

**ECO2850H1: URBAN AND REGIONAL ECONOMICS
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO, FALL 2022**

1. BASIC INFORMATION

Time: Thursday 2:10–4:00PM

Location: WO 20

Course website: <http://q.utoronto.ca>

Instructor: Jonathan Hall

Email: jonathan.hall@utoronto.ca

Office hours: Tuesday 9:30–10:30AM in GE 356

2. COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

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 modelling 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 second year paper and dissertation.

This course is targeted at PhD students who have completed the first year of a PhD in economics or a related field. MA students are welcome to take the course. However, relative to a MA course, this class goes into more depth on fewer topics and is more technical. Auditors are also welcome, I just ask that you let me know you are auditing. All those sitting in on the course are expected to present one paper of your choice to the class (20–30 minutes) at some point during the term.

3. REQUIREMENTS

Prerequisites. This course builds on standard microeconomic theory and econometrics. Familiarity with the standard first-year microeconomics and empirical methods is assumed.

4. POLICIES

First rule of holes. Stop digging and get help! Come see me, the ACGS (Rob McMillan), or any of the other university resources.

Electronic devices in the classroom. I encourage you to not use, or minimize your use of, computers, tablets, phones, etc. during class. A growing body of research finds that even when electronic devices are used in the best possible way they still lead to worse student outcomes.¹

Communication: Quercus and Email. In order to help me get to know you better, I prefer that you ask questions in class, after class, or during office hours; rather than electronically.

Questions that are personal in nature can be sent to me by email. Other questions should be asked in person. Emails *must* be sent from your official University of Toronto email address. I will respond to all emails within two business days. To help me prioritize your email, please prefix the subject line of your email with [ECO2850].

I use the University's learning management system, Quercus, to post course information, announcements, and assignments. I expect you to either check Quercus, or set Quercus to email you notifications and check your email, at least once each business day.

Accommodation. I am willing to provide reasonable accommodations for a variety of reasons, including disability, health problems, religious observance, participation in an extra-curricular activity, death in the family, illness, or injury. I require a written request for an accommodation. If you need an accommodation for a disability you should register with Accessibility Services (<http://accessibility.utoronto.ca>).

¹See <https://www.brookings.edu/research/for-better-learning-in-college-lectures-lay-down-the-laptop-and-pick-up-a-pen/> for a recent summary.

Appealing grades. If you believe an assignment you may for it to be re-evaluated. Requests must be submitted by email within two weeks of the coursework being handed back. The entire work will be regraded and your grade may increase or decrease. I have this policy not to punish you for asking for a re-evaluation, but because notwithstanding all our efforts to achieve precision in grading, grading inevitably involves a degree of randomness and in regrading we wish to reduce the randomness (both in your favor and against) on all parts of the work in order to come to a more precise measure of your true performance on the assignment. If after completing this process you still have a problem with any aspect of your grade, the overall grade appeal process under the university's policies remain available to you (see <http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/Assets/Governing+Council+Digital+Assets/Policies/PDF/grading.pdf>).

No audio or video recordings. You may not create audio or video recordings of classes, with the exception of those students requiring an accommodation for a disability, who must speak to me prior to beginning to record lectures.

Academic Integrity. All students, faculty and staff are expected to follow the University's guidelines and policies on academic integrity. For students, this means following the standards of academic honesty when writing assignments, collaborating with fellow students, and writing tests and exams. Ensure that the work you submit for grading represents your own honest efforts. Plagiarism—representing someone else's work as your own or submitting work that you have previously submitted for marks in another class or program—is a serious offence that can result in sanctions. Speak to me for advice on anything that you find unclear. To learn more about how to cite and use source material appropriately and for other writing support, see the U of T writing support website at <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca>. Consult the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters for a complete outline of the University's policy and expectations. For more information, please see <https://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/current/academic-advising-and-support/student-academic-integrity> and <http://academicintegrity.utoronto.ca>.

