ECON 1200 • Section B • Fall 2026

Experimental Economics

Course Syllabus

Instructor

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Office hours	Wednesdays 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM *Starting September 9* *Also by appointment*
Office	Old Mill 339

Class

Dates	August 31 – December 12, 2026
Time	Tuesday & Thursday 4:25 – 5:40 PM
Classroom	Kalkin Building 007
Final exam	No final exam

Course Description

This course explores economic topics through laboratory and field experiments. Rather than assuming people behave as standard models predict, experimental economics treats observed behavior as evidence to be explained. Each class pairs core theory with experimental findings to ask three questions:

- What do people actually do?
- Why does their behavior sometimes depart from standard predictions?
- And what do those departures imply?

Topics may include the endowment effect, overconfidence, time preferences, coordination games, auctions, bargaining, social preferences, and deception. By the end of the course, students will be able to read experimental economics research critically, design a simple incentivized experiment, and apply behavioral insights to real-world economic questions.

Prerequisites: None

Textbook

There is no assigned textbook for this course. This course is mainly built around experimental economics papers that I will post to Brightspace. While I will post all the papers I talk about in the course (and I encourage you to read them!), you are only required to read the ones I specify for the weekly reflections. For the list of papers referenced, see the detailed reading list on Brightspace.

Note: The reading list will be updated as we progress through the course.

Participation

This is a course taught through experiments, so you will be experiencing economic experiments firsthand! Throughout the semester, I will regularly conduct short in-class experiments related to the topic we are covering that day. In addition to gaining experience with the decisions, incentives, and situations discussed in lecture, you also have the possibility of earning real money based on your performance.

Participation in these experiments counts toward your course participation grade, and in most cases, the experiment will involve monetary earnings based on the decisions you make during the activity. When an experiment is conducted for cash, I will randomly select one participant after the experiment is completed and that participant will be paid the amount they earned based on their actual performance.

Because payment depends on the decisions made during the experiment, you should treat each activity as if there were a real possibility that your earnings will be paid. **You will never be graded based on the decisions you make, how much you earn, or whether your choices are consistent with economic theory.** Your grade is based only on whether you participate seriously in the experiment.

> Experiments will generally take place at the **beginning of class**. If you are late or absent, you cannot participate in that day's experiment. **There will be no make-up experiments.**

Your participation grade is based on the percentage of in-class experiments you participate in over the course of the semester:

Share of experiments participated in	Participation grade
75% or more	100%
50%–74%	75%
25%–49%	50%
Less than 25%	0%

This system is intentionally designed so that missing an occasional class or experiment will not substantially affect your participation grade. Consistent participation throughout the semester, rather than perfect attendance, is the expectation.

Reading Reflections

One goal of this course is to learn how to read and analyze experimental economics research papers. Throughout the semester, we will discuss dozens of papers in class. The reading reflections give you practice doing the same on your own while demonstrating your understanding of each paper's main question, experimental design, findings, and implications.

Each week, I will assign a specific research paper for you to read. The paper will be announced in class on **Tuesday** and posted to Brightspace. Your reading reflection is due **the following Tuesday before class**.

4 + 1	10 pts	Open	1 try
multiple-choice and one short response	2 points per question	no time limit; you may refer to the paper	one attempt per reflection, on Brightspace

Your grade will be released after I have reviewed the short-response portion.

Note: There will likely be sections of some papers that you do not fully understand, particularly sections involving formal theory, mathematical models, or advanced statistical methods. That is okay! You are not expected to understand every technical detail of the paper and you do not need to explain those sections in your reflection. I am evaluating whether you can identify the paper's main question, understand the basic experimental design, explain the main results, and think about what those results mean.

No late reflections will be accepted. See the drop policy below.

Biweekly Experiment Ideas

Another goal of this course is learning how economists turn an interesting question into a testable experiment. **Every two weeks**, you will submit a short experiment idea based on the topics covered in lecture since the previous submission. These assignments help you practice experimental design and build a collection of ideas that may eventually be developed into your group's final experiment.

Each submission should propose one experiment that could realistically be conducted with students in our class. Your idea should build on a concept discussed in the previous lectures, but it should not simply reproduce an experiment we have already discussed. You should modify, extend, or apply the underlying idea in a new way.

Your experiment idea should be approximately **200–500 words** and address the following:

1. **What topic and question are you studying?**
   - Identify the course topic or theory your experiment relates to.
   - State a clear research question that your experiment is designed to answer.
   - How did you come up with this idea?
2. **What do you predict will happen?**
   - State your hypothesis.
   - Briefly explain why you expect this result using an economic concept, theory, or finding discussed in class.
3. **What would participants actually do?**
   - Describe the decision or task participants would complete.
   - Be specific enough that someone reading your idea could understand what participants would be asked to do.

4 What would you change?

- Identify the key treatment.
- What would happen in the control or comparison condition?
- What would happen in the treatment condition?

5 What would you measure?

- Identify the outcome you'd use to determine whether the treatment affected behavior.
- Explain what comparison you would make between the treatment and control groups.

6 Could we actually run this experiment in class?

- Briefly explain whether your experiment would be feasible to conduct with students in this class.
- Consider the amount of time required, the number of participants, the instructions, incentives, and any materials that would be needed.

You're not being graded on whether your idea is especially clever or whether your prediction turns out to be correct. I am evaluating whether you can take an economic idea and turn it into a clear, testable experiment.

You should keep all of your experiment ideas throughout the semester. When you begin working on the group experiment, your group may use, modify, or combine ideas previously submitted by any member of the group.

