ECON 1200 • Section A • Fall 2026

Economics of Sports

Course Syllabus

Instructor

Name	Sierra Smith
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Office hours	Wednesday 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM *Starting September 9* *Or book an appointment*
Office	Old Mill 339

Class

Dates	August 31 – December 12, 2026
Time	Tuesday & Thursday 2:50 – 4:05 PM
Classroom	Williams Hall 301
Final exam	Thursday, December 17 4:30 – 7:15 PM Williams 301

Course Description

This course applies core economic principles to the business and structure of professional and amateur athletics. Using the sports industry as a real-world setting, students will examine how concepts such as supply and demand, incentives, competition, market power, labor markets, and decision-making shape outcomes on and off the field. Topics will explore questions such as how teams price tickets, why leagues regulate competition, how athletes and teams negotiate over compensation, how franchises make location and investment decisions, and how public policy affects the sports industry.

Throughout the course, students will use economic reasoning to evaluate decisions made by athletes, teams, leagues, fans, businesses, and governments. The goal is not simply to learn about the economics of sports, but to use sports as a setting for understanding how economic principles operate in the real world. By the end of the course, students will have a stronger foundation in basic economic analysis and will be able to apply economic concepts to a wide range of issues within sports and beyond.

Prerequisites: Basic math

Materials

- **Textbook:** There is no assigned textbook for this course. I referenced the following books to create the course, but we will not strictly follow either of them:
  - *The Economics of Sports* by Leeds, Allmen, and Matheson
  - *Sports Economics* by David Berri
- **Calculator:** You may use a scientific or basic calculator on exams. Graphing calculators, phones, and

other electronic calculators are **not** allowed under any circumstances. Using a prohibited device will be treated as cheating and dealt with accordingly.

Reading Reflections

A goal of this course is learning how to apply economic concepts to stories you hear outside the classroom. Fortunately, sports provides no shortage of real-world examples. Each week, I will assign a sports news article, or a short set of articles and ask you to respond using the economic concepts we have discussed in class. Your reflection has two parts:

Part 1: Positive Analysis

At least 100 words

Positive analysis focuses on **what is** and relies on facts, evidence, and data that can be observed or tested. Explain what the article is stating, arguing, or implying, and use concepts from class to analyze the issue. The goal is not to tell me whether you agree with the article, but to show that you can use economic reasoning to understand what is happening and why.

Part 2: Normative Analysis

At least 100 words

Normative analysis focuses on **what ought to be** and involves opinions, values, and judgments. Tell me what you think about the issue raised in the article. Do you agree with the argument, policy, decision, or outcome? Should something be done differently? Explain your position and why you hold it.

There are no predetermined "correct" opinions for the normative portion and you will not be graded on whether your opinion matches mine. You will be graded on how clearly you explain and support your reasoning. Be thoughtful and candid in your response.

Importantly, your positive and normative analyses do not have to lead to the same conclusion. You may understand why an outcome occurs economically while still believing that the outcome is undesirable or should be changed.

How reflections are graded

Mark	Grade	What it means
✓+	**100%**	Demonstrates a thorough understanding of the article, distinguishes between positive and normative analysis, applies relevant economic concepts, and meets the basic assignment requirements.
✓	**80%**	Demonstrates a basic understanding of the article and attempts to distinguish between positive and normative analysis and apply relevant economic concepts, but contains some errors, omissions, or areas that need further development.
✓−	**50%**	Shows minimal understanding, weakly applies economic concepts, confuses positive and normative analysis, or does not fully complete the assignment.
X	**0%**	Not submitted, substantially incomplete, or does not meaningfully address the assigned article(s).

Readings are assigned on **Tuesdays** (check Brightspace) and are due by the **beginning of class the next Tuesday**. No late submissions will be accepted.

Problem Sets

There will be **six** problem sets due throughout the semester. The problem sets serve three main purposes. First, they give you an opportunity to practice applying the concepts covered in class. Second, they help you identify areas where you may need additional review or practice. Finally, they are designed to help you prepare for the exams. You should spend a good deal of time working through each assignment to make sure you understand the material behind it.

