
Foundations of Economics for Sustainable Development

Spring 2025

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Office hours: M 1-2 pm and R 1-2 pm
Sections: AFS 6307 (170D) – INR 6708 (1000)
Times/location: R Period 2-4, ROG 0106

Course description and goals

This course examines key questions regarding the economic foundations of sustainable development, including its social, institutional and environmental dimensions. Through readings and class activities, students will learn both key conceptual tools and knowledge of specific case studies to discuss important sustainability issues and dilemmas, including: which trade-offs exist between economic, social and environmental sustainability? What types of economic growth are feasible, if at all? What are the alternatives to economic growth? What examples exist of circular economies? How can agriculture and livestock sectors become more sustainable? What community-level responses are most effective? Is there a role for foreign investment and foreign aid in a more sustainable world? Which institutional architecture will best support a sustainable future?

While examples and readings draw from many different parts of the world (including the Global North), particular focus will be devoted to examining sustainable development challenges and options in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. The analysis will move between the micro-level (e.g., behavior and choices by individuals/households), the meso-level (analysis of sub-sectors) and the macro-level (with countries/regions as units of analysis). Rather than examining theories in detail, the course will encourage reflection on how concepts and models apply to practical contexts.

The course is organized around four thematic learning units. Each covers core topics and skills while allowing students to adapt the course material to their own interests. Targeted at MDP students, for whom it fulfills the core social science requirement, the course is open to interested Master and PhD students from other units on campus, including those with no or limited background in economics.

Class format

The course consists of lectures, group discussions and hands-on activities and will use participatory and experiential modalities to enhance student learning and enrichment. Many of the discussions and activities will occur in small groups, which are formed on the first day of class and will remain the same throughout the semester. Every effort will be made to foster a safe and collaborative learning environment. For these efforts to be successful, it is essential that each student takes responsibility for reading the materials according to the calendar, participating in all activities, and contributing eagerly and actively to both individual and collective learning and progress.

Student learning outcomes

By the end of this course successful students will have gained:

1. Ability to apply relevant economic and social science concepts to the analysis of key sustainability questions, including: which trade-offs exist between economic, social and environmental sustainability? What types of economic growth are feasible, if at all, and what are the alternatives? What are the existing models and examples of sustainable economic sectors?
2. Knowledge of the different aspects of sustainability, including economic, environmental, social and institutional and how these relate to societal resilience and policy choices;
3. Ability to use and interpret key economic development indicators, and a basic understanding of quantitative data analysis;
4. Ability to distinguish and analyze the complex factors affecting individual/household decision-making;
5. Familiarity with the context of policy-making and political economy issues.

Reading

- A Banerjee and E Duflo, (2011) *Poor Economics*, Public Affairs, New York (required)
- Szirmai, A. (2015) *Socio-Economic Development*, Cambridge University Press (suggested) or other development economics textbook (if in doubt, ask me).

All other required reading will be available on the course Canvas site.

Grading and Assignments

The learning components and related assignments are briefly described below. Detailed instructions along with specific requirements and grading criteria will be provided on the Canvas course website. The cumulative number of points for this course is 1000.

- **Attendance and participation (100 points):** Much of the learning occurs in class and is a function of students' commitment to attend classes and participate actively. You are expected to complete readings before each class, submit assignments by the deadlines, contribute constructively to class activities, and be respectful of others. This component will be assessed through your participation in the classroom and on the Canvas discussion board. A grade will be given at the end of the semester, but you can always ask the instructor at any point in the semester where your performance stands.
- **Class presentation/activities (3 @50 points each, for a total of 150 points):** Each student is to contribute to class learning by signing up for oral presentations or for leading class activities (individually or in groups). These assignments give students the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of the class material and share their reflections on the readings, thus contributing to collective learning.
- **Unit-based assignments (each 150/200 points for a total of 750):** For each learning units, you are to submit an assignment that demonstrates your knowledge and understanding of the relevant class material, as well as your ability to apply the concepts studied. The assignments will consist of individual or group work – and include a mix of data-reporting exercises, situational analyses and case comparisons.

The grading scale is as follows:

	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	E
Tot %	94-100	90-93	87-89	83-86	80-82	77-79	73-76	70-72	67-69	63-66	60-62	<60

CLASS SCHEDULE

The instructor reserves the right to make changes to this schedule during the semester.

Unit 1: Key concepts

Jan 16: Intro to sustainability, and its multiple dimensions. Key economic concepts: differences between income and wealth; trade-offs; values, externalities and prices. Why may individual choices not be sustainable and which tools exist to encourage sustainable choices? What are the differences between rich and poor countries?

Jan 23: Social inclusion; definitions of Poverty and Inequality; deep dive into inequality data over time and across space; the concept of intersectionality to identify pockets of disadvantage.

Jan 30: *Resilience*: How do shocks affect well-being? How do communities and societies cope with climate change and other shocks? How is wealth related to resilience? How does resilience manifest in individuals, communities and whole societies? What does a systemic perspective of responses to climate change look like?

Unit 2. MICRO: Individual/household choices and their sustainability

Feb 6: Introduction to behavioral economics: What is limited rationality? How do people make choices? What is the role of social norms in decision-making? Application to one of the following: parent's fertility decisions; household education choices; Conditional Cash Transfers.

Feb 13: Application of behavioral economics to saving, credit and investment decisions: When and how do (poor) people save and invest? How can credit and insurance institutions better serve (poor) people? Why and how do people become entrepreneurs? What are the constraining or enabling factors to successful investment and entrepreneurship?

Feb 20: Collective action problems: the prisoner's dilemma and the tragedy of the commons; how to foster cooperation to overcome collective action problems. Application to a case of natural resource management at community level.

Unit 3: MESO: An analysis of different sectors and their sustainability

Feb 27: Smallholder agriculture and actors in global value chain systems – what is the role of agriculture/livestock/fishing for development and food security? What are the gender and socio-political dimensions along value chains? What is the role of markets? How can agricultural sectors become more sustainable and GVC more inclusive?

Mar 6: Enabling Policies for Agriculture/Livestock/SMEs: Which policy and institutional environment best support well-being and food security for households involved in food

value chains? Where are the greatest gaps: application of science/knowledge or lack of political will/capacity? Which examples exist of improved enabling environment?

Mar 13: Microfinance: pitfalls and promises of the microfinance revolution. Gender aspects of microfinance interventions. Incorporation of credit and saving schemes in development programs: analysis of progress so far.

Spring Break: March 15-23: Enjoy!

Unit 4: MACRO: Economic Growth, Green Growth and De-Growth

Mar 27: The experience of developing countries in the 20th century – What are the benefits of economic growth? What are the implications of structural change? Is industrialization essential for developing the economy? What is the role of policy?

April 3: Critiques to the economic growth model: Green economy, decarbonization and de-growth as alternative paradigms: what are their main differences? What do proponents of De-growth say and what are the applications in real contexts (e.g. Buen Vivir)?

April 10: Is there a sustainable future for extractive resources in developing countries? What are the role and effects of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)? Who benefits and who loses in the recipient countries? Can FDIs ensure sustainability and how?

April 17: The international economic order and the development architecture (The World Bank, IMF and the UN agencies). Does foreign aid contribute or hinder economic development? What are the perspectives from aid critics and grass-root organizations in aid receiving countries?

University Policies and Resources

Grading in this class is consistent with UF policies available. These can be found [here](#). Requirements for class attendance, make-up exams and assignments follow University policies, which can be found by clicking [here](#). More details for this course can be found on the Canvas course site.

Student Honor Code

All students should abide by current [UF policies and guidelines](#), which define student honor code and student conduct code. Students are responsible for all content they generate for the course, regardless of how the work is generated.

In particular, note that UF students are bound by **The Honor Pledge**, which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code (<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-honor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor.

E-learning Supported Policies can be found at: <https://elearning.ufl.edu/supported-services/>.

Students requiring accommodation

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodation should connect with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, <https://disability.ufl.edu/get-started/>). Once registered with DRC, students will receive an accommodation letter, which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

Campus Helping Resources – Health and Wellness

U Matter, We Care: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit [U Matter, We Care website](#) to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.

Counseling and Wellness Center: [Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website](#) or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.

Student Health Care Center: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or [visit the Student Health Care Center website](#).

University Police Department: [Visit UF Police Department website](#) or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).

UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; [Visit the UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website](#).

Campus Helping Resources – Academic

E-learning technical support: Contact the [UF Computing Help Desk](#) at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.

Career Connections Center: Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services.

Library Support: Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

Teaching Center: Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352- 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.

Writing Studio: 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.

Student Complaints On-Campus: [Visit the Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code webpage for more information](#).

Other Campus Resources for Students

Dean of Students Office (<https://dso.ufl.edu>; 352-392-1261) provides a variety of services to students and families, including Field and Fork (UF's food pantry);

https://dso.ufl.edu/areas_services/hitchcock-field-fork-pantry/) and New Student and Family Programs (https://dso.ufl.edu/areas_services/new-student-family-programs/).

Multicultural and Diversity Affairs (<https://multicultural.ufl.edu/>; 352-294-7850) celebrates and empowers diverse communities and advocates for an inclusive campus.

Statement Regarding Evaluations

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available from this website (<https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>). Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at the public results website (<https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>).

In-class Recording

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or guest lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student