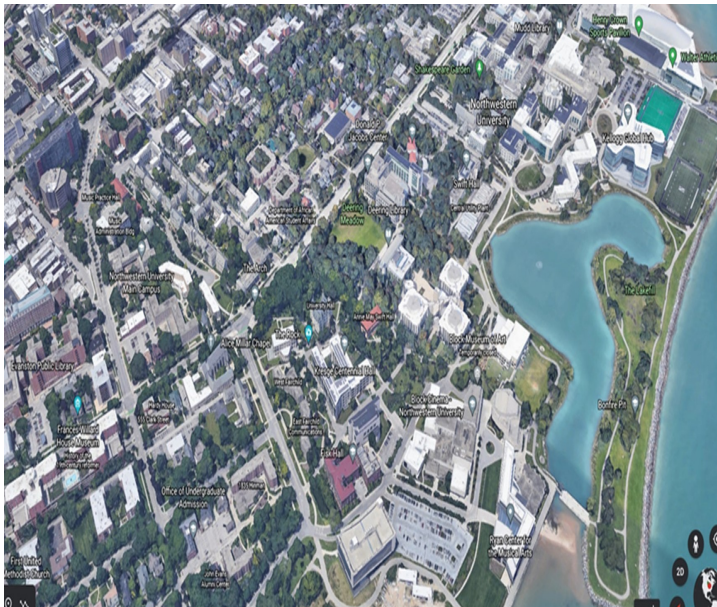
### Instructor information

Instructor: Sidonia McKenzie  
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✉ [sidonia.mckenzie@northwestern.edu](mailto:sidonia.mckenzie@northwestern.edu)  
(Please put "ECON 354: [subject of email]"  
in the subject line of your email!)  
☎ 847-491-8200  
Student hours: Wednesdays 4:30-6:30 pm  
via [Zoom](#) and by appointment.

### Course information

Lecture times: MW ; 12:30 - 1:50pm  
Discussion section: F ; 12:30 - 1:50pm  
Lecture room: Tech L05  
Prerequisite(s): ECON 281, ECON 310-1,  
ECON 310-2  
Web page: [ECON 354 Canvas](#)  
TA: Pablo Sanchez  
✉ [PabloSanchez2026@northwestern.edu](mailto:PabloSanchez2026@northwestern.edu)

**Northwestern University, Evanston campus**  
*"Bordered by a Great Lake and a global city"*



“Eventually, I think Chicago will be the most beautiful great city left in the world.”

*Frank Lloyd Wright (celebrated American Architect)*

“I’m impressed with the people from Chicago. Hollywood is hype. New York is talk. Chicago is work.”

*Michael Douglas (American Actor and Producer)*

“She is always a novelty; for she is never the Chicago you saw when you passed through the last time.”

*Mark Twain (renowned American novelist)*

## Course Description:

### A Warm WILDCAT Welcome To You!

The above quotes highlight some of the important facets of cities that we'll cover in this course. As an introduction to issues in Urban and Regional Economics, we will study the problems of cities, urban areas, and regions by examining the effects of geographic location on the decisions of individuals and firms. The importance of location in everyday choices is readily seen in your decision to live on or off campus (or in a new professor's decision to live in Evanston or downtown Chicago). Yet, conventional economic models do not account for spatial factors. As urban economists, we will use the tools of economic theory and empirical data to explore several interesting questions along the dimensions of why we live in cities and how do regions develop. These questions include, but are not limited to: Why do cities and regions exist? How do firms decide where to locate? Why do people live in cities? What determines the growth and size of a city and region? What is the role of cities in regional development? We will then analyze the economic problems that arise because we live in urban areas. We will focus on specific urban issues such as firm location, housing, education, transportation costs, immigration, and local government policies. Time permitting, we will briefly explore issues related to crime, poverty, and housing bubbles.

We will cover several empirical papers in class that you are expected to read in advance. Typically, this will involve reading the abstract, introduction, and conclusion of the papers to get a general overview of the *contribution, research question and methodological approach*. We will analyze data using Stata or R and may also use ArcGIS, a digital mapping program.

## Course Objectives:

While this course will prepare you for further courses in economics, that is not its primary purpose. Instead, its objectives are to help you:

- (i) introduce you to basic concepts and models of urban and regional economics;
- (ii) help develop your ability to analyze these concepts and apply them in and outside the classroom;
- (iii) improve your critical thinking (and hopefully creativity) about existing research on cities and regions and
- (iv) improves your ability to present complex research output clearly and succinctly.

I hope that the topics covered in this course will stimulate your interests to further explore and develop research ideas of your own, either for a senior thesis (ECON 398 – Senior Seminar), independent study (ECON 399), or graduate school.

