DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

Psychology and Economics Syllabus

ECON 2300 • Fall 2026 • Department of Economics

Dalhousie University operates in the unceded territories of the Mi'kmaw, Wolastoqey, and Peskotomuhkati Peoples. These sovereign nations hold inherent rights as the original peoples of these lands, and we each carry collective obligations under the Peace and Friendship Treaties. Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, recognizes and affirms Aboriginal and Treaty rights in Canada.

We recognize that African Nova Scotians are a distinct people whose histories, legacies, and contributions have enriched the part of Mi'kma'ki known as Nova Scotia for over 400 years.

Instructor	Dr. C. Boulatoff	**Email**	Boulatoff@dal.ca
Class time	T & R 1:05 PM-2:25 PM	**Location**	CHEM226
Office hours	W 2 PM -3 PM	**Course site**	Brightspace
Term	Fall 2026	**Format**	Two lectures per week, in person

Course overview

Psychology and Economics—also known as behavioural economics—uses insights from psychology and other social sciences to improve our understanding of economic decision-making. The course compares standard economic models with evidence showing how people actually form judgments, make choices over time and under uncertainty, respond to social influences, and interact with institutions.

The course combines foundational theory, empirical research, classroom experiments, and real-world applications. Topics include present bias and self-control, heuristics, prospect theory, social preferences, beliefs and attention, mental accounting, emotions and well-being, behavioural finance, choice architecture, public policy, sustainability, digital platforms, and the ethics of behavioural intervention.

Learning outcomes

- Explain central concepts and models in behavioural economics.
- Identify psychological mechanisms that influence economic choices.
- Compare behavioural evidence with predictions from standard rational-choice models.
- Interpret evidence from experiments and applied behavioural research.
- Apply behavioural concepts to problems in policy, business, finance, and everyday decision-making.
- Design and critically evaluate a behavioural intervention, including its ethical implications and possible unintended effects.

Course Prerequisites

Econ1101

Course materials

Primary text: Corr, P. J., & Plagnol, A. C. (2019). Behavioral Economics: The Basics. Routledge.

Selected chapters, articles, cases, and excerpts will either be publicly available online or posted on Brightspace. These may include work by Kahneman and Tversky; Thaler and Sunstein; Thaler and Benartzi; Allcott; Barber and Odean; Haushofer and Fehr; and Kahneman et al. Additional reference texts include Wilkinson (2008), Wilkinson and Klaes (2022), and Schilbach's publicly available MIT lecture notes.

Unless identified as required, supplementary books and excerpts are optional. Students are responsible for assigned material announced in class or posted on Brightspace.

Assessment

Component	Weight	Purpose and format
Pop-up quizzes (best 6)	**10%**	Brief in-class checks of core concepts, readings, and experiments.
Midterm examination	**25%**	Covers Lectures 1–13; scheduled after Lecture 13. Format and permitted materials will be confirmed in class.
Group behavioural-intervention project	**30%**	Groups of five design an evidence-based intervention; each student leads one section. Includes an approximately five-minute Brightspace video and peer assessment.
Final examination	**35%**	Multiple choice (40%), short answer (30%), and an applied case study (30%).

Assessment details

Pop-up quizzes. Quizzes are completed in class. Only the best six scores count, which provides flexibility for occasional absence or a lower result. Because of this built-in flexibility, missed quizzes are not rewritten.

Midterm. The midterm is scheduled for the first class meeting of Week 8 and covers Lectures 1–13. Lecture 13 will be completed in the second class meeting of Week 7. The midterm follows in the next class meeting. Regular lectures resume with Lecture 15.

Group project. Students will work in groups of five to design an evidence-based, low-cost behavioural intervention for a real economic or social problem. Each student will lead one identified section, while all members remain responsible for the coherence of the proposal. The project culminates in an approximately five-minute video posted on Brightspace, followed by peer comments and rubric-based assessment.

Group project details

Possible topics include recycling, energy conservation, attendance, procrastination, financial decisions, health behaviours, misinformation, fast fashion, or social connection. Groups may propose another topic with the instructor's approval. Each submission must identify who led each section; all five members are responsible for integrating the sections into one coherent intervention proposal.

Student	Section	Main responsibility
1	Problem diagnosis	Define the problem and target population, and explain why the issue matters.
2	Behavioural mechanism	Identify and explain the behavioural concept contributing to the problem.
3	Evidence	Find and summarize relevant research or a comparable intervention.
4	Intervention design	Explain what will be done, how it will work, and where and for whom it will be implemented.
5	Evaluation and ethics	Propose an outcome and simple evaluation method; discuss ethics, unintended effects, or backlash.

Final video

Each group will produce an approximately five-minute video that introduces the problem and target population, explains the behavioural mechanism and supporting evidence, describes the intervention, explains how effectiveness would be evaluated, and acknowledges one important ethical concern or potential unintended effect. Every group member must make a meaningful contribution. The video will be posted on Brightspace near the end of the term.

Peer comments and assessment

Each student will watch and respond to two videos from other groups. For each video, the response must (a) identify one especially effective feature, (b) offer one constructive question or suggestion, and (c) provide a brief rubric-based assessment. Peer input informs only the peer-assessment portion of the grade; the instructor assigns the remaining project marks.

