Course Description
In this course, we examine the economic roles of government and the tools that governments use to fulfill these roles. We will start with the questions: Under what circumstances is it possible for governments to improve on the outcomes that would occur in their absence? And how do we decide whether one outcome is better than another? The course will continue with an examination of the performance of governments in the United States. The primary questions addressed will be: What policies do governments pursue? How do they spend money to achieve the goals of these policies? How do they raise the money that they spend? And what sorts of undesired “side-effects” might result from taxation and expenditure policies?

Instructor Information
Instructor: Prof. Damien Sheehan-Connor
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Phone: x2531
Office Hours: Tu 10:30am-12pm, Th 9-10:30am

Readings and Lectures
The required textbook for the course is:


Earlier editions of the same textbook are likely to be adequate, though you will need to check the references I make to pages, figures, problems, etc.

I anticipate covering nearly the entire textbook, spending about one class on each chapter. Unless otherwise stated in class, you should assume that the next class will cover the next chapter in the text.

The lectures and readings are intended to be complementary to, not substitutes for, one another. In general, the lectures will cover the same topics as the readings, but will emphasize conceptual understanding and real world examples. The readings will be more comprehensive than the lectures and are important so as not to lose sight of the “big picture” into which the
Full understanding of the course material will require both reading the textbook and attending the lectures. Test questions will be drawn from both sources.

Course Moodle Page
Course information and documents will be available on the course Moodle page. Announcements will be posted on the page and those that are time-sensitive will also be sent by e-mail.

Problem Sets
To help you prepare for the exams (see below), problem sets will be posted on the Moodle each week, but do not need to be passed in. An answer key for each problem set will be posted the following week and you should plan to use it to “grade” your own problem sets. Because the exams will contain questions similar to (in form and difficulty, but not identical in content) those on the problem sets, it is highly recommended that you come to my office hours with any questions about these problems.

Examinations
There will be four midterm course examinations on the dates listed below. The exams will include questions that require some combination of prose, diagrams, and simple math to answer and will draw on material from both the textbook and the lectures. These exams are not cumulative, covering only the material covered subsequent to the preceding exam.

Please also see the notes in the “Academic Integrity” section, below, regarding my expectations during exams.

Your lowest midterm score will be dropped in computing your final grade. The remaining three midterm exams will count for 70% of the final course grade.

Research Paper
Students must complete an original research paper on any topic related to public economics.

The bulk of your paper should be a positive analysis that addresses Jonathan Gruber’s “Four Questions of Public Finance” as they pertain to your topic (see pp. 3-10 of the textbook). In particular:

- What is the economic justification for government involvement?
- What policies are available to the government?
● What would be the likely impact of these policies?
● Is there anything about the structure of our political system that might make implementation of some of these policies more difficult than others?

The final part of your paper should be normative and essentially take the tack: “Given all of the above, here is what I think we should do and why.”

In your paper, you should draw on multiple sources (good papers in the past have used 10+ sources), including at least two articles from peer-reviewed economics journals, relevant to your topic. (If you have any question whether one of your sources fulfills this criterion, please ask me.) Bear in mind that sources that have been peer-reviewed are more reliable than those that have not. Be careful to reframe and synthesize the analysis of your sources in your own way. References to sources should be made in the text using the author-date format with a full alphabetical bibliography at the end of the paper. For example, if this sentence referred to material from Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations*, I would refer to the source at the end of the sentence like this (Smith, 1776). And in the list of References at the end of the paper I would include:


The paper should be 8 to 12 pages long (double-spaced, 12 point font) excluding references, tables, and figures.

Over the course of the semester, you will pass in (on the dates given below) three items related to this paper:

1. First, you should submit (via Moodle) a one half to one full page description of your topic, explaining why it is interesting and relevant to this course. Late submission will result in a one grade reduction in your paper grade (e.g. an A- becomes a B+). Particularly poor submissions will also reduce the paper grade by one grade.

2. Second, you should submit (via Moodle) a 2-3 page document in which you provide tentative, short answers to each of Gruber’s four questions. This should not be an essay, but four distinct answers labeled with numbers 1 through 4. Details are not necessary at this point, but I would like to see that you are developing a good sense of the material relevant to your topic. You should also include a list of at least five references you used in formulating your answers. Late submission will result in a one grade reduction in your paper grade (e.g. an A- becomes a B+). Particularly poor submissions will also reduce the paper grade by one grade.

3. Finally, you should submit (via Moodle) your final paper. Late submission will result in a one grade reduction in your paper grade (e.g. an A- becomes a B+). Submission more than 24 hours after the deadline will result in a failing grade unless previous arrangements have been made.
Note: All documents submitted via Moodle should be in pdf format. Please save your documents as pdf’s before submitting them.

Please also see the notes in the “Academic Integrity” section, below, regarding my expectations for the paper.

The research paper will account for 30% of the final course grade.

Grading
To summarize the above material, the final grade will be determined from the problem sets, examinations, and research paper using the following weights:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Midterm Exams</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Paper</td>
<td>30%</td>
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</tbody>
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Class Attendance and Participation
Attendance of lectures is required and participation in discussions is strongly encouraged. Anything covered in lecture may be included on the examinations.

Key Dates
Examination Dates:
- Midterm 1- Tuesday February 9
- Midterm 2- Thursday March 3
- Midterm 3- Tuesday April 12
- Midterm 4- Tuesday May 3

Research Paper Dates:
- First Submission Due- Thursday April 7
- Second Submission Due- Tuesday April 26
- Final Paper Due- Friday May 13, 11:59pm

Academic Integrity
Wesleyan University has an honor code, the full text of which is in the Student Handbook. An overview is provided at:

http://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/facguide/honor.html

It is expected that students will abide by the honor code during this course.
Exams are closed book. Calculators are allowed. No books, notes, cell phones, computers, or electronics other than stand-alone calculators are allowed during exams. Students will be asked to sign the honor code pledge on each exam.

The research paper will necessarily draw on the work of others, but the paper’s wording and the manner in which multiple sources are synthesized to make an argument should be original. I strongly recommend that all students read the section of the Student Handbook that describes plagiarism.

All research papers will be subjected to analysis by plagiarism detection software (i.e. turnitin.com). Any suspected violations of the Honor Code will be referred to the Wesleyan University Honor Board.

Disability Resources

Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a documented disability as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and provide documentation of the disability. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Disability Resources as soon as possible.

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Dean Patey in Disability Resources, located in North College, Room 021, or call 860/685-5581 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations.