Faculty of Science Course Syllabus
Department of Economics
ECONOMICS 2218A / CANADIAN STUDIES 2218A
Canadian Economic Policy Issues
September - December 2026

Instructor: Lars Osberg

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 2:30 to 5:00 PM or by appointment
Classes: Monday and Wednesday 1:00 PM – 2:30 PM MCCAIN ARTS&SS 2198
Course delivery: in person, lectures recorded

Course Description
The course examines what Canada can learn from international evidence on the public policy response to three big problems – Life Cycle Expenses, Climate Change and Economic Inequality.

Course Prerequisites

ECON 1101.03, 1102.03

Learning Objectives
1. To increase your useful knowledge – both empirical and analytical – about some of the big issues of Canadian public policy.
2. To develop general skills useful in a wide variety of contexts later in life - specifically: teamwork, library and internet research, net present value analysis, critical thinking, written and oral presentation, and the ability to give and receive constructive criticism.
3. To foster the habit of thinking through the long-term implications of current decisions and to develop some of the necessary tools.
4. To provide some sense of the importance of rigorous thinking about issues that really matter.

Course Assessment		Due Date	Marks
	Life Cycle Expenses		
	Presentations	OCT 5, 7, 12	15%
	Assignment 1 Calculation of present value of own education	Oct 14	10%
	Climate change Policies and their impacts		
	Assignment 2: Present value of own carbon footprint	NOV 18	10%
	Presentations on climate change policies	NOV 16, 18, 23	15%
	Economic Inequality: Trends and Policies		
	Assignment 3: Costs & Benefits of Anti-Poverty Policies	Dec. 9	10%
	Presentations on inequality & poverty	DEC 4, 7, 9	15%
	FINAL EXAMINATION (date set by Registrar)		25%

Course Materials

Readings will be posted on Brightspace

Conversion of numerical grades to Final Letter Grades follows the Dalhousie Common Grade Scale

A+ (90-100)	**B+** (77-79)	**C+** (65-69)	**D**	(50-54)
A (85-89)	**B** (73-76)	**C** (60-64)	**F**	(<50)
A- (80-84)	**B-** (70-72)	**C-** (55-59)		

Course Policies on Missed or Late Academic Requirements

- Missed Presentations cannot be replaced. If there is a reasonable cause for missing a presentation, its weight can be reassigned to other presentations.
- Late assignments are debited half of one percentage point of final mark (i.e. 0.5% percentage points – to a maximum of 15%) for each day late.

Course Policies related to Academic Integrity

Students are expected to co-operate and co-ordinate in their presentations but will be graded individually on the presentations. Student essays and assignments must be written by students (NOT by ChatGPT or CoPilot or Gemini or other AI software) and must properly identify and reference the sources of data and factual assertions.

Course Content

September 9th – October 14th: Life Cycle Costs

Canada's economy is primarily organized by market exchange. Because only a few Canadians can depend on inherited wealth to pay their bills, for the roughly forty years from the end of school (usually in the twenties) until retirement (usually in the sixties) most people work in the labour market and pay for their own consumption out of their own after-tax labour income. However, for the twenty-odd years before and the twenty-odd years after the labour market – i.e. for roughly half their lives – most Canadians now alive do not have much market income. Who pays for the years before and after the labour market?

In Canada, as anywhere else, individual earnings while in the labour market are heavily influenced by education, and particularly by post-secondary education. The costs of education before labour market entry are partly paid for by individuals or their families and partly by the public sector. After labour market exit, income during retirement comes partly from private savings but for most people, public pensions (CPP/QPP and the Old Age Security / Guaranteed Income Supplement) are crucial. Because Canada's birth rate has fallen and life expectancy has risen, fewer Canadians are now in the "before" labour market life phase and more Canadians are now in the "after" phase – and that balance will shift further in future years. The percentage of the "after" costs of retirement and the "before" costs of education paid for publicly or privately differs a lot across countries and has varied a lot over time in Canada.

How should the costs of education before labour market entry and of retirement after labour market exit be paid for? What could Canada learn from the experiences of other countries?