## Text resources:

I want to reduce the need for you to purchase multiple textbooks that you may not use beyond your time at Northwestern, so there is no required text for this course. Instead, I've curated the lecture materials to enhance your learning. These materials include skeletal lecture notes, which you must fill in occasionally, and empirical papers. Please read the [reading guide](#) (available in Canvas) to help structure your review of the articles and know what is required of you during our class discussions.

Additional readings from open-access texts and blogs will be assigned to some topics and listed in Canvas.

## Course overview & assessments:

**Class sessions:** Typically, Monday and Wednesday class sessions will be reserved for discussion of lecture slides and important lessons from the assigned reading(s) for the week. Please see the [Winter Schedule](#) for a list of topics we will explore this quarter. Friday sessions will be devoted to applying and reinforcing what was discussed in previous lectures. This will usually involve TA-led collaborative discussion of assignments, student presentations, feedback, or software workshops. In Canvas, weekly instructions will be announced, so turn on your Canvas notifications to “alert immediately”. Please frequently check the course’s [Canvas page](#).

**Assignments:** This course has 6 components that will determine your final grade:

(i) **Midterms 1 and 2 - 15% each**

This will be an **in-person exam** with a similar questioning style as the problem sets. Past midterm exams can be found [here](#).

(ii) **Problem sets - 40%.**

There will be four problem sets throughout the course, and at least one will involve using software such as Stata or R. The problem sets are meant to reinforce class materials and help you think more deeply about urban and regional economic development research questions. At the end of every problem set, I will ask you a couple of questions that will help you think about a potential research idea based on the concepts covered in the problem set. I will provide you with feedback on your responses, hopefully making it easier for you to write your proposal towards the end of the quarter. This is completely optional (i.e. your responses are not graded). This must be submitted individually.

(iii) **Policy portfolio - 10%.**

A significant portion of this class is dedicated to discussing urban policies and how we can use the tools of economics to improve these policies. This portfolio will allow you to utilize your creativity and desire to effect the change you want to see in our urban economy.

You will take five to seven photographs of urban scenes in Evanston or Chicago and examine (in at least two pages of double-spaced text) each photograph using economic concepts and models discussed in this class. For example, a photo of a dilapidated house may prompt a discussion on its impact on housing prices, etc. You may also juxtapose two photographs to illustrate one scene (rich vs. poor, black vs. white, etc.) – those count as one scene. You must include a conclusion about the implication(s) for urban policy planning and implementation in the Chicago/Evanston area.

You must attribute your photos! For example, who took the photograph and the location/date/time. If you had taken a photo before this course that you’d like to include, that is fine. Finally, if you come across a really effective photograph taken by someone else (a friend, online, a book), you may include it with proper citation. No more than three of your scenes may come from photos not taken by you. You must hand in your own project. No collaboration is allowed. More details and a grading rubric will be provided later.

(iv) **Class presentation - 10%.**

You will be asked to form groups of 6 to present and lead the class discussion of one article (working paper version) that highlights a contemporary urban issue that interests you. The presentation will take the style of a [referee report](#). It must include elements such as the paper’s main hypothesis/research question(s), the paper’s contribution, data description, empirical strategy, and your critique of the paper. You may use slides or presentation notes, which should be emailed to me before your presentation. Further details and a grading rubric are available [here](#).

(v) **Participation - 10%.**

The course is structured to encourage active student engagement with the lecture materials. It is critical that you not only read the empirical papers but participate in the discussions during class and the TA sections. Participation may look different for everyone. Whether you are an eager student who has an answer to every question or an observant wallflower, it must be clear to the instructor that you are engaged with the course materials, either during lectures, TA sections or office hours. The TA and I will monitor each student’s participation throughout the course.

## Grading policy

**Grade distribution:** I strictly adhere to the Department's grading policy, where **a curve may be applied to determine your overall grade at the end of the course**. In other words, *if applicable*, the curve is computed when all scores for problem sets, exams, presentations, and proposals have been tallied. **The Economics department determines this curve, so the instructor has no input about the grade distribution.** If you anticipate that you will have an issue with your grade potentially being curved, please contact ✉ [Mark Witte](#) or ✉ [Ian Savage](#) since this might not be the class for you.

The grade cutoffs for ECON 354 used in the past are shown below. The numerical values used to calculate a grade-point average are given in square parenthesis.

- A → 94% + [4.0]
- A- → 90% to 93% [3.7]
- B+ → 87% to 89% [3.3]
- B → 84% to 87% [3.0]
- B- → 80% to 83% [2.7]
- C+ → 77% to 79% [2.3]
- C → 74% to 76% [2.0]
- C- → 70% to 73% [1.7]
- D → 61% to 69% [1.0]
- F → less than 61% [0.0]

**Grade allocation:** A central theme in my pedagogical approach is to create an equitable class environment where everyone can work toward achieving their desired grade outcome. To this end, grade weights are applied to the course assessments that give you the maximum return on your effort. That is, **your instructor will calculate your final grade in the course based on whichever method (A, B, C) that yields the highest total score.** This grading system is a realistic compensating adjustment to the departmental curve.<sup>a</sup> Each method is calculated as follows:

- **Method A:**  $60\% \times (\text{Problem Sets, Presentation \& Participation}) + 15\% \times (\text{Midterm 1}) + 15\% \times (\text{Midterm 2}) + 10\% \times (\text{Policy portfolio})$
- **Method B:**  $60\% \times (\text{Problem Sets, Presentation \& Participation}) + 0\% \times (\text{Midterm 1}) + 25\% \times (\text{Midterm 2}) + 15\% \times (\text{Policy portfolio})$
- **Method C:**  $60\% \times (\text{Problem Sets, Presentation \& Participation}) + 25\% \times (\text{Midterm 1}) + 0\% \times (\text{Midterm 2}) + 15\% \times (\text{Policy portfolio})$

Due to the structure of the course, you must take both midterms to receive an overall score in CAESAR. Exams will not be rescheduled for any reason unless apocalyptic. Exams will not be rescheduled if you have a personal emergency and miss one. **If you already foresee an issue with the midterm dates listed in the [topic schedule](#), you should take the class in a different quarter.**

**Requests for re-grading:** Regrade requests must be submitted to me in writing one week after your work is returned. Your written explanation should address legitimate concerns such as mistakes or oversight. Please do not approach the TA with an oral request before making the written request. Further details of this policy are explicitly outlined [here](#).

**Missed exam & Late assignments:** An assignment is considered late if submitted after the deadline. **Assignments submitted after the deadline will not be accepted and will receive 0 credit.** Please pay attention to the deadlines listed on each assignment.

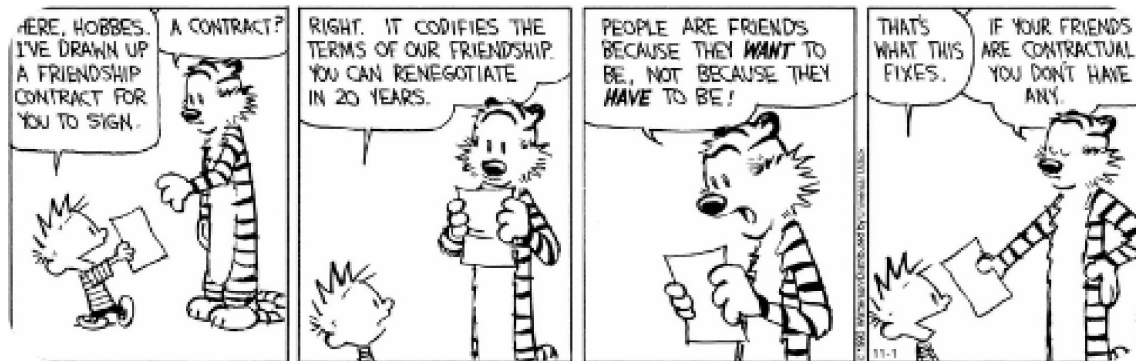
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<sup>a</sup>Following departmental recommendations, **a curve may be applied after this step.**

## Contract<sup>1</sup>

A **syllabus is a contract** between students and the instructor that provides information about the course and serves as a commitment device to prevent arbitrary behavior. I will assume that you are familiar with, and agree to, all policies delineated in this contract.

In the event that new guidelines issued by the Provost are released once the quarter has started and supersede the class policy, the weights, percentages, and assessments are subject to change at the instructor's discretion.



<sup>1</sup>Inspired by Professor Sara Hernandez-Saborit



## Frequently asked questions and Answers

### **Q: What are your basic expectations for the class?**

A: A: **Professional conduct is always expected, regardless of the mode of delivery.** I expect you will arrive at lectures on time, participate in and be respectful towards each others' views during class discussions. We are part of a respectful college community, so comments and language should be appropriate for this setting, including addressing your instructor appropriately (Professor or Professor McKenzie). Tolerance and respect towards each other must always be displayed. We all come from various backgrounds and bring different viewpoints and experiences to this community, so we have so much to learn from each other. We can show respect for differences by seeking to understand, asking questions, clarifying our understanding, and/or respectfully explaining our own perspectives. This way, everyone walks away with a new perspective of seeing an issue and respecting others with different values or beliefs.