Copyright. Course materials prepared by the instructor are considered by the University to be an instructor's intellectual property covered by the Copyright Act, RSC 1985, c C-42. These materials are made available to you for your own study purposes, and cannot be shared outside of the class or "published" in any way. Lectures, whether in person or online, cannot be recorded without the instructor's permission. Posting course materials or any recordings you may make to other websites without the express permission of the instructor will constitute copyright infringement.

5. ASSESSMENT

The assessment for this course will be based on the following:

- Weekly reading response (15%)
- Weekly research idea OR term paper (30%)
- Mock referee report (20%)
- Class presentation (25%)
- Class participation (10%)

Weekly reading response. 15% of your grade comes from a weekly response to the reading assignment. The goal of this assignment is to provide some structure for your reading and help you engage with the reading. I ask you to respond to three prompts, listed below. Your response should be 0.5–1 pages long.

- (1) Three things I learned from the reading were...
- (2) Two questions I have about the reading are...
- (3) One idea that is meaningful to me from the reading is...

These are due by midnight the day prior to class. You will receive full marks for good-faith efforts. Late submissions are not accepted.

Weekly research idea. For PhD students (or PhD-bound/interested MA students, upon request), 30% of your grade comes from submitting a half-page research idea each week. The summary can be in the form of a hypothetical abstract, in bullet points, or otherwise. The goal of this assignment is 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 RSM3012 and your second year paper. 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 are not graded on the quality of your idea.

These are due by midnight the day prior to class. 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, and you may skip two submissions without penalty. I strongly discourage skipping the first two weeks.

Term paper. For non-PhD students (and others not submitting a weekly research idea), 30% of your grade comes from writing a term paper. You should choose a question you are curious about, read what the academic literature has to say about it, and summarize this literature. Your target audience is an intelligent non-academic economist, for example, your future boss. The question you choose to answer should be relatively specific and your paper should be well organized with a clear central idea or thesis.

The objective of this assignment is to give you an opportunity to investigate an area of your choice in greater depth, improve your ability to summarize complex ideas, and to practice writing.

Your paper should be 8–10 pages long, excluding title page and references. Please use 1.5-line-spacing, 1-inch margins, and a 12-pt font.

Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to the University's plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool's reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site (<https://uoft.me/pdt-faq>).

Deadlines:

- October 5th: Propose your topic (1–3 sentences).
- October 19th: Submit a bibliography of at least four papers you wish to use as sources. Include in the bibliography the abstract of each paper and the URL to access the paper.
- November 23rd: Submit draft for peer feedback. This should be a finished product, not a rough draft.
- December 7th: Submit feedback on peers' papers.
- December 20th: Submit final paper.

You can propose your topic and submit your bibliography early.

Late submissions of any of the parts of the term paper are penalized by 10 percentage points of the total value of the term paper per day.

Mock referee report. 20% 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 which 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.

You should write your mock referee report on:

Duranton and Puga (2022). “Urban growth and its aggregate implications.” Working Paper. <https://diegopuga.org/papers/hcgrowth.pdf>

You can see this paper presented virtually on October 24th. See <http://osus.info/> to register and for more information. If you register, they will typically make a recording available. You should read the paper in addition to watching the presentation.

Due: October 26th

Class presentation. 25% of your grade comes from a class presentation. Those submitting weekly research ideas will present one paper of their choice. Those writing a term paper will present the same content as in their term paper. Your presentation will be 20 minutes with 10 minutes for discussion.

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

6. COURSE OUTLINE

Below is a list of topics and questions we will address in this course. Reading assignments are posted at <https://bit.ly/3RNKu8V>.

- (1) Introduction; spatial equilibrium within cities
- (2) Spatial equilibrium across cities
- (3) Systems of cities
- (4) Modern quantitative models of cities and regions
- (5) Infrastructure costs
- (6) Road congestion
- (7) Urban public transportation
- (8) New transportation technology