

EC 597-007-PhD Urban Economics I

Fall 2024

Credit Hours: 3

Lecture



Contact Information



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Office Hours:

Wednesdays, 3:30-4:30 pm

Office Location: Alston 245

UA Campus Directory:

<https://www.ua.edu/directory/>

Course Description

None

Student Learning Outcomes

This course will explore a range of topics related to current research in urban and regional economics, with a special focus on urban transportation. This course is intended to prepare students to do academic research in urban economics and related fields. To achieve this goal, this course has several sub-objectives:

1. Provide you with substantive knowledge about the economics of cities and regions, with a special focus on urban transportation.
2. Foster your technical knowledge about a number of modeling aspects, econometrics techniques, and the link between the two.
3. Encourage you to think critically and creatively about existing research.
4. Improve your ability to clearly present complex research.
5. Help you generate research ideas for your dissertation.

This course targets PhD students who have completed the first year of a PhD in economics or a related field. Auditors are also welcome; however, you must let me know if you are auditing. All those sitting in on the course are expected to present one paper of their choice to the class (20-30 minutes) at some point during the term.

This class is designed to complement Professor Ross' course "PhD Urban Economics II," offered in the spring semester.

Between the two courses, we will work with you to help you write a paper. Our goal is that the paper will be ready to be submitted to the Southern Economic Association annual meetings by the end of the spring semester.

Outline of Topics

The detailed class schedule and reading assignments are posted at <https://bit.ly/phd-urban>.

- Spatial equilibrium within cities
- Spatial equilibrium across cities
- Real estate economics and finance

- Urban traffic congestion
- Urban public transportation
- Infrastructure costs
- Transportation safety
- New transportation technology

Exams and Assignments

In this course, you will be assessed on the following:

- Reading responses (15%)
- Mock referee report (15%)
- Class presentation of a published paper (15%)
- Weekly research ideas (25%)
- Class presentation of your research idea (20%)
- Class participation (10%)

Reading responses

15% of your grade comes from writing a response to the reading assignment for each class. These are due by midnight before each class with a reading assignment. This assignment aims to provide some structure for your reading and help you engage with the reading.

1. What is the research question?
2. What does this question matter?
3. What data do they use?
4. What did they find?
5. What are two questions you have related to the reading? These can be directly about the paper or the broader topic.

Mock referee report

15% of your grade comes from writing a critical evaluation of a paper, similar to the report a referee would write evaluating a paper for possible publication in a journal. A useful resource regarding how to write a referee report is

<https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2547191>. You should imagine that the paper below has been submitted to the *Journal of Urban Economics*. You should include a mock cover letter that explains your recommendation regarding the paper, which is no more than two paragraphs long. Your referee report should 1--3 pages long and explains the reasons for your recommendation.

Class presentation of a published paper

15% of your grade comes from presenting a published paper of your choice. Your presentation will be 20 minutes long, with 5 minutes for discussion.

Weekly research ideas

25% of your grade comes from submitting a half-page research idea each week for the first ten weeks of the semester. The idea can be in the form of a hypothetical abstract, in bullet points, or otherwise. This assignment aims to help you learn to generate ideas rapidly, get feedback, kill bad ideas quickly, and pick the best idea and invest in it. Ideally, this prepares you well for further developing a research proposal in the second semester of PhD urban economics and for your dissertation. Your ideas should have some connection to cities. Your idea does not need to be related to the specific content of this course.

The goal of this assignment is not assessment, but to provide encouragement and constructive feedback. You will receive full marks for good-faith efforts and will not be graded on the quality of your idea.

These are due by midnight on Friday. Late submissions are not accepted.

I will read each idea carefully, give detailed feedback, and encourage you to submit the same (but improved) idea in future weeks when the idea is particularly promising.

I recognize that this is not easy. You may skip two submissions without penalty, but I strongly discourage skipping the first two weeks.

You must submit the idea on Blackboard (for grading) and by email (for feedback). Please prefix your email's subject line with "[ECO597]". By receiving feedback via email, you won't lose access to the feedback when you lose access to Blackboard.

Class presentation of your research idea

20% of your grade comes from presenting your research idea. By week 12 of the course you will choose a research idea to develop further. You will discuss this idea with me, and then give a class presentation on this idea in the last week of the course. This presentation must cover the following:

- What is your research question?
- Why should we care?
- What do we already know? This should include at least four related papers.
- What would the ideal (yet realistic) dataset and identification strategy look like?

