

**Syllabus for ECON 100**  
**Understanding Global Poverty**  
**William & Mary**  
**Fall 2023**

Instructor: Ranjan Shrestha  
Office: Chancellors Hall 461  
Class Meeting: MW, 2:00-3:20pm, Tucker 222 (Sec 01)  
MW, 3:30-4:50pm, Tucker 222 (Sec 02)  
Office Hours: MW, 5:00-6:00pm; Fri, 9:00-10:00am; or by appointment  
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### **Course Description**

A significant fraction of the world's population lives in poverty. Over 600 million people, that is around 8 percent of the global population, live on less than \$2.15 per day, the criterion used by the World Bank to define extreme poverty. If we use a slightly higher criterion of less than \$3.65 per day, almost a quarter of the global population would be classified as poor. The poor lead lives characterized by undernutrition, illiteracy, unemployment, poor health, insecurity, and exclusion from many markets. In this course, we will explore different aspects of global poverty to understand its prevalence, its causes, and the various ways that have been proposed to fight it. First, we will explore how poverty is defined and measured. Second, we will discuss the causes of poverty and the factors that perpetuate it within a society. Finally, we will discuss policies undertaken by governments to improve the lives of the poor, and whether these policies have been effective in reducing the incidence of poverty.

This is a COLL 100 course and has a strong non-written communication component. Students will work on a project that will involve searching for publicly available data for their assigned country to determine how it has performed economically over the last few decades. They will also conduct a literature search on anti-poverty programs in the country. They will then present their findings to their peers during in-class presentations and a poster session over the course of the semester.

### **Objectives**

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- compute various social indicators in order to demonstrate their understanding of the value as well as the limitations of commonly used measures of economic well-being.
- locate and process country-specific data in order to demonstrate how the economic performance and well-being in that country has changed over time.
- explain various economic terminology and concepts to effectively engage in discussions about government poverty reduction policies.

## Text and Course Materials

No textbook is assigned for this course. Students will be directed to journal articles that are accessible to William & Mary affiliates or are available at the library. The following books are recommended if you want to further your understanding of development economics:

- *Poor Economics* by Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo [highly recommended]
- *The Bottom Billion* by Paul Collier
- *The Elusive Quest for Growth: Economists' Adventures and Misadventures in the Tropics* by William Easterly

I will post links to the readings related to topics covered in class on Blackboard.

## Course Project

The course provides you an opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of the institutional background of a low- or middle-income country, gauge its economic progress over the last few decades, and evaluate the country's policies to tackle poverty. You will be placed in a group (of around 4 students) that will be assigned a particular country. Over the course of the semester, you will work with your group to build a website using Google Sites that provides a broad overview of the country, the wellbeing of its people, and the anti-poverty policy environment.

The group website will consist of three major components discussed below:

First, your website will provide a general overview of the country, providing information on demographics, political system, colonial history, economic development, major industries, trade, etc. This part of the website will be created by the group as a whole.

Second, each member of your group will work on data for the country to create charts and graphs that provide an overview of the socioeconomic progress made by the country in the last 3-4 decades. This part will also include a comparative analysis with equivalent data from a developed countries of your choosing (such as a rich neighboring country, the United States, Japan, or a western European country). Each student in the group should focus on different indicators and should not replicate the graphs of other group members. For example, one student in the group could focus on health indicators, another on income/expenditure measures, another on education outcomes, etc.

Third, each group member will conduct a literature search on papers using a randomized controlled trial (RCT) on a policy-relevant issue in the country (or a neighboring one), focus on one specific paper, summarize it, create a research poster, and present it to the class during a poster session. You have some flexibility in choosing the papers as long as the RCT has a poverty-related component to it and the paper is published in a reputed economics journal. The papers that you choose can be related to a transfer program (such as a cash transfer program, food subsidy program), health subsidy or health insurance program, workfare program, educational subsidy program, among others. After revising your poster based on feedback from me and your peers, you will post your final poster on your country website.

## **Project Due Dates**

Wed, Sep 13:            Group formation

### **Part 1: Country overview**

Fri, Sep 22:            Draft of country overview presentation due by 5:00pm

Week of Sep 25:        Country overview group presentations

Fri, Sep 29:            Country overview incorporated into website due by 5:00pm

### **Part 2: Country trends**

Fri, Oct 6:             Draft of country trends presentations due by 5:00pm

Week of Oct 16:        Country trends group presentations

Fri, Oct 20:            Country trends incorporated into website due by 5:00pm

### **Part 3: Policy evaluation**

Wed, Oct 18:           Literature search due by 5:00pm: list five journal articles involving RCTs conducted in your assigned country (or a neighboring one). I will pick one of the five for you to focus on. If I feel that your literature search is inadequate, I will pick a separate article for you.

Mon, Nov 6:            Summary of assigned article

Wed, Nov 15:           Draft of poster on assigned article due by 5:00pm

Week of Nov 27:        Poster sessions

Week of Dec 4:        Poster sessions

Fri, Dec 15:            Final website including posters due by 5:00pm

Note: The dates are set provisionally and may be adjusted during the semester. If the dates have to be changed, I will announce the revised dates in class and post a revised syllabus reflecting the new dates.

## **Student Assessment and Grading**

Numeric scores on the assessments will be converted to a weighted average overall course score using the following weights:

### **Part 1: Country overview (total 15%)**

- Draft: 5%
- Presentation: 10%

## **Part 2: Country trends analysis (total 20%)**

- Draft: 5%
- Presentation: 15%

## **Part 3: Policy evaluation (total 40%)**

- Literature search: 5%
- Summary of research article: 10%
- Draft of poster: 5%
- Poster session: 20%

Website: 10%

Feedback to peers: 10%

Participation and attendance: 5%

At the end of the semester, your weighted average course score will be calculated by applying the weights, listed above, to your scores on the assessments. Your weighted average course score will then be converted to a letter grade using the following scale: 93% and higher = A, 90%-92.9% = A-, 87%-89.9% = B+, 83%-86.9% = B, 80%-82.9% = B-, 77%-79.9% = C+, 73%-76.9% = C, 70%-72.9% = C-, 67%-69.9% = D+, 63%-66.9% = D, 60%-62.9% = D-, and 59.9% and below = F.

The last date to add/drop classes on Banner is **Monday, Sep 11**. The last day to withdraw from the course is **Monday, Oct 30**.

## **Late submission policy**

Please plan to submit your work well before the deadline. If you submit an assignment after the deadline has passed, there will be no penalty if both of the following conditions are met:

- 1) You present credible, documented evidence that an unforeseeable, extenuating circumstance beyond your control, e.g., illness, prevented you from submitting the assignment on time.
- 2) You submit the assignment as soon as it is feasible to do so.

If either of the two conditions is not met, I will deduct ten percent of the score for each week or fraction of a week that the assignment is submitted late. For example, if an assignment is due at 5:00pm on Friday, and you submit it at 5:01pm on Friday, then I will deduct ten percent of the score.

## **Procedures for Accommodating Disabilities**

William & Mary accommodates students with disabilities in accordance with federal laws and

university policy. Any student who feels they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a learning, psychiatric, physical, or chronic health diagnosis should contact Student Accessibility Services staff at 757-221-2512 or at [sas@wm.edu](mailto:sas@wm.edu) to determine if accommodations are warranted and to obtain an official letter of accommodation. For more information, please visit [www.wm.edu/sas](http://www.wm.edu/sas).

## Support for Mental and Physical Well-Being

William & Mary recognizes that students juggle different responsibilities and can face challenges that make learning difficult. There are many resources available at W&M to help students navigate emotional/psychological, physical/medical, material/accessibility concerns, including:

- The W&M Counseling Center at (757) 221-3620. Services are free and confidential.
- The W&M Health Center at (757) 221-4386.
- For additional support or resources & questions,

Contact the Dean of Students at 757-221-2510.



- For a list of other [resources](#) available to students, see:

## Writing Resources Center

The Writing Resources Center, located on the first floor of Swem Library, is a free service provided to W&M students. Trained consultants offer individual assistance with writing, presentation, and other communication assignments across disciplines and at any stage, from generating ideas to polishing a final product. To make an appointment, visit the WRC webpage [www.wm.edu/wrc](http://www.wm.edu/wrc).

## Honor Code

You are expected to follow the William & Mary Honor Code. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. Please refer to the Student Handbook and the [William & Mary Honor Council website](#) for information regarding the Honor System.

Although you will be relying on other students' feedback as you produce your website and presentations, they are your own construction. The use or incorporation of any AI-generated content (from ChatGPT, Dall-e, etc.) in assignments is not allowed. Having another student produce the content of your website and presentations will also be deemed a violation of the College's Honor Code. So will suspected cases of plagiarism of outside sources on any of the components of

the class project. Any submitted work can be reviewed, as needed, for plagiarism, lack of citation, and improper use of AI-generated content.

## Course Schedule<sup>†</sup>

- Week 1: Introduction
- Week 2: National income: GDP, GNP, income per person
- Week 3: Economic growth: from Malthus to Solow
- Week 4: Demographic transition: explaining global population growth from 600 million in 1700 to 7.7 billion in 2019
- Week 5: Poverty: poverty line, headcount ratio, depth of poverty, absolute vs. relative poverty  
*Country overview group presentations*
- Week 6: Inequality: Gini coefficient, absolute vs. relative, Kuznets curve
- Week 7: Library visit (Monday, Oct 9)  
  
Poverty traps: role of nutrition, health, and education; fetal origins, childhood health insults, and the intergenerational transmission of poverty
- Week 8: *Country trends group presentations*
- Week 9: Randomized controlled trials (RCTs)
- Week 10: Transfer and safety net programs in poor countries
- Week 11: Education and health policies
- Week 12: Select issues: market failures—land, credit, and labor markets in poor countries; Foreign aid, redistribution within countries
- Week 13: Online class on Monday, Nov 20. Followed by Thanksgiving break.
- Week 14: *Poster sessions*
- Week 15: *Poster sessions*

Note: Readings for each week will be posted on Blackboard.

<sup>†</sup> I will adjust speed and coverage of materials as we proceed, so deviations from the schedule are possible. The main purpose of the course schedule is to provide an outline of what we intend to cover.

### SYLLABUS VERSION 1.0.

The syllabus is a dynamic document that may be revised over the course of the semester. This version of the syllabus is active starting on Aug 30, 2023.