

COURSE SYLLABUS

UPL 310/URP 506

Urban Economics, 3 units

Fall Semester, 2026

Tuesdays/Thursdays 3:30pm to 4:50pm

T.C. Parker Building 009

Office Hours: Tuesday/Thursday 1:30pm to 2:30pm

Wednesday 12:30pm to 2:00pm

(or by appointment)

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Course Description

This course investigates the economic forces behind the structure of cities. The prevailing question is: “How do individuals and firms choose where to locate in the absence of planning and regulation?” We review the underlying assumptions of so-called location behavior, the base-level urban issues that arise from individual and firm location behavior, and what this means for the effectiveness of urban planning and policy decisions. While much of the course centers on exploring urban economics theories, part of the course is devoted to empirical review of urban economics theories and their relevance to urban planning.

Learning Objectives and Outcomes

1. Describe the study of urban economics.
2. Articulate microeconomics concepts within the framework of urban economics.
3. Differentiate and evaluate bid-rents and density gradients.
4. Relate urban public policy issues to economic activity.
5. Initiate empirical research that investigates accuracy of urban economics theories.

Textbook and Readings

The textbook for this course is the ninth (2019) edition of *Urban Economics* by Arthur O’Sullivan (ISBN 9780078021787). Chapters required for each class meeting are defined in the schedule below. Any further readings will be available via Blackboard. All readings are to be completed before the respective class meeting.

Assignments and Grading

Assignment	Description	% of Grade
In-Class Participation	Your contribution to class discussion, group work, and in-class assignments will be accounted for in your grade. Generally, only students who show a clear lack of engagement or perpetual absences or tardiness will experience a reduced grade in this category.	15%
Readings Quizzes	Beginning Week 10, a reading quiz will be given at the start of class to quiz general takeaways from the readings of that day. One-third of the value of each quiz will be for taking the quiz (i.e., arriving to class on-time). Reading quizzes will be in short-answer format and each quiz is weighted equally. Your lowest scored three quizzes will be dropped from your grading.	20%
Problem Sets	A total of two to three urban economics applied mathematical problem sets will be assigned. While the value of individual problem sets may differ, your percentage score on each will be equally weighted in determining your grade. Students are afforded one opportunity to make corrections to problem sets to recover credit.	30%
Midterm	A closed book/note in-class midterm will cover material up to the date of the midterm. Format will mostly entail short-to-medium answer questions.	15%
Term Paper (graduates)	A term paper is due by the end of the day (i.e., 11:59pm) on <u>Wednesday, October 9</u>. The paper shall be in the form of a literature review on a topic of your choice that investigates the empirical legitimacy and implications of a concept/theory in urban economics. The topic shall be selected through consultation with me. Readings beyond the scope of class is required. <u>A draft proposal is due by 11:59pm on Friday, October 30</u>. Late proposals will cost 2.5 percentage points per day late up to 20%. All papers shall be twelve to sixteen double-spaced pages, use 12-point Times New Roman font, with one-inch margins. Title pages, appendices, bibliographies, etc. do not count towards the page requirement. Further specifications will be provided in class or via Blackboard.	20%
Final Exam (undergraduates)	A closed book/note, comprehensive, in-class final exam will be given. The exam will have two elements: Short-answer questions and a hand-written essay responsive to a comprehensive prompt relating to course material.	

