

ECO254 - Behavioral Economics - Syllabus

Instructor: Simon Halliday

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This syllabus is preliminary and subject to change.

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- class schedule: TTh 3-4:50 pm
- Venues: Seelye 110

Pre-requisites

ECO254 requires you to have completed ECO250 and ECO220/MTH220. You need to have completed the courses for at least some of the following reasons:

- We build substantially on consumer theory from ECO250. We will look at various forms of utility functions and experiments that evaluate self-interest. We will also examine human rationality.
- We build on choice under uncertainty from ECO250. We evaluate whether expected utility theory is the best or only description of individual choices with risk and compare it with prospect theory.
- We will employ the knowledge you obtained from ECO220/MTH220 about means, standard deviation, correlation, probability distributions and regression analysis with one or more variables in order to understand results from economic experiments.
- We will employ the practical skills you developed from ECO220/MTH220 in using a statistical software package like R or Stata to produce graphical and statistical output that is relevant to the questions we evaluate.

As calculus is a pre-requisite for ECO250, I shall assume that you are comfortable with calculus and algebra.

Game theory (with Prof Miller or while abroad) is a recommended course to have taken, but not a pre-requisite.

You need to have access to a laptop/notebook for this course we will use them every Thursday either for experiments or data analysis in R. If you need access to one, let me know and we shall do our best to organize one with ETS.

Learning Goals

I separate learning goals into goals with different verbs: *know, understand, comprehend, analyze, synthesize, do*, etc.

- *Know* the virtues and limitations of the rational actor model and its application to choice theory and the behavioral sciences.
- *Understand* the role of economics as a constituent of the behavioral sciences

- *Ask* meaningful questions with important potential answers
- *Analyze* data from experiments and surveys to answer questions relevant to the behavioral sciences
- *Synthesize* different ideas, theories and empirics within the behavioral sciences
- *Design* well conceived experiments and surveys to *answer* important questions
- *Do* rigorous data analysis to *comprehend* relevant data

Course Surveys

Please make sure you have completed these surveys by the end of the first week of term.

- Your individual background and preferences: goo.gl/forms/M9DaKh366j
- Questions about your thinking and preferences: goo.gl/forms/MKPML7aMny
- Moodle statistical knowledge survey: moodle.smith.edu/mod/questionnaire/view.php?id=17318

Texts

Copies of these are on reserve at the library. Required text: Edward Cartwright, 2011, *Behavioral Economics*, 2nd Edition, Routledge Advanced Texts in Economics and Finance, Taylor and Francis.

The companion website for the book is [here](http://www.behavioraleconomics.com). At the book's website you'll see quizzes, flashcards, and worked examples.

- Daniel Kaplan *Data Computing: An Introduction to Wrangling and Visualization with R*, 2015.

Supplementary/Recommended text(s): Copies of these are on reserve at the Library. - Charles Plott, 2007, *Markets, Games and Strategic Behavior*, Pearson. Note, a draft .pdf of this book is available [various places](#) online and I will refer to the draft version most of the time. - Horton, Nicholas J. and Ken Kleinman, 2015, *Using R and R-studio for Data Management, Statistical Analysis and Graphics*, 2nd Edition, CRC Press (Taylor & Francis Press), Florida, USA.

Course Schedule

Below is a tentative and preliminary course schedule. It is subject to change depending on what happens during the semester.

Date	Topic	Reading	Lab/Experiment	Assignment
9/8-10	Intro	BE Ch. 1	Experiment	-
9/15-17	Heuristics	BE Ch. 2	Lab 1	ER1
9/22-24	Risk	BE Ch. 3	Lab 2	-
9/29-10/1	Risk	BE Ch. 3	Experiment	-
10/6-10/8	Time	BE Ch. 4	Lab 3	ER2
10/10-10/13	Fall Break	-	-	-
10/15	Learning & Info	BE Ch. 5	Lab 4	-
10/20-10/22	Learning & Info	BE Ch. 5	Experiment	-
10/27-10/29	Group Interactions	BE Ch. 6	Lab 5	ER3 (T); Prop Pres (Th)
11/03	Otelia Cromwell Day	-	-	-
11/05	Group Presentations	BE Ch. 7	Lab 6	Midterm
11/10-12	Social Preferences	BE Ch. 7	Experiment	-
11/17-19	Social Preferences	BE Ch. 7	Lab 8	ER4
11/24	Happiness & Utility	BE Ch. 10	Lab 9	-
12/1-3	BE & Policy	BE Ch. 11	Lab 10	-

Date	Topic	Reading	Lab/Experiment	Assignment
12/8-10	Presentations	-	-	Project Hand-in
12/15	Presentations	-	-	-

Assessment

The following table summarizes the different aspects of the course's assessment.

