

ECON 700: Selected Topics in Labour Market Performance and Policy

Instructor: Dr. Jim Stanford stanforj@mcmaster.ca

The instructor will be present at McMaster and available for consultations by appointment during the last two weeks of September (from September 18-29). He will be available on request for additional on-line or e-mail consultation and supervision throughout the rest of the semester.

Course Summary: This course will consider a range of current topics related to work and employment, labour market functioning, and labour market policy interventions. Topics include: employment strategies of firms; sectoral and regional trends in job-creation; “precarious” work and its consequences; demographic change and the ageing of the workforce; trends in labour force participation; unemployment and underemployment; trade unions and collective representation; new models of employee “voice;” trends in wage determination; inequality and low-wage work; wage and employment regulation; and the labour market impacts of technology, automation, and digital platforms. Each topic will be introduced and considered in light of economic theory and published applied research, with policy implications explored in the context of Canadian labour market experience.

Open to: Students in the MAEP program. Depending on enrollment levels, selected students from the fourth-year Economics B.A. program, and graduate students in the Labour Studies program, may also be accepted on approval of the instructor. Interested B.A. and Labour Studies students should apply by e-mail directly to the instructor at stanforj@mcmaster.ca.

Schedule: The course begins with a series of six sessions organized within a compressed schedule during the last two weeks of September. Students will then select a labour market policy issue of interest, and work on integrated policy projects related to that topic over the term (with support from the instructor via individual and group internet meetings). See detailed course schedule and list of assignments below.

Course Requirements: Student assignments are organized around an integrated policy project involving the comprehensive and multi-dimensional analysis of a selected labour market policy problem. Each student chooses a labour policy issue or problem of interest, describes the scope and importance of the problem, reviews previous economic research in the topic area, identifies a range of potential policy responses, recommends one favoured response, and considers its risks, challenges, and possible effects. The problem of interest may relate to a specific industry, occupation, or segment of the labour market, or to its overall performance and efficiency. This structure of work anticipates and simulates the responsibilities of an employed analyst working in an applied policy research setting (such as government, a research institute, a business, or a university). Students submit several incremental assignments related to their chosen policy topic; details of these assignments are listed below.

Readings: A reading list corresponding to the topics covered in the initial course meetings will be distributed at the first lecture.

Course Schedule:

September 18th, 6:00 pm - 8:20 pm

Introduction to course and labour economics. Neoclassical theory of employment and labour markets.

September 20th, 6:00 pm - 8:20 pm

Heterodox approaches to labour policy; demographic trends and labour supply; sources of statistical information on labour issues.

September 22nd, 3:00 pm - 5:00 pm

Regional and sectoral labour market trends; wage growth and dispersion; wage regulation; collective bargaining.

September 25th, 6:00 pm - 8:20 pm

New forms of work and employment; precarious work; self-employment; inequality and discrimination.

September 27th, 6:00 pm - 8:20 pm

Labour market information; job search and matching; occupational and skills mismatches; productivity growth and labour income.

September 29th, 3:00 – 5:00 pm

Technology, automation, and employment; digital platforms and “gig” jobs; policy options for regulating informal and independent work.

Course Assignments: The specific assignments and their associated weighting in course grading are listed below. With the exception of the initial in-class presentation on assigned readings, all assignments relate to the student’s selected policy topic. Written work should be e-mailed as attachments to the instructor by 11:59 pm Hamilton time on the date of the deadline.

Letter grades will be provided for each assignment. Weighted average grades will be calculated according to the following scoring system (an average score will be rounded up to the next level if it exceeds the halfway point between levels):

Grade	Points
A+	12
A	11
A-	10
B+	9
B	8
B-	7
C+	6
C	5
C-	4
D+	3
D	2
D-	1
F	0

Assignment List:

In-class presentation on selected assigned readings: Sept. 22 - 29 **10%**

Initial policy proposal: October 9 **15%**

Up to 500 words, explaining why the identified policy problem is important and should be researched, introducing potential policy responses (if relevant, “doing nothing” is a legitimate option), and outlining the proposed research program. Written in form of a briefing note to a senior policy official.

Literature review: October 23 **15%**

Up to 2500 words, summarizing existing policy research in the area and its relevance to the selected policy topic; must cite at least 10 published sources.

Policy deck: November 13 **15%**

Presentation in slide format summarizing the research findings and policy recommendations, such as would be delivered to a policy-making committee.

Commentary article: December 4 **15%**

Up to 1000 words, a short and accessible commentary article (such as might be published in a newspaper or an on-line blog), introducing general readers to the problem and explaining and advocating the proposed policy response.

Final research paper: January 15, 2018

30%

Up to 5000 words, fully referenced (APA Style), which introduces the problem, summarizes existing literature, reviews empirical evidence, identifies and explains the theoretical framework being used to analyze the problem, outlines potential options for policy response, advocates a preferred policy response, and considers risks and opportunities associated with that recommendation.

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Course Changes: The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes.

Student Responsibility for E-Mail Contact: It is the responsibility of students to check their McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes. In this course, the instructor will make announcements in class and by using the course e-mail distribution list.

Academic Integrity: Students are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences—e.g., the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty, please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at: <http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity>.

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- Plagiarism – for example, the submission of work that is not one’s own or work for which other credit has been obtained.
- Improper collaboration in group work.
- Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.