Class participation

10% of your grade is earned by actively participating in class discussions.

Grading Policy

The final letter grade you earn will be based on the following scale.

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Letter grade	Percentage
A	90-100
B	80-89
C	70-79
D	60-69
F	0-59

Policy on Missed Exams and Coursework

Late assignments are not accepted. Any missed assignments will receive a zero.

Attendance Policy

You are expected to attend all classes and to come prepared to actively participate.

Generative AI Tools

Students are welcome to explore generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, to seek support for their assignments or other activities. However, students should follow the "verify everything" approach to the content generated by these AI tools. These tools learned the models from the public internet, which means they may reproduce substantial text from other sources. It is the student's responsibility to check the original sources to be sure they are not plagiarizing someone else's work. Students should also cross-check the content and citations generated by these tools to ensure they are accurate and properly referenced.

Students should incorporate the subsequent statement in their assignments when using a Generative AI Tool: "For this assignment's preparation, the author(s) have utilized [Generative AI Tool Name], a language model created by [Generative AI Tool Provider]. Within this assignment, the [Generative AI Tool Name] was used for purposes such as [e.g., brainstorming, grammatical correction, writing paraphrasing, citation, specific sections of the assignment]."

Controversial Topics

All University faculty, instructors and teaching staff have the academic freedom to explore, discuss, and provide instruction on a wide range of topics in an academic setting. This class may present difficult, objectionable, or controversial topics for consideration, but will do so through an objective, scholarly lens designed to encourage critical thinking. Though students may be asked to share their personal views in the academic setting, no student will ever be required to assent or agree with any concept considered “divisive” under Alabama law, nor penalized for refusing to support or endorse such a concept. All students are strongly encouraged to think independently and analytically about all material presented in class and may express their views in a time, place, and manner, consistent with class organization and structure, and in accordance with the University’s commitment to free and open thought, inquiry, and expressions.

Notification of Changes

The instructor will make every effort to follow the guidelines of this syllabus as listed; however, the instructor reserves the right to amend this document as the need arises. In such instances, the instructor will notify students in class and/or via email and will endeavor to provide reasonable time for students to adjust to any changes.

Statement on Academic Misconduct

Students are expected to be familiar with and adhere to the official [Academic Misconduct Policy](#).

Statement On Disability Accommodations

The University of Alabama is committed to ensuring the full participation of all students in its programs. If you have a documented disability (or think you may have a disability) and need reasonable accommodation(s) to participate in this class, contact the Office of Disability Services (or ODS; 205-348-4285, ods@ua.edu, Houser Hall 1000, www.ods.ua.edu) as soon as possible. If you have been approved to receive accommodations through ODS, please meet with your instructor or College designee

during office hours or by appointment to review your accommodation letter and discuss how accommodations can be implemented in this course.

Severe Weather Protocol

Please refer to the Severe Weather Guidelines located on the [Office of Emergency Management website](#).

Pregnant Student Accommodations

Title IX protects against discrimination related to pregnancy or parental status. If you are pregnant and will need accommodations for this class, please review the University's FAQs on the [UAct website](#).

Religious Observances

Under the Guidelines for Religious Holiday Observances, students should notify the instructor in writing or via email during the first two weeks of the semester of their intention to be absent from class for religious observance. The instructor will work to provide reasonable opportunity to complete academic responsibilities as long as that does not interfere with the academic integrity of the course. See full guidelines at [Religious Holiday Observances Guidelines](#).

UAct Statement

The University of Alabama is committed to an ethical, inclusive community defined by respect and civility. The [UAct website](#) provides extensive information on how to report or obtain assistance with a variety of issues, including issues related to dating violence, domestic violence, stalking, sexual assault, sexual violence or other Title IX violations, illegal discrimination, harassment, hate or bias incidents, child abuse or neglect, hazing, threat assessment, retaliation, and ethical violations or fraud.

Student Resources

The University of Alabama provides resources and support for the benefit of all students. An up-to-date list of these resources is located on the [Division of Student Life website](#), which includes information regarding counseling, health and wellness, career planning, and accessibility services.