I firmly adhere to Northwestern's policy on [institutional equity](#). Our classroom is a safe space where students from different backgrounds can connect around the common goal of learning and applying economic concepts to create a measurable impact on our lives and those around us.

I also hope you will study for at least two hours and complete reading assignments for every hour of lecture. I want you to challenge yourself and have fun while doing it! This can be a really rewarding class! The materials taught in this course can help you beyond your university life by exposing you to tools that will help you make sense of this dynamic and complex world.

### **Q: I am sick on the day of the exam, or have a personal emergency and can't make it to class on exam day. What should I do?**

A: Firstly, if you are unwell while on campus, you should contact the [Student Health Services](#) immediately and your student advisor or the [Office for Student Assistance & Support Services](#) (SASS).

If for **valid reasons, with proofs (a note from the Dean's office or other school advisors)**, you miss an exam, **please notify me immediately**. Advanced notice is always preferred, and **proofs must be emailed within 36 hours of the missed exam to validate your absence**. Viva voce reports will not be accepted, and you will earn zero on the missed exam(s). Missing class for work, a job interview, or a family event **would not** constitute an excused absence.

The grading methods described above are designed to facilitate life's unexpected events. Therefore, if you miss an exam with **valid proofs**, your score will be reweighted based on grading methods B or C. **If you don't report your missed exam AND provide valid proofs, you will earn zero on the exam. There are no exceptions to this.**

If you miss both Midterms, you will have to drop the class since we will not have sufficient evidence to assess your performance.

### **Q: I'm anxious about my performance in an exam. How soon will grades be posted?**

A: The [grade book](#) in Canvas will be updated regularly (almost weekly, if possible) so that you are aware of your current progress in the course. This is done to promote transparency and accountability, which should prompt you to take action and seek academic help (see tutoring resources below) if you are not pleased with your current performance. Please utilize my student hours (they are for you!) or email me to schedule an appointment. I am always willing to meet with and help you.

### **Q: I feel like I'm behind in the class. Where can I find information to catch up?**

A: *Firstly, breathe.* You are doing better than you think! Class information (changes in assignment dates, exam coverage, notification of new files, answers to frequently asked questions) will be posted on the front page of the class Canvas page under [Announcements](#) or on the discussion board. I will post there at least once a week with a general weekly greeting and overview of activities for that week before noon on Monday, along with handouts or practice problems that I think may be helpful throughout the week, where applicable. Make sure to keep up with your syllabus and read the text assignments. Lecture and discussion sessions will make a world more sense after having done the reading.

**Q: Should I email you if I have questions about an assignment or exam?**

A: I welcome all your questions! But, **I strongly suggest you post all questions relating to assignments, exams queries, or anything you need clarification on via the [class discussion board](#) on Canvas.** The TA will create and monitor a discussion post for each problem set. This is a great way for us to interact and learn from each other. We will not answer class-related questions via email. Of course, **for personal matters**, please don't hesitate to contact me, and **put "ECON 354: [subject of email]" in the subject line of your email.** Due to the many daily emails I receive, I will likely miss your email if you don't adhere to this. **Please allow 24 - 48 hours to receive a reply.**

Dr. P.M Forni once said "*We respect other people's time when we learn to value it as much as our own. Even better, we can get to a point where we won't distinguish between our time and the time of others.*" In other words, please be respectful of your instructor's time by arriving at lectures and office hours on time and sending emails during the **work week (Monday - Friday) before 10 pm.**

**Q: Will you be lenient if I'm caught cheating, plagiarizing, or engaging in unethical behavior?**

A: No. You will likely get a grade of "F", and your case will be escalated to the Dean, who will take further action. While you are encouraged to form study groups to discuss assignments and lecture notes, your graded work must result from your independent effort. You are required to comply with the policies found in the booklet, "Academic Integrity at Northwestern University: A Basic Guide", which can be found here: <https://www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies/academic-integrity/index.html>

**Q: Checking Canvas frequently seems like a lot! Why can't you just email us?**

A: While checking the announcements page takes a bit of time out of your busy life, I have found this technique better than flooding your inboxes with emails (especially right before exams, I may post several notices as I write exams or answer student questions). If you check the [class Canvas page](#) frequently, you can consume course information at your leisure and have it all archived so that it's easy to find.

**Q: I won't be able to attend class, can I ask my friend to record the lecture?**

A: No. Unauthorized student recording of classroom or other academic activities (including advising sessions or office hours) is prohibited. The unauthorized recording is unethical and may violate 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 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.

**Q: I arrived late for an exam. Will I be given extra time?**

A: No. The classrooms and exam proctors are usually only available during the allotted time. We simply don't have enough resources to facilitate extra time beyond the end of the exam. That said, please make every effort to arrive at the exam on time.