Project component	Course weight
Individual section and contribution	8%
Coherence and quality of the group intervention	7%
Final approximately five-minute video	10%
Peer comments and rubric-based evaluations	5%
Total	**30%**

Detailed instructions, milestones, submission specifications, and the full rubric will be posted on Brightspace.

Final examination. The final is cumulative, with emphasis on students' ability to explain concepts, interpret evidence, diagnose behavioural mechanisms, and propose an appropriate intervention.

Important Dates:

September 22	Last day to add fall term courses
	Last day to drop fall term courses with no financial implications
October 1	December Exam Schedule posted
October 7	Last day to change fall term courses from audit to credit (and vice versa)
	Last day to drop fall term courses without a "W"
November 5	Last day to drop fall term courses with a "W"

Conversion of Numerical Grades to Final Letter Grades following 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 schedule

The sequence below is the planned schedule. Readings and activities may be adjusted to support the pace of learning; any changes will be announced in class and on Brightspace.

Week	Date	Lesson Topic(s)	Lectures
1	Sept 8	Course welcome and orientation; syllabus and course expectations; small-group electronic-device policy case; Survey 1. Then: introduction to behavioural economics, rational choice, bounded rationality, methods, and experiments.	Day 1 + Lecture 1
2	Sept 15	Introduction continued; then time preferences and self-control: discounting, present bias, procrastination, self-control, and commitment devices.	Lectures 2–3
3	Sept 22	Self-control continued; then heuristics and biases: System 1 and System 2, availability, representativeness, anchoring, overconfidence, and confirmation bias.	Lectures 4–5
4	Sept 29	Heuristics and biases continued; then risk and uncertainty: expected utility, risk aversion, reference points, loss aversion, framing, and prospect theory.	Lectures 6–7
5	Oct 6	Risk and prospect theory continued; applications of prospect theory; then social preferences: endowment and status quo effects, fairness, inequality aversion, and altruism.	Lectures 8–9
6	Oct 13	Social preferences continued; then trust, reciprocity, social capital, cooperation, public goods, collective action, and institutions.	Lectures 10–11
7	Oct 20	Cooperation and institutions continued; then social norms and behavioural public policy.	Lectures 12–13
8	Oct 27	Midterm examination covering Lectures 1–13; then beliefs, learning, and limited attention.	Midterm + Lecture 15
9	Nov 3	Mental accounting and consumer choice; sunk costs and constructed preferences.	Lectures 16–17
10	Nov 10	From choice to happiness: decision, experienced, and remembered utility; happiness, life satisfaction, and mental health.	Lectures 18–19
11	Nov 17	Behavioural game theory and behavioural finance; then choice architecture and public policy.	Lectures 20–21
12	Nov 24	Choice architecture continued: nudges, defaults, intervention design, paternalism, evidence, and ethics; then behavioural economics and global challenges. Survey 2.	Lectures 22–23 + Survey 2
13	Dec 1	Behavioural economics and global challenges continued: climate, sustainable consumption, misinformation, AI, digital platforms, persuasion, and ethical limits; course synthesis; compare Survey 1 and Survey 2; what behavioural economics can—and cannot—do; final review.	Lecture 24 + synthesis/review

Note: Tuesday, December 8 - Monday classes will be held.

Exam period - Submit: Final Exam (Scheduled by Registrar’s Office during December 11-20)

All Learning Outcomes are assessed.

Late work. Unless otherwise stated in the assignment instructions, late work is subject to a 10% deduction per calendar day and will not normally be accepted more than three days after the deadline. Students who anticipate difficulty should contact the instructor as early as possible.

Missed assessments. There are no make-up pop-up quizzes; the best-six policy provides flexibility. If the midterm is missed, its weight will normally be transferred to the final examination. A missed final examination is handled through the University's formal accommodation and deferred-examination procedures; the date and format will be communicated to eligible students.

Attendance and participation. Regular attendance is expected because experiments, discussions, and quizzes are integral to the course. Participation is not assigned a separate grade, but some learning activities cannot be fully replicated outside class.

Communication. Course announcements, readings, instructions, and schedule changes will be posted on Brightspace. Students should use their Dalhousie email account and include "ECON 2300" in the subject line when contacting the instructor.

Academic integrity. Students are expected to complete their work honestly, acknowledge sources, and follow Dalhousie University's academic-integrity requirements. Suspected violations will be addressed through the applicable University procedures.

Accessibility and accommodation. Students requiring academic accommodation should follow Dalhousie University's established process and are encouraged to make arrangements as early as possible. Students facing short-term circumstances affecting course work should contact the instructor promptly.

Respectful learning environment. Behavioural economics invites disagreement about evidence, policy, freedom, and ethics. Discussion should be analytical, respectful, and attentive to the experiences and dignity of others.

Course Accessibility. You are eligible for accommodations based on protected characteristics such as religion. To begin the process of requesting a formal academic accommodation, contact the Student Accessibility Centre

Please retain this syllabus and consult Brightspace for current announcements and assignment instructions.