

PPHA 39404: Practicum on Inequality, Household Finance, and Tax Policy

Instructor: Damon Jones

Meeting Time: Tuesdays, 6:30p-8:00p

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 4:00p-5:00p (or by appointment)

Teaching Assistants: Gabriela Saade, Mark Sheppard

Office Hours: by appointment

Service Requirement: One 3-4 hour (virtual) tax preparation shift per week, for 6 weeks

Course Objective: The first component of this course will feature seminar discussions of inequality in the US, with respect to income, gender and race, and how these interact with US tax policy. We will have a focus on income transfers to low-income households such as the Earned Income Tax Credit. We will also review current policy topics in Household Finance, the study of how households save, borrow, and/or use insurance to overcome unexpected changes in household income. In addition, we will discuss the process of filing tax returns, the prevalence of income tax refunds, and the various industries, both non-profit and for-profit, that have arisen around this phenomenon.

Next, students will go into the field, and work as volunteer tax preparers for a local, Chicago non-profit, Ladder Up. Students will be trained as tax preparers (which requires completing a training course), learn how these services are delivered, and will also learn about the various social goals and public benefits that are often coupled with this process. Tax season begins in late January, and the students will volunteer weekly for about 6 weeks, until the end of the quarter. Students are also encouraged, though not required, to continue to volunteer until the end of the tax season, April 15th.

Finally, students will produce a final project as a part of a group project.

COVID-19 Updates: Due to the limitations created by the current pandemic, students will volunteer remotely with the tax preparation nonprofit. In addition, we will be splitting our course time each week between asynchronous lecture videos and group discussion.

This course counts towards both the Finance & Policy Certificate and the Markets & Regulation Certificate.

Course Requirements and Grading: Grades will be based on class participation, homework assignments, a group assignment, and volunteer tax preparation requirements.

1. Tax Preparation Volunteer training (10%)

2. Weekly volunteer shifts with Ladder Up (40%)
3. Weekly reading assignments (10%)
4. Asynchronous lectures and discussion participation (5%)
5. Four (4) writing assignments (15%)
6. Final group project (20%)

Schedule: Lecture will meet on Tuesdays from 6:30pm – 8:00pm. Lecture time will be split between asynchronous video and live discussion. Volunteer tax schedules will differ across student groups.

Homework: Homework will involve short written pieces in response to assigned readings, four longer writing assignments, and a final group project. Work must be handed in by the deadline. For every six (6) hours beyond the deadline, you will lose 5% of your grade, receiving zero (0%) percent once 24 hours have passed. **If you have an extenuating circumstance, please contact the instructor to work something out.**

Schedule of Topics

- **Week 1:** Introduction; EITC, Withholding, & Refunds
- **Week 2: Guest Speaker on Eviction**
- **Week 3:** Inequality I
- **Week 4:** Inequality II; HH Finance I
- **Week 5:** HH Finance II; Tax Policy I
- **Week 6:** Tax Policy II
- **Week 7:** Tax Policy III
- **Week 8:** COVID-19 Pandemic
- **Week 9:** Group Presentations

Accessibility:

This is a classroom committed to access. If there are any changes that can be implemented to facilitate your greater participation, don't hesitate to contact me so that we can make arrangements.

If you require any accommodations for this course, as soon as possible please provide the instructor with a copy of your Accommodation Determination Letter (provided to you by the Student Disability Services office) so that you may discuss with him/her how your accommodations may be implemented in this course.

The University of Chicago is committed to ensuring the full participation of all students in its programs. If you have a documented disability (or think you may have a disability) and,

as a result, need a reasonable accommodation to participate in class, complete course requirements, or benefit from the University's programs or services, you are encouraged to contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. To receive reasonable accommodation, you must be appropriately registered with Student Disability Services.

Please contact the office at (773) 702-6000/TTY 773-795-1186 or gmoorehead@uchicago.edu, or visit the website at disabilities.uchicago.edu. Student Disability Services is located at 5501 S. Ellis Ave.

Title IX Resources and Mandated Reporting¹

As a faculty member, I am considered an “Individual with Title IX Reporting Responsibilities.” This means that if you disclose to me instances of sexual assault, sexual harassment, other sexual misconduct, dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking, I am required to share this information with the Title IX Coordinator of the University. This person’s job is to advise members of our community on their options regarding remaining anonymous, confidentiality, the University’s process for investigating complaints of sexual misconduct, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking, and the University’s disciplinary process.

If you wish to contact the Title IX Coordinator directly about any of these matters, you can do so by emailing bcollier@uchicago.edu, by calling 773.702.5671, or by writing to Bridget Collier, Office of the Provost, The University of Chicago, 5525 S. Ellis Ave., Room 171, Chicago, IL 60637.

If you need someone to talk to who does *not* have an obligation to report sexual misconduct, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking to the Title IX Coordinators, you can reach out to these “Confidential Resources:”

- Sexual Assault Dean on Call (SADoC)
773.834.HELP
- Student Health Service
773.702.4156
- Student Counseling Service
773.702.9800
- Members of the Clergy
(See spirit.uchicago.edu for more information.)

Territory Acknowledgement

¹ Language adapted from the syllabus of Dr. Eve L. Ewing.

I want to acknowledge that our course, at the University of Chicago, takes place on the traditional territory of the Peoria, Potawatomi, and Miami people.