Assessment	Percentage	Cumulative
Class Participation	10%	10%
In-class presentations	10%	20%
Take-home Midterm	30%	50%
Proposal Presentation	5%	55%
Team Project	30%	85%
Final Presentation	5%	90%
Experiment Reports	10%	100%

- *Class Participation*: Class participation will be based on your participation in class, in your group, on Piazza, in the experiments, etc.
- *In-class presentations*: During the semester, you will give very brief presentations on topics in the chapters (in pairs or triples). You will be expected to read the original paper, give a brief written summary (to me and posted online for the class as a google doc to which you provide a link) and talk very briefly about the idea in class. There will be sign-up sheets online.
- *Proposal Presentation*: You and fellow team members will take a theory from the textbook and present it to the class. You will provide the initial thinking about the data for the experiment you would like to replicate and some ideas you're thinking of pursuing for your own design based on the replication.
- *Take-home midterm*: You will have one week to complete each take-home midterm exam. Each will involve data analysis, theory from the textbook, or interpretation of experimental results from a published paper.
- *Team Project*: In teams of 4-5 you will consider a question in behavioral economics that you can use an experiment to answer. You will devise an experimental design, compose instructions, and explain the statistical methods you would use to analyze the data. You will review the relevant literature and explain the theory that pertains to your question. **Be sure to sign up for a meeting time with Professor Halliday before fall break.** I shall provide a list of meet-up times on doodle. You will also each answer a survey on your team at the end of the semester.
- *Final presentation*: You and your team members will produce a powerpoint presentation and present your experimental design in class.
- *Experiment reports (ER)*: You will write two experimental lab reports during the semester based on experiments you participate in during the semester. You pick when to hand them in after each experiment. We will do 4 experiments, you will be expected to hand in the report online by the next class. They are indicated in the provisional schedule by ER1 through ER4.

In-class Experiments

We will use [VEconLab](#) to run in-class experiments, typically during the Thursday class-times. I'm also investigating an alternative platform, [MobLab](#).

Moodle & Website

In general, I will use my site, simondhalliday.github.io/eco254 for content for ECO254. We also have a moodle site where the lecture capture software will automatically send lecture recordings.

Guideline Questions to Think About Your Team Research Project

Each member of the class will participate in a team to research a project. In doing so, you will need to think about a research experiment you would like to do (assume you had the funds and other resources to do so). It would be useful for you to write down answers to the following questions, and then iterate by revising your answers as you think about each question, discuss it with your team members, your other colleagues and the instructor. Send me your write up at any stage you wish, and feel free to come and talk to me about it.

1. What is the question you would like to have answered after the experiment? (Your answer should be a single sentence with a question mark at the end.)
2. What do you know already about the possible answers to the question you have stated above?
3. What are the various possible ways of finding an answer to the question you have stated above? Include both experimental and other methods you can think of.
4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using an experiment to find an answer?
5. How important is this question to YOU? What are the chances that the answer you get from the experiment will surprise you or others? What are the chances that it will change someone's mind?
6. How would you conduct the experiment? (Write down a design and develop instructions.)
7. Is your experimental design the *simplest possible design* to help answer the question you have stated?
8. What are the possible outcomes of the experiment? Do the possible outcomes include at least one outcome that will *answer* the question you stated above? What is the chance that you will observe this outcome?

At any stage of your thinking, feel free to go back and revise your earlier answers if you wish to.

Team Formation

I will put you into teams. I will take your answers to the course survey about your backgrounds – your majors, the courses you've taken, etc – to design teams with diverse backgrounds and capabilities. As this is an upper-level course, all of you should have taken the pre-reqs, but the extra courses you've taken will help to improve the diversity of perspectives in your teams. I would recommend that you assign each person in your team a role and either hold roles constant for the semester or occasionally rotate roles to expose people to different tasks.

Team Project Deadlines

You have four deadlines that I have imposed for the Team Research Project.

- initial meeting with me before fall break
- team proposal presentation
- team final presentation
- final submission of project

I would suggest that you consider imposing deadlines within your team which you write up as a contract which all your team members agree to and sign. Provide me with a scan/photo of the agreement and submit parts of the project as the semester proceeds. You can amend the contract if everyone votes and agrees (send

me a copy of the amendment). If you don't vote to amend, then someone may fail to meet their contractual obligations. This happens all the time in teams, so please also be forgiving, but also let me know if this happens repeatedly and a group member does not do their agreed tasks.

