

Economics of Public Policy: Syllabus HS 2025

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<u>Language</u>	English	
<u>Credits</u>	3 CP	
<u>Time / Place</u>	Tuesdays, 10:15-12:00, WWZ S14/S15 (see course directory)	
<u>Literature</u>	Relevant textbook chapters and journal articles will be made available on ADAM	
<u>Exam</u>	TBD	
<u>Office hours</u>	By appointment	

This version: September 9, 2025

Contents and goals

This introductory course sets the stage for students to understand the role of public policy in a market economy. The course includes and combines elements from normative and positive public economics and the constitutional approach to political economy.

The questions discussed include: When and how should and do governments intervene, and how can we test whether an intervention was successful using empirical evidence? How can we prevent that a market failure is replaced by a government failure, and vice versa? What institutions can help us reach an outcome that is both efficient and socially acceptable? What is the role of, and the need for, redistribution? The course provides a theoretical foundation for the economics of public policy and discusses applications from different fields. It is taught by Profs. Hintermann and Stutzer and also includes guest lectures from other faculty members.

Students become acquainted with thinking about public policy from an economics point of view. They become familiar with different theoretical frameworks to define and shape public involvement in a market economy and, more generally, in society. They understand the concepts of market and government failures and the type of interventions that can alleviate them. They learn why public programs need to be evaluated regularly, what principles should guide empirical work and how the results can be interpreted.

The course also provides the fundamentals for other core and field courses in the Master of Economics and Public Policy.

Textbooks

The economic analysis of public policy is the subject of various textbooks that adopt different perspectives considering more or less a public economic or