Economics 301 Intermediate Microeconomics  
Summer 2014  
Lecture: Monday/Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday/Friday 9:50-10:50 AM, 0111 East Hall  

Instructor: Matt Simpson  
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themattsimpson@gmail.com  
Office Hours: Tuesday/Thursday: 11-1 or by appointment  
Course Website: http://www.themattsimpson.com/classes/Econ301Sum14  
for syllabus, schedule, and assignments;  
Blackboard (https://bb.its.iastate.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp) for grades.  

“Undergraduate students in classes with traditional lectures are 1.5 times more likely to fail than students in classes that use more stimulating, active learning methods.”  
http://usefulscience.org/post/traditional-lecture-methods-are-less-effective-active-learning-methods  
http://news.sciencemag.org/education/2014/05/lectures-arent-just-boring-theyre-ineffective-too-study-finds  

Goals:  
To understand how to use mathematical methods to formalize the fundamentals of microeconomic theories of consumer and firm behavior. To learn how these theories are applied to practical problems with the use of data and spreadsheet tools. To develop an understanding of optimizing decisions subject to constraints caused by limited budgets, technological barriers, and the capacity to earn income or profit. To gain an appreciation for the role of markets in resource allocation. To understand the conditions necessary for markets to foster efficient resource allocations and to understand how market failures lower market efficiency. To understand how firms and consumers respond to government policies regarding taxation and regulation. To appreciate when government interventions raise or lower efficiency and to understand how government policies can correct market failures.  

Textbook:  
You can buy the text, buy a 3 Hole punch version or buy on-line access to the text. YOU WILL NEED A COPY OF THE TEXTBOOK FOR READINGS AND HOMEWORK.  

Structure of the Course:  
This class will use a “team based learning” approach. What this means is that we'll spend more time in class doing problems and discussing the material in class in teams, and less time with me lecturing you. I will pick the teams for you on the first day of class while trying to make sure that each team has a diverse array of perspectives and experiences. These will be your teams for the entire semester and much of the coursework will be done in these teams. I realize that everyone has had awful experiences with group work in the past – myself included – but this course will structure group, or team, activities differently in order to alleviate this problems. Most importantly, you have the same team for the entire semester and all team activities are in class.  

Each week of the course corresponds to a different topic and chapter in the textbook. On the Friday before the week, I will give out a reading assignment that will be due Monday in class. The week itself will typically be structured like this:
Monday:
The first thing we'll do is an in class assignment over the reading that you'll complete first on your own and again in groups. I'll grade these assignments in class and return them immediately. Next, I'll quickly lecture on the topics people had the most trouble with and on some extensions using calculus – I typically will not require you to read the calculus material on your own, though I may experiment with this. I'll assign a problem set on Monday or Tuesday for you to complete individually and outside of class, typically due the following Monday. These assignments will often use calculus.

Tuesday – Friday:
Most of the time, I'll hand out a team assignment for you to complete within your teams. While you are working I'll walk around to the teams and try to facilitate discussion and lead you to an answer when you're having trouble. At the end of the class, we'll discuss each team's answer as a class.

Some days (like the first day of class) we'll have an in class assignment that isn't directly based on the reading assignment. These will typically be more like the problem sets and the in-class structure will be the same as other in class assignments.

About once every other week, we'll do an in class experiment in order to illustrate how well the economic theory we're learning predicts what actually happens in reality. These experiments will be short, and afterwards there will be a short team assignment responding to what happened. There will be some sort of reward attached to how well you perform in the experiment – typically extra credit or money. Occasionally when the experiment is a little longer, the assignment will be the next class period.

Once every couple of weeks we'll also have an in class exam.

Assignments:
There will be 5 different types of assignments in this class:

Reading Assignments – In order for team based learning to work, you guys need to take a crack at the material before we have class, so there will be reading assignments that you will be expected to complete. At most, these will usually be about 50 pages over a weekend or two weeknights though occasionally I will give a shorter assignment due overnight. The class the reading assignment is due you will have an in class assignment over the reading. I don't expect you to spend hours trying to understand every last detail in the reading assignment – the in class assignments will be relatively simple, and if you can't seem to figure something out that's what class is for. The key is getting repetitions with the material, and the reading assignment is your first rep.

In Class Assignments – In class assignments will usually follow a reading assignment. You will complete the assignment on your own, then again in teams (more on these teams later), then we'll talk about the assignment as a class. These will typically be 10-20 multiple choice questions and worth 1 point per question.