October 19th – November 23rd: Climate Change

Climate change differs dramatically in time scale from the Covid-19 Pandemic, since the impacts of Green House Gases on Climate Change unfold over generations while the Covid-19 pandemic hit with dramatic suddenness. But climate change and Covid19 have a basic similarity – the importance of externalities. If each individual considers only their own personal self-interest in getting vaccinated or masking, they will not take into account the impact of their personal choices on the change in illness probability that other individuals will face. When each individual's self-interested decisions determine their use of carbon-based fuels and their personal Green House Gas emissions, the impact on everyone's climate is ignored. Even if the contribution of each individual is a minute fraction of total global emissions, adding up self-interested decisions of 8.3 Billion people produces an aggregate level of those emissions which will drive climate change for many generations, affecting the well-being of all individuals now alive and those unborne[1]. As well, pandemics and Climate Change are both policy problems that are clouded by uncertainty – visible costs in the immediate present to reduce these hazards have to be compared to the uncertain future benefits of hazard reduction. The calculation of Expected Net Present Value and evaluation of alternative scenarios are useful tools in choosing between uncertain benefits and costs at varying future dates, so this course will introduce students to these tools of analysis.

November 25th - December 9th: Inequality and Poverty

Can Canada make the decisions that are needed to address big, long-run problems? Economic inequality is fundamental to the ability of human societies to deal with common problems but education costs and benefits, retirement incomes and the impacts of Climate Change are very unequally distributed. The resentments of those "left behind" in an era of increasing economic inequality have produced, in many nations, a political process which seems often to be paralyzed by partisanship and unable to agree

[1] See https://wedocs.unep.org/items/156d074c-ab1d-4833-acf8-6343589ede9b

on, or to implement, the consistent long-term public policies needed to deal with the challenges of aging societies and Climate Change.

Everywhere in the world, governments have to make decisions about how to deal with these common problems – and they have often made very different policy choices, with different results. What can we learn from these differences? Thirty or forty years ago, policy debates in Canada tended to be local in scope – inter-provincial comparisons were sometimes made but international comparisons were rare because it was hard to acquire good comparative international evidence and to learn from rigorous comparisons of international experiences. But the Internet now makes it easy to learn from international comparisons[2]. This course therefor emphasizes comparison of the advantages and disadvantages of alternative policy models now in use in other jurisdictions around the world.

Specifically, we will be making comparisons within and between three main groups of jurisdictions:

(1) the continental member nations of the European Union
(2) the "Anglosphere" – Australia, New Zealand, England, Scotland, Ireland, South Africa, India, Pakistan, Malaysia, etc.
(3) the different states within the U.S.A.

Students will be assigned to one of three teams – labelled A, B, and C below. After each broad topic area is covered in a series of lectures, teams of students will then lead discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of the policies now in use in specific jurisdictions within their group of jurisdictions. For example, each member of Team A will choose a different country within the European Union and will make a presentation on what the post-secondary education financing or pension policies of that country are and what Canada can learn from their experience. Each member of Team B will make a presentation on an English-speaking country and each member of Team C will present on a different U.S. state. Teams will alternate their focus on the rotation below.

	Life Cycle Costs OCT 5, 7, 12	Climate Change NOV 16, 18, 23	Inequality DEC 4, 7, 9
EU	**A**	**B**	**C**
Anglosphere	**B**	**C**	**A**
USA	**C**	**A**	**B**

Copies of all course materials will be posted on Brightspace.

[2] For example, a great data source for international comparisons of CO2 emissions is https://ourworldindata.org/co2-and-other-greenhouse-gas-emissions.

. Student Resources and Support

Advising

General Advising https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/advising.html

Science Program Advisors: https://www.dal.ca/faculty/science/current-students/undergrad-students/degree-planning.html

Indigenous Student Centre: https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/communities/indigenous.html

Black Students Advising Centre: https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/communities/black-student-advising.html

International Centre: https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/international-centre/current-students.html

Academic supports

Library: https://libraries.dal.ca/

Writing Centre: https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/writing-and-study-skills.html

Studying for Success: https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/study-skills-and-tutoring.html

Copyright Office: https://libraries.dal.ca/services/copyright-office.html

Fair Dealing Guidelines https://libraries.dal.ca/services/copyright-office/fair-dealing.html

Other supports and services

Student Health & Wellness Centre: https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/health-and-wellness.html

Student Advocacy: https://dsu.ca/dsas

Ombudsperson: https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/safety-respect/student-rights-and-responsibilities/where-to-get-help/ombudsperson.html

Safety

Scent-Free Program: https://www.dal.ca/dept/safety/programs-services/occupational-safety/scent-free.html

Dalhousie COVID-19 information and updates: https://www.dal.ca/covid-19-information-and-updates.html

Dalhousie University acknowledges its location in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq People and also acknowledges the histories, contributions, and legacies of the African Nova Scotian people and communities who have been here for over 400 years.