How problem sets are graded

Mark	Grade	What it means
✓+	**100%**	Assignment is over 80% complete, demonstrates good effort, and many answers are correct. This is the expected level of performance.
✓	**80%**	Assignment is 60–80% complete, demonstrates basic effort, and more answers are correct than incorrect.
✓−	**50%**	Assignment is less than 60% complete and/or most answers are incorrect. This indicates that you need to improve next time. I hope not to assign these often, but subpar work or effort can expect a check minus.
X	**0%**	Assignment shows little to no effort, was not turned in, or did not follow the Brightspace requirements.

You may (and are encouraged to) work in groups; however, your submission must be your own work. Copying classmates' submissions or substantial use of AI is a violation of the academic integrity code.

Problem sets will be announced and distributed in class and are due at the beginning of a specified class. No late assignments will be accepted. You are encouraged to turn in problem sets in class, but there is also a Brightspace submission option with specific requirements:

Brightspace submission requirements

- Submissions must be contained within **one** document.
- The document must be either a Microsoft Word file or a PDF.
- You may take pictures or individually scan pages, but each image must then be compiled into the one document.
- Your solutions must be in order and properly labeled.
- Images should be properly rotated (i.e. no sideways pictures).

Brightspace submissions that do not follow these requirements will receive a zero.

All problem sets must be handwritten, regardless of how you submit them. A PDF with tablet writing is fine, but nothing may be typed. A typed submission will receive a zero.

Exams

There are two midterms and a **non-comprehensive** final exam, all graded on correctness. You are expected to be present, seated, and ready to take the exam before it begins. You may not use any outside materials, resources, or electronic devices (including but not limited to phones and smartwatches, but not including a calculator) on the exams. Any violation of this policy is a violation of the university's Academic Integrity Policy.

There is no scheduled make-up exam day. A missed exam counts as a zero unless a valid excuse note is presented to me at least one week before the exam (when applicable). In the case of sickness, you need to notify me *before* the exam and provide an excuse within 24 hours. With an acceptable written excuse, I will work with you to arrange an alternative date.

Acceptable excuse notes

- **Conflicting UVM engagements** (sports, clubs, organizations): a note from a faculty member stating which days you need to be excused. Notes from student presidents will not be accepted.
- **Sickness:** either fill out the UVM acute sickness form or provide a doctor's note stating that you are unable to attend class on the exam day.

Grading

Component	Weight
Midterm 1	20%
Midterm 2	20%
Final exam	20%
Problem sets	25%
Reading reflections	15%
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 will be 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 problem set 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. That means you are welcome to edit your own writing for grammar, structure, and spelling and to ask for feedback on something you have already written. **You may not use AI to write your reflections or solve the problem sets for you.**

You are also allowed to use AI to supplement your studying. It is a great tool for creating extra practice problems and study plans when preparing for exams.

Respect Policy

I respect your time

- I will come prepared to help you understand the course material and prepare you for reflections, problem sets, and exams.
- 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 and studying early.
- Attend every class.
- Ask questions, whether during class, in office hours, or by email.
- Form a study group! Working together will help you and others better understand the course material, as you can work through different difficulties and offer each other clarifications on concepts.
- Do problems! Reading through your notes is not enough. Seek out new problems and work through them carefully. When you are done, check your answer. If you are wrong, examine carefully what misunderstanding occurred and how to avoid it in the future. If you were correct, examine whether there was a faster way, check whether your solution "flowed" and was easy to read and think over what concepts and computations were used and what "type" of problem the exercise was.
- Every time you approach a new concept, think carefully about how it could be applied in your own life.

Bonus: For three bonus points on Midterm 1, email me a photo of a dog 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	Tools of a Sports Economist
2	09/08	Demand	09/10	Supply
3	09/15	Leagues	09/17	Leagues
4	09/22	Monopoly	09/24	Monopoly
5	09/29	Competitive Balance	10/01	Competitive Balance
6	10/06	*Review*	10/08	**Midterm 1**
7	10/13	Sports Gambling	10/15	Sports Gambling
8	10/20	Teams, Stadiums, Municipalities	10/22	Teams, Stadiums, Municipalities
9	10/27	Mega Events	10/29	Mega Events
10	11/03	*Review*	11/05	**Midterm 2**
11	11/10	Labor Markets	11/12	Labor Markets
12	11/17	Labor Market Imperfections	11/19	Labor Market Imperfections
13	11/24	No class	11/26	No class
14	12/01	Diversity in Sports	12/03	Diversity in Sports
15	12/08	Intercollegiate	12/10	Intercollegiate

Final exam Thursday, December 17, 4:30 – 7:15 PM, Williams 301

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.