

Instructor Note: *The following are the actual, unedited evaluations of AECN/NRES 883 Ecological Economics (it was numbered as 896 at that time) provided by the Spring, 2006, class which involved 14-students... with about one-half of these students in each group (on-campus and off-campus/distance ed). We have added a "Comment" at the end of each section to help in understanding the Evaluations. We will do our best to address the concerns expressed herein, as well as offered by you during the time you take the class. As you will learn when you see our "metaeconomics," the notion of empathy... walking-in-your-shoes and modifying instructor behavior accordingly... is prominent in the economics and the approach in this class. If you have specific questions/concerns after reading these materials, please feel free to contact me directly (Gary Lynne, glynnel@unl.edu; the approach of the course is described at <http://agecon.unl.edu/lynne/ecocon/ecoconsyllabus.htm>)*

PLEASE READ ALL OF THESE COMMENTS on the prerequisites issue... *including our reactions as Instructor(s) to them... before passing judgment on the prerequisites in this course. Also, please keep in mind that the matter of how to handle prerequisites when offering a graduate level course (in this case a graduate level course in a kind of economics) to majors in other disciplines is very much a challenge, with no easy answers. We can only say that: let the grades we assigned in the offering this 2006 spring speak for themselves. If this course was, in 2006, as "economics intensive" as the comments suggest, with this being a problem in this course, then the grades should have been much lower... in that only one-student in the spring 2006 class had substantive amounts of formal training in economics. Also, please keep in mind that these written evaluations were done by students before the final grades were assigned. We do our best to review the basic principles for those with minimal backgrounds, which often helps even the most advanced students as well, and to encourage the students with more background training to use the course as an outline for more intensive study on their own (we help these students find the more advanced papers that need attention). If you have specific questions about prerequisites, and how your background might work, please feel free to contact us.*

If prerequisites were not required, should they have been? List examples.

Yes, future students should be better informed that this is a very economics intensive course. I would recommend those who have only taken a microeconomics course be wary of taking this course, only because they may feel very overwhelmed at the terminology. Maybe the first few lessons could be refreshers for those who have not had an econ course for a while or at all. Maybe a list of terms/concepts that will be discussed should be presented in the syllabus/provided before the course starts, so potential students can see if it is above their current level of understanding, if it something they can easily learn, or if they are well educated already.

Not particular prerequisites are necessary, since we really cover the very surfacial materials. and which prerequisites are required all depends on which major you're already, because Ecol.Eco. course provide information cross displines.

No real prereq. required, just a lot of time.

I think this could be a killer class at a bit deeper economic level - but then I wouldn't have had the prerequisites! So, the prerequisites (and I think Gary's OK was a valid prerequisite) were fine for where we were. A slightly more advanced class might add more economic or mathematical prereqs, but that's another class!

Yes, an economics undergraduate degree.

Economics. I had no experience in that area.

YES!!! Economics, and environmental ecology or something of that nature

Definetly, they should. Basic of economy Philosophy International Policy

Comment by Instructor(s):

We will continue to work on this problem, re: prerequisites, and necessary background. This is not an advanced class; it requires only a basic understanding of economic ideas learned in the part of an introductory economics class that focuses on microeconomics. (We do not draw on macroeconomics other than a bit on national income accounting). Advanced classes in economics are almost completely mathematics these days: We used essentially no mathematics in the Spring 2006 offering of the class (perhaps we do need to use some, in that it does add precision, as in the Spring 2005 offering).

As Donna Woudenberg... who was a student in the spring 2005 offering and served as the Teaching Assistant in the spring 2006 offering... noted in an e-mail to me (August 22, 2006),

“The class I TA'd was what I would call "economics lite" as compared to the class I took. I actually thought the calculations we did at the beginning of the class I took were beneficial for me in understanding the rest of the class, but I've told you that before. It would be pretty hard to do anything like that for a mixed class, though, especially in 10 weeks. In 10 weeks, the philosophy side of ecological economics will fill in all the gaps left by calculations - but that is basically what ecological economics is all about, anyway - ethics, reason, empathy, etc. - or at least it's what appeals to me about the discipline. Lots of calculations aren't really necessary as long as everyone can make the distinctions in their minds between neo-classical econ, env econ, behavioral econ, ecol econ, etc. by the end of the class - but then they will need to read.” (Donna indicated she would also be willing to answer questions, dialogue about the prerequisites... she can be reached at dwoudenberg2@unl.edu)

The course is open to every graduate student, no matter their main discipline. It is intended to be integrative in nature, working at the interstices (where they overlap) of several disciplines, including especially that cross-over area of behavioral economics and ecology/community: Metaeconomics as the overall guiding framework is inherently about the integration of “I&We,” “Self&Other,” “Private&Public,” “Individual&Organization,” “Individual&Ecosystem”, “Individual&Community.” (see: <http://metaeconomics.unl.edu/>). Your continued feedback on how this is working, as we interact in the class, will be appreciated.

On Grades, as Associated with Background Training in Economics

We should also add, in terms of grades, for the 14-students in the class, we gave 7-As, 5Bs, and 2Cs. Everyone passed the class, albeit the Cs do create problems (not insurmountable) for graduate students. We also do not use a “curve” nor do we have a “quota.” If everyone produces enough points to be given an A-grade, we will award all As. The distribution showing mainly As and Bs (and, recall that only one-student, who did earn an A, had advanced training in economics) suggests that the

prerequisite (i.e. one introductory course with the emphasis on microeconomics) is working. We will continue our efforts to ensure each participant's success (e.g. during Spring, we provided a "tutorial" section of the Discussion Board; students could raise questions about basic economic principles, with feedback provided by other students, the teaching assistant and the instructor. We are here to help!).