How ideas are graded

Mark	Grade	What it means
✓+	**100%**	Clearly connects the proposed experiment to recent course material; states a testable research question and reasonable prediction; describes what participants would do; identifies a meaningful treatment and comparison condition; and specifies a measurable outcome.
✓	**80%**	Proposes an experiment that is connected to recent course material and includes most of the required elements. The research question, prediction, participant task, treatment and comparison condition, or measurable outcome may need minor clarification or refinement, but the experiment could be conducted with only small changes.
✓−	**50%**	The idea is connected to course material but is vague, difficult to test, missing an important part of the experimental design, or would require substantial changes before it could realistically be conducted.
X	**0%**	Not submitted, substantially incomplete, unrelated to the assigned course material, or does not meaningfully propose a testable experiment.

No late ideas will be accepted. See the drop policy below.

Group Experimental Project

The final project gives you the opportunity to design, conduct, and analyze your own economics experiment. Working in **groups of 3–4**, you will develop a research question based on a topic covered in this course, design an experiment that can be conducted in class, collect data from your classmates, and use those data to evaluate your hypothesis.

The project builds directly on the Biweekly Experiment Ideas you have completed throughout the semester. Your group may use, modify, or combine ideas previously submitted by any group member. You are not required to use one of those ideas, but your experiment must clearly relate to an economic concept discussed in this course. The project consists of four parts:

1	2	3	4
Draft Experimental Design	**Experimental Design Workshop**	**In-Class Experiment**	**Final Experimental Report**

For detailed explanations of each part, see the separate document on Brightspace.

Grading

Component	Weight
Reading reflections	20%
Experiment ideas	20%
Participation	25%
Group project	35%
Total	**100%**

Drop Policy

As stated previously, no late work will be accepted under any circumstances, including with a note or other documentation. **I mean it.** You are given ample time to complete each assignment and if you wait until the last minute and something goes wrong, I will not make an exception.

That said, I understand that there are times when life has to come before schoolwork. To account for those situations:

> I will automatically drop your **two lowest reflection grades** and your **lowest idea grade**, including zeros for assignments that were not submitted. You do not need to provide a note, explanation, or documentation. The drops are applied automatically at the end of the semester.

My advice is to use these drops wisely. Think of them as built-in flexibility for unexpected circumstances, not as assignments you should plan to skip. If you choose not to submit the first two reflections and then an alien abducts you for the entirety of week 3, you'll have a sick story, but a zero for your week 3 reflection.

Grade Scale

Grade	A	A–	B+	B	B–	C+	C	C–	D+	D	D–	F
Score	93+	90	87	83	80	77	73	70	67	63	60	<60

Each score is the minimum for that grade (e.g. B = 83–86). I reserve the right to curve grades if necessary. This is not a guarantee, so try your best on every part of this course.

Students with Disabilities

In keeping with University policy, any student with a documented disability interested in using ADA accommodations should contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS), the office of Disability Services on campus for students. SAS works with students and faculty in an interactive process to explore reasonable and appropriate accommodations, which are communicated to faculty in an accommodation letter.

If you have an accommodation with SAS, you must provide it to me **within the first two weeks of class** if you wish to use it.

AI Policy

You may use AI tools to check work you have already done, but not to do the work for you.

You may

- Edit your own writing for grammar, structure, and spelling
- Format slides
- Ask for feedback on something you have already written

You may not

- Use AI to generate ideas for you
- Use AI to write your reflections, your ideas, or your project
- Use AI to summarize the assigned papers

Prompts that fall within approved use include asking what papers relate to your research question, asking for the pros and cons of a design you have drafted, asking whether your instructions would be clear to subjects, and asking what standard economic model an idea connects to.

The guiding principle: the thinking, the writing, and the reading must be yours.

Respect Policy

I respect your time

- I will come prepared to help you understand the course material and prepare you for assignments.
- Communication is key: I cannot help you if I do not know what is going on.
- I am here to help you. This is your time, so let me know what I can do to help you succeed.
- If there is something you would like me to do differently, please let me know. I am happy to work with you to make class the best it can be.

Respect my time

- Be on time to class.
- Pay attention when I am lecturing.
- Come to class prepared by doing the work and going to office hours when you need help.

Tips for Success

- Be proactive about your success in the course.
- Do not procrastinate! Begin your assignments early.
- Attend every class.
- Ask questions, whether during class, in office hours, or by email.
- Every time you approach a new concept, think carefully about how it could be applied in your own life.

Bonus: For a bonus participation attendance point, email me a photo of a turtle by **September 4**.

Tentative Schedule

Dates are subject to change depending on the amount of material covered each class.

Week	Tuesday		Thursday	
1	09/01	Welcome	09/03	Methodology
2	09/08	Risk preferences	09/10	Loss aversion and reference dependence
3	09/15	Ambiguity aversion	09/17	Endowment effect
4	09/22	Present bias	09/24	Framing
5	09/29	Anchoring	10/01	Defaults
6	10/06	Overconfidence	10/08	Information cascades
7	10/13	Honesty	10/15	Ultimatum and fairness
8	10/20	Dictator games	10/22	Trust and reciprocity
9	10/27	Gift exchange	10/29	Public goods and free riding
10	11/03	Punishment and norms	11/05	Level-k thinking
11	11/10	Coordination	11/12	Auctions
12	11/17	**Workshop**	11/19	Bubbles
13	11/24	No class	11/26	No class
14	12/01	**Project experiments**	12/03	**Project experiments**
15	12/08	Winner's curse	12/10	Matching

Final Remark

I view this syllabus as a contract between you and me. While I promise to try my best to honor all that I have detailed, I do reserve the right to make any changes I see necessary.