Course Schedule

Week	Date	Module	Topic	Readings*
1	August 20	Introduction	Course Overview; Introductions	—
2	August 25		Review of Economics Principles; Defining Urban Economics	Chs. 1 and 24 in O'Sullivan
	August 27			Ch. 2 in O'Sullivan
3	September 1			—
	September 3	Urban Economic Theory and Implications	Agglomeration; Location Theory	Ch. 3 in O'Sullivan
4	September 8			Ch. 4 in O'Sullivan
	September 10			Ch. 5 in O'Sullivan
5	September 15			—
	September 17			Ch. 6 in O'Sullivan
6	September 22		Urban Labor Market; Cities and Regions	Ch. 7 in O'Sullivan
	September 24			Ch. 8 in O'Sullivan
7	September 29		Land Rent	—
	October 1			Ch. 10 in O'Sullivan
8	October 6		Monocentric Model; General Equilibrium	Ch. 14 in O'Sullivan
	October 8	—	ACSP CONFERENCE / NO CLASS	
9	October 13	Midterm Exam**	Review	—
	October 15		Exam	—
10	October 20	Expanded Concepts and Empirical Review	Core-Periphery Models; Polycentricity; Regional Science	Krugman (1991)
	October 22			Mallett and Wilsey (2026)
11	October 27		Gibrat's Law; Zipf's Law	Gabaix (2016)
	October 29		Developing Economies	Chauvin et al. (2017)
12	November 3		Commute Time (Dis)utility; Wasteful Commuting; Travel Time Budgets	Giuliano and Small (1993)
	November 5			Mokhtarian and Chen (2004)
13	November 10	Planning and Policy Implications	City/Metropolitan Size	Melo et al. (2009)
	November 12		Local Government and Taxation	Carruthers (2003)
14	November 17		Housing and Land Use	Fischel (2004)
	November 19		Parking and Transportation	Brueckner and Franco (2018)
15	November 24	—	THANKSGIVING BREAK	
	November 26			
16	December 1	Course Conclusion	Closing Lecture	—
TBD (December 3-9)		Final Exam	Monitor this webpage for the dates/times of all final exams.	

* Readings are complimentary to lectures. Contents of readings do not define all content that will be covered on the given topic.

** This does not correspond with midterm grade reporting, which is simply a time to report mid-semester performance.

Grading Scale

Grade	Percent Range
A	[90%, 100%)
B	[80%, 90%)
C	[70%, 80%)
D	[60%, 70%)
F	[0%, 60%)

Student final grades are based on the performance of course deliverables and the weights defined in the Assignments and Grading section. No class curve will be used for grading. At the instructor's discretion, grade cutoffs may be uniformly adjusted, and the total point value of individual assignments or assessments may be reduced, to better reflect the instruction provided.

Grading Rubric

Mathematical problems will be graded principally on procedural correctness. That is, if proper procedures were used but a student incidentally arrives at an incorrect answer, most points will be awarded, whereas getting to a correct answer but using improper methods will result in few if any points being awarded. For this reason, showing work is imperative. For mathematical problems that require the use of a procedure to draw conclusions — for example, a question that asks you to determine whether a statement is true for which performing calculations is required — guessing the right answer or arriving at the right answer using improper methods will receive no credit.

Written assignments, including term papers or essays, are graded *holistically*. This means that, rather than determining your grade by subdividing your writing into individually evaluated elements, the writing is evaluated as an integrated whole, considering how its various elements work together to accomplish its purpose. In making this holistic assessment, I consider how well a written assignment demonstrates:

- **Application of and relevance to course content:** The writing needs to demonstrate appropriate application of, and relevance to, material covered in the course.
- **Adequate depth:** The writing needs to demonstrate more than a surface-level understanding of relevant concepts.
- **Adequate breadth:** Especially for literature review assignments, the writing needs to demonstrate engagement with relevant surrounding literature and topics that provide necessary context for, or qualify, the central question or topic.
- **Literary/topical synthesis:** The writing needs to demonstrate not only a narrative summary of topics or individual bodies of literature, but also synthesis across topics and bodies of literature that produces meaningful takeaways.
- **Responsiveness to feedback:** The final product needs to demonstrate meaningful consideration of feedback provided for improving the paper.

It is assumed that all students enrolled in this course have sufficient basic writing skills. While poor writing may adversely affect the clarity and effectiveness of a written assignment, basic writing skills are not directly evaluated as a separate criterion in this course.

Academic Honesty

Membership in the AAMU learning community imposes upon the student a variety of commitments, obligations, and responsibilities. It is the policy of AAMU to impose sanctions on students who misrepresent their academic work. These sanctions will be selected by appropriate classroom instructors or other designated persons consistent with the seriousness of the violation and related considerations.