Team member evaluations

At the middle and end of the semester, you will evaluate each of your fellow team members in the following way. You will receive exactly these instructions on Moodle. For the mid-semester assessment, you will receive the feedback comments from others. For the final assessment, only I will read the comments.

“Evaluate the contributions of each person in your group except yourself, by distributing 100 points among them (that is, when you are done, the total points assigned to everyone should sum up to 100). You must provide comments for each person. These comments – but not who provided them – will be passed onto your teammates. Your score should reflect your judgment of such things as:

- Preparation (did they come to class prepared?),
- Contribution (did they contribute productively to group discussion and work?),
- Respect for others (did they encourage everyone to contribute and listen respectfully to different opinions?), and
- Flexibility (were they flexible when disagreements occurred?).

It is important that you differentiate between people who truly worked hard for the good of the group and those you perceived not to be working as hard on group tasks

(NOTE: If you give everyone pretty much the same score when it is not truly deserved, you will be hurting those who did the most and helping those who did the least)."

Stats Prep & Extra Credit for Spinelli Center Workshops

Dr. Cat McCune of the Spinelli Quantitative Learning Center and I have devised a program to evaluate and revise your statistical knowledge. The program will also offer workshops on Excel to make sure you have that infrastructure in place before using R.

In the first week of ECO254, you will need to complete a knowledge survey on Moodle. Your answers on the knowledge survey will provide me and Dr. McCune some insight into what you would want to have revised by the Spinelli Center. Please access the knowledge survey through [Moodle](#).

Ms. Maria Delfin-Auza is the statistics consultant at the Spinelli Center. She has a BA in Economics and a BA in Math & Stats. She is currently completing two MA degrees (one in public policy & another in resource economics). She can coach you on the use of Excel and R. Maria will run the workshops at the Spinelli Center.

Revising and Learning Statistics

There are many resources online for learning or revising statistics.

- For introductory statistics, [Open Intro Statistics](#) is a free online textbook paired with R (and [mosaic](#)) that you can use to revise relevant statistical knowledge and applications.
- For the use of statistics in experiments, [A First Course in Design and Analysis of Experiments](#) is a textbook originally published in 2000 that has gone out of print, but the pdf of which has reverted to the author (Gary Oehlert) and which he has made available free of charge online under a creative commons license.

Excel, Stata and R

During the course we will use R to do statistical analysis and produce graphics. R is rated among the top ten most useful programming languages and is growing in use. See for example, this blogpost: www.r-bloggers.com/r-6-in-ieee-2015-top-programming-languages-rising-3-places/

We need to do statistical analysis in the course, so you will learn about tidy data, the grammar of graphics and the basics of statistical analysis building on the theoretical knowledge you should have from ECO220 or MTH220. If you prefer to use Stata you are welcome to, but R is becoming more commonplace and there is more support for its use at Smith. Also, R and RStudio are free so you can access R using RStudio on your own computer. In contrast, Stata is costly and either the college or you yourself will have to pay for R.

We will use Microsoft Excel as a spreadsheet package for this course. You should also be able to use Google Docs as an alternative. I do not recommend MacOS Numbers: it is strictly inferior to both these alternatives. MS Excel is used in a variety of business, banking and accounting settings and I strongly advise you to improve your knowledge of the software. The main use of Excel will be to prepare data for use in R by exporting the data to a csv file. So you know, the following constitutes a non-exhaustive list of the functions I expect you ought to know how to use in Excel for the workplace, but which I shan't go into myself in this course. `corr`, `cov`, `sum`, `count`, `if`, `sumif`, `countif`, `concatenate`, `stddev`, `index`, `match`, `vlookup`.

For Help with Excel, Stata or R, I suggest you go to the following links:

- **Excel, Stata and R** Princeton's [Data and Statistical Services](#): They cover topics related to Stata and R and have very helpful annotated screenshots to help you understand what's going on. They have a helpful comparison document for Stata and R in case you happen to know the one package better than the other.
- **R only** [The Five College Guide to R and R Studio](#): Covers the basics of what you want to be able to do in R-studio and R using the mosaic package. Prof. Horton also has a variety of very helpful videos on his webpage at Amherst for [getting started with R](#) (scroll about half-way down the page). He uses the lovely `mosaic` package to make R more accessible.
- **Stata and R** UCLA's Statistics [help pages](#): they have comprehensive help [R](#), and for [Stata](#). I use them regularly as reminders and tutorials.
- **Stata only** German Rodriguez's online [Stata tutorial](#) at Princeton.
- **Stata only** Stata.com's long list of [resources for learning Stata](#).