Team Assignments – Team assignments will be completed entirely within your teams and will be a little more open ended, though the assignment will always be an answer to a specific question. You will typically be allowed to use outside sources on these assignments – e.g.
your textbook or something you find on the internet. In particular, someone in your group should bring a laptop to class every day so that you have access to these resources and can submit your group assignments by email. **Note, however, that furiously googling the answer will not result in a high score on the assignment** – you may look for outside resources as tools to help you answer the question, but not for the answer itself. Your grades on these assignments will be somewhat subjective, though I will mainly be looking for how hard the group tried and not necessarily correctness – the goal here is learning, not grading. If your groups basically figured out what was going on but didn't quite get a correct or defensible answer, you will do well on these assignments. These assignments will typically be worth 5 points, though it's possible to receive extra credit if I think your group has a particularly insightful or creative answer or something else about your answer stands out.

**Problem Sets** – Problem sets will be like traditional assignments in any course that uses mathematics. They will be 5 – 10 questions that to answer fully will require you to use the mathematical tools we discuss in the course (usually calculus in some form). You will typically have about a week to complete each problem set. Each problem set will have its own point total, and these will be graded somewhat harshly. However, I'll be lenient on “silly” mistakes, like sign errors.

**Experiments** – Often in class we will do experiments. Sometimes, you will gain extra credit points based on your performance in these experiments – to be added to your individual in class grade. Other times, you will (or can) earn real American dollars based on your performance.

**Exams** – There will be two exams in this course, a midterm and a final. The purpose of the exams is to test the limits of your knowledge, so they will be designed to be hard and will be graded harshly. However, each exam will be graded on a (separate) curve that will depend on how well the class does. It's hard for me to predict how hard an exam will be for you guys, so this is necessary to prevent me from unjustly failing everyone just because I wrote a harder exam than usual! Exams are the only assignments in the course that will be graded on a curve – notably I will not curve final grades. Exams will consist of a combination of short answer questions and mathematical problems based on the material we have covered in and out of class. Each exam will have a starred (*) problem that is essentially extra credit, unless it's easier than I expected and everyone gets it right! I will post a practice exam and solutions in the time leading up to each exam that is similar in structure to the actual exam so that you have some idea of what to expect (I actually will create two exams and flip a coin to decide which one is the real exam and which one is the practice exam).

**Peer Evaluation** – On every exam, there will be a peer evaluation section. I will give you a set number of points to distribute among each member of your team, including yourself. You must also give a short (~1 sentence) justification for the the amount of points you give to each person based on how well they contributed to any team assignments. For example if your team has 6 members, I might give you 20 points to distribute among the 6 members. The points will be added to your team grade (see below) essentially as extra credit.

**Grades:**
All grades will be posted to Blackboard. Your final grade will be computed by weighting your grades on the following types of assignments:

- (10%) Individual grades in class assignments
- (50%) Team grades on in class assignments and team assignments
Individual grades on problem sets
(30%) Individual grades on exams

Here's the kicker: you will choose the weights – first within your teams, then your teams will negotiate with each other to choose the final weights. There are a couple of constraints though: 1) exams must comprise at least 30% of your grade, 2) Team grades must comprise at least 25% of your grade, 3) Any other category must comprise at least 10% of your grade.

We already did this in class – the percentages the class decided on are in red above.

Absences:
Absence on regular class days: You are responsible for material and work due or conducted during each class period. If you are ill or cannot attend for school related functions or personal reasons, you must inform me before class to be excused. You can notify me by note, Email, friend, or next-of kin. You do not have to speak with me personally, and if you're sick, you probably should just email me anyway since I don't want to catch what you have! You will not be able to make up most in class assignments under most circumstances (i.e. you won't get credit for what your group does when you're not there), but between the in class experiments, the peer evaluation, and exception performance on group assignments, there will be enough extra credit to allow you to miss a couple classes without it hurting your grade too much, not to mention the extra credit question on the exam. However, IT WILL BE HARD TO LEARN IF YOU NEVER SHOW UP TO CLASS.

Absence on exam days: If you are absent on the day of an exam, you must notify me before the exam. You must schedule the make-up exam before the next meeting of the class, if possible. Special arrangements can be made for extended absences due to medical, family tragedy, or school-related reasons, provided I am notified in advance. Failure to meet these requirements will result in a zero.

World-Wide-Web Resources
Blackboard: Course grades will be posted on Blackboard. Login at https://bb.its.iastate.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp

Course website: The syllabus, schedule, assignments, and interesting links will be posted at the course website: http://www.themattsimpson.com/classes/Econ301Sum14

ISU Economics Home Page: If you want to know more about the ISU Economics Department, its faculty, its graduate or undergraduate programs, or if you are stuck with nothing to do on a Friday night, check out the ISU Economics Home Page at www.econ.iastate.edu.

Disability Policy
Please address any special needs or special accommodations with me at the beginning of the semester or as soon as you become aware of your needs. Those seeking accommodations based on disabilities should obtain a Student Academic Accommodation Request (SAAR) form.
Student Disability Resources office hours are 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Monday – Friday, Student Services Building, Room 1076. Please call 515-294-7220 to schedule an appointment.