

ECON 3100: Law and Economics

Fall 2023 Syllabus

BASIC COURSE INFORMATION

Instructor: Chris Vickers / czvickers@auburn.edu / Office: 133 Miller Hall

Meeting time: TuTh 11:00AM–12:15PM

Location: Lowder 126

Office hours: Tuesday 3:30PM-4:30PM, Wednesday 3:00PM-4:30PM, and by appointment

Textbook: *Law and Economics* 6e by Robert Cooter and Thomas Ulen / required.
This book has been put into the public domain and is available [here](#). Printed copies are available in the bookstore, and I recommend purchasing there.

Website: Canvas

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is about how the law affects economic outcomes. Topics to be discussed include property, torts, contracts, litigation, and criminal law. We will be particularly interested in how the law can help society reach efficient outcomes, and the likely effects of proposed changes to the law. Note that this is an *economics* course. That is, the course is about understanding the effects of legal rules through economic analysis, in contrast to a course focused on what the law says about particular situations.

PREREQUISITES

ECON 2020, 2023, or 2027 (Principles of Microeconomics or Honors Principles of Microeconomics)

EXPECTATIONS

- Check your Auburn email and the course website regularly. I will post announcements, additional readings, assignments, etc., throughout the semester. I will assume you are aware of everything I send via email and post on the website.
- You are expected to write legibly for any handwritten assignments or exams; if I cannot read your response, you will not receive any credit for the problem.

EVALUATION AND GRADES

Your course grade will be based on the following:

Assignments (15%): Students will be responsible for completing problem sets.

Homework sets are due at the BEGINNING of class on the due date via email. I will always give you at least a full week to complete the homework assignments.

My intention is to have six problem sets throughout the semester. One problem set will be dropped.

Midterms (55%): There will be three closed-book and closed-notes midterm exams, equally weighted. No electronic devices other than a calculator will be allowed during the exam. The exams will consist of short identification questions, problems similar to those on assignments, short essays, and (possibly) some multiple choice questions. Please come to the exam on time; you will not be given extra time if you are late for an exam.

Final Exam (30%): The final will have the same rules as the midterms: closed-book, closed-notes, and no electronic devices aside from a calculator are allowed, etc. It will be *cumulative*.

Computing Final Grades: In general, a ten point scale guarantees a letter grade. That is, if you receive 90%, you will make an A for sure, and likewise 80% for a B, etc. I will curve grades upward (but not downward) if performance warrants it. Note that such a policy *necessarily* dictates somewhat “arbitrary” distinctions between an A and B, B and C, and so forth, and I will not respond to inquiries about how close people were to a boundary or requests for reconsideration.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Attendance at lectures is strongly encouraged but not mandatory. People who do not attend class regularly forfeit the right to use my office hours. You are responsible for any material covered and for any changes to the course that may be announced in class. Some class material will be posted on Canvas; some will be handed out in class. Should you miss a lecture for whatever reason, it is your responsibility to get the material from someone in the class. *You are required to put your mobile devices away when you attend lecture.*

REGRADE POLICY

If you believe that I had made a mistake in grading your midterm, I ask you to return your midterm and submit a written request describing the nature of the mistake within a week of the return of your midterm. I will regrade the *entire* exam once I have granted the request. Please note that because everyone in the class is subject to the same scoring rubric, I will not accept requests based entirely on your disagreement with it.

I do not respond to emails about final grades, other than checking for arithmetic errors, until after classes resume in the spring semester.

COURSE OUTLINE

The topics covered and associated chapters in the required book are listed below. Some of the material we discuss comes from other sources than the textbook, but the class notes should be sufficient for this. (I also occasionally reorder material from the textbook.)

The numbers in square bracket at the end of paragraphs of the schedules indicate roughly the number of lectures that will be devoted to the material in the paragraph.

Introduction. Definitions of efficiency, basic concepts in game theory.
CU: Chapter 1 [2]

Property. Externalities and the Coase Theorem. Remedies for violations. Establishment and limitations of property rights. Intellectual property.
CU: Chapters 4 and 5 [5]

Torts. Classic theory of torts. Negligence rules and strict liability. Calculating damages. Valuations of a statistical life. Vicarious liability.
CU: Chapters 6 and 7 [5]

Contracts. Bargaining theory of contracts. Remedies for breach. Reliance and precaution against breach.
CU: Chapters 8 and 9 [5]

Litigation. Elements of the legal process. Exchange of information. Trials and appeals. Efficiency of the common law. Rules of evidence.
CU: Chapters 10 and 11 [4]

Crime. Model of rational crime. Purpose of criminal law and of punishment. Empirical evidence on deterrence. Economics of drugs.
CU: Chapters 12 and 13 [5]

Conclusion and Review [1]

IMPORTANT DATES

Examinations

Note: Exams are to be taken during the regular course meeting time unless otherwise noted.

Midterm 1: Tuesday, September 12

Midterm 2: Tuesday, October 10

Midterm 3: Tuesday, November 7

Final Exam: Thursday, December 7, 10:30AM-12:30PM

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic dishonesty, including but not limited to exchanging information about the exam during the exam, will not be tolerated. Consult the *Auburn University Academic Honesty Code* for more details. I will assume that you have been abiding by the code unless you show me evidence otherwise; at which point I will seek out the maximum allowable penalty for any academic dishonesty that occurs in this course. If you have questions about which behaviors are acceptable, please ask me.

OTHER POLICIES

Office Hours: You are welcome to come to my office hours without making an appointment. If those times do not work for you, email me to set up an appointment.

Email Policy: Please feel free to email me if you have any questions or concerns about the course. I will attempt to answer them promptly. Sometimes emails do get lost in my inbox so I encourage you to follow up if you do not hear from me within two business days. If you have a *substantive* question (e.g., “Can you explain X from class?”), it is usually best to come address that in person with me. If you have a purely *administrative* question, email is fine (but check the syllabus first). I do *not* answer (substantive) emails the evening before exams.

Late Assignments: Unless an exception has been agreed upon *well in advance* with me, I will not accept late assignments.

Make-Up Exams: If you are unable to take an exam, notify me and give me a written notice from your doctor or, if it is not health-related, a clear written statement of the reason which is subject to my approval. A list of university-approved reasons for missing an examination is available at: <http://bulletin.auburn.edu/Policies/Academic/classattendance/>
PLEASE CONTACT ME AS SOON AS POSSIBLE regarding excused exam absences.

Other Accommodations: If you require any additional accommodations, please come speak with me in person or email me. You are welcome to come to my office hours or set up an appointment. Please do so as soon as possible.