Important Make sure you can save an Excel file as a comma separated value (.csv) file so that you can import it easily into either Stata (using the command `insheet`) or R (using the commands `read.csv` or `read.table`). To get help in Stata you can type in `help` followed by the command's name e.g. `help insheet`. To get help in R you can type in `?` followed by the command's name, e.g. `?read.csv`.

TIP If you want to import Stata data (a .dta file) into R, you should use the `haven` package.

Style Guides

When doing statistical work, it is imperative that you adopt a good style when presenting your work. I recommend that you use a style guide.

For R Scripts:

Hadley Wickham has a brief and useful [style guide](#). Google has a very comprehensive style guide for its employees who use R, [Google's R Style Guide](#) (This is viewed as a bit of a gold standard)

For Stata Do Files Note, I *only* expect you to use do files, I don't expect you to use ado or mata files (they're beyond what I use when I use Stata).

*A basic intro to do files is available at StataCorp, [Ch. 13: Using the Do File Editor](#) Miwa Nakajo (TAMU) has another great resource on Stata do files at [Instruction to Stata Do File](#) *StataCorp has more do file info**

here [Ch. 16: Do Files](#) Nick Cox has an article in the Stata journal of programming in stata, [Suggestions on Stata Programming Style](#). *Francis Smart* also has a great guide on his blog, [My Not So Brief Stata Formatting Guide](#) Kit Baum has some comprehensive notes on Stata use [here](#)

Reproducibility and Integrity in Research

In ECO254, we shall do our best to follow the norms of the Teaching Integrity in Empirical Research ([TIER](#)) project in conjunction with the Open Science Framework ([OSF](#)).

Quantitative Literacy/Quantitative Reasoning

“Economics is an empirically oriented discipline. The focus is on explaining and testing our understanding of economic phenomena. Hence, students need an appreciation for an ability to deal with empirical matters.” Siegfried et al 1991, p.216

“The foundation in empirical methods depends on (1) knowing something about the measurement of economic variables (methods of data collection, reliability, etc.); (2) being able to organize, work with, and manipulate data for purposes of comparison; (3) the capacity to test hypotheses with empirical data; and (4) knowing how to interpret the results of various statistical procedures. The quantitative methods course should be reoriented from its almost singular statistical focus to emphasize this wider range of quantitative methods employed by economics.”(ibid. p.216)

I will do my best to help you become more quantitatively literate and to help you to become better applied social scientists in your study of behavioral economics.

Additional Links and Resources

- Rebecca Morton and Kenneth Williams. [From Nature to the Lab: The Methodology of Experimental Political Science and the Study of Causality](#). Working manuscript.
- More links

Piazza, Questions & Email

In ECO254 we will use Piazza. Piazza is a website that allows participants to post questions (with their names or anonymously). You can respond to questions other people ask and they can respond to questions you ask. I can also endorse, comment on and add feedback to questions. I strongly encourage you to assist each other online (and preferably to do so with your names) so that I can see if and when you understand or do not understand an idea. Using Piazza also helps to ensure that I do not receive many emails asking the same question (which has happened in the past). If you email me about something already covered on Piazza, I will direct you to Piazza. I will add you all to the Piazza course after which you will receive an email alert and need to create a log-in for Piazza. Many of you probably already have such a log-in (I hope you remember your passwords).

All of which said, please feel free to email me. Typically, if an email is *not* about course content (which should almost always go on Piazza), then the email will be about something that is particularly relevant to you personally, e.g. you are traveling and will miss class, you need an extension for an assignment, you have a physical or mental health issue that needs to be resolved, etc. I shall always do my best to accommodate you. That said, I receive many, many emails. I try to ensure I get back to you within 24 hours (during the business week) or by Monday (if you emailed over the weekend). Occasionally, I may miss an email because of reading it on my phone and forgetting to mark it as unread to respond to it later. I apologize in advance if this happens.

Some notes on my goals and my learning

- It is the first time I am teaching ECO254.
- I love the ideas in behavioral economics. I love to talk about them, think about them out loud, and to debate their relevance.
- I am doing my best to provide a fantastic course.
- I want you to leave the course with some mastery of behavioral economics and a practical skill in the use of R.
- I am learning how best to provide such a course and how best to encourage student learning.
- I have only recently begun to use R, but I think it is a good and powerful language. I continue to learn how best to use it.
- So I am learning too. Please be forgiving because I am trying to learn enough to satisfy all of you, whereas you need to learn enough to satisfy one of me.

Acknowledgments

In developing this syllabus, I have drawn on resources from a variety of people: Shyam Sunder, Michael Naef, John Spraggon,