Examples of academic dishonesty include but are not limited to:

1. **Plagiarism, taking someone else's intellectual work and presenting it as one's own (which covers published and unpublished sources).**

Using another's term paper as one's own; handing in a paper purchased from an individual or agency; submitting papers from living group, club or organization files; or using another's computer program or document are all examples of plagiarism. Standards of attribution and acknowledgment of literary indebtedness are set by each discipline. Faculty are encouraged to include disciplinary or class-specific

definitions in course syllabi. Students should consult with their department or with recognized handbooks in their field if in doubt.

2. Cheating is unacceptable in any form.

Examples include consultation of books, library materials or notes during tests without the instructor's permission; use of crib sheets or hidden notes; intentional observation of another student's test; receipt of a copy of an exam or questions or answers from an exam to be given or in progress; substitution of another person for the student on an exam or another graded activity; deliberate falsification of lab results; submission of falsified data; alteration of exams or other academic exercises; and collaboration on projects where collaboration is forbidden.

3. Falsification, forgery or alteration of any documents pertaining to assignments and examinations.

4. Students who (cooperate or in other ways promote) participate in promoting cheating or plagiarism by others (or who take credit for the work of others) will also be in violation of this policy.

Students participating in any violation of this policy must accept the consequences of their actions. Classroom instructors and/or university review/appeals committees and administrators will assess the sanctions for violation of this policy. The seriousness of the violation will dictate the severity of the sanction imposed.

Academic sanctions may include but not be limited to any of the following:

- verbal or written warning
- lowering of grade for assignment/activity
- lowering of term grade
- failure of class assignment

Administrative sanctions may include but not be limited to either of the following:

- suspension from the University
- dismissal from the University

University Attendance Policy

A student is permitted one (1) unexcused absence per credit hour generated by the class. Accordingly, three (3) unexcused absences are permitted for this course. Students remain fully responsible for maintaining course progress, including making up for missed content.

Tutorial Assistance

In addition to office hours, tutorial assistance for undergraduate courses can be obtained through the [Tutorial Assistance Network](#).

Accommodations for students with disabilities

Alabama A&M University is committed to providing equal access to all educational programs and ensuring compliance with applicable laws, including Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the applicable titles of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 for qualified students with disabilities.

If you require or may benefit from disability accommodation, please contact Disability Services within the first week of classes by visiting their office at the Health and Counseling Center or emailing them at disabilityservices@aamu.edu.

Bibliography

- Brueckner, Jan K., and Sofia F. Franco. "Employer-paid parking, mode choice, and suburbanization." *Journal of Urban Economics* 104 (2018): 35-46.
- Carruthers, John I. "Growth at the fringe: The influence of political fragmentation in United States metropolitan areas." *Papers in regional science* 82.4 (2003): 475-499.
- Chauvin, Juan Pablo, et al. "What is different about urbanization in rich and poor countries? Cities in Brazil, China, India and the United States." *Journal of Urban Economics* 98 (2017): 17-49.
- Fischel, William A. "An economic history of zoning and a cure for its exclusionary effects." *Urban Studies* 41.2 (2004): 317-340.
- Gabaix, Xavier. "Power laws in economics: An introduction." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 30.1 (2016): 185-206.
- Giuliano, Genevieve, and Kenneth A. Small. "Is the journey to work explained by urban structure?." *Urban studies* 30.9 (1993): 1485-1500.
- Krugman, Paul. "Increasing returns and economic geography." *Journal of political economy* 99.3 (1991): 483-499.
- Mallett, Zakhary, and Nicholas Wilsey. "Beyond Dispersion: Density, Industry, and Political Fragmentation in the Geography of Regional Job Centers." *Journal of Regional Science* (2026).
- Melo, Patricia C., Daniel J. Graham, and Robert B. Noland. "A meta-analysis of estimates of urban agglomeration economies." *Regional science and urban Economics* 39.3 (2009): 332-342.
- Mokhtarian, Patricia L., and Cynthia Chen. "TTB or not TTB, that is the question: a review and analysis of the empirical literature on travel time (and money) budgets." *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice* 38.9-10 (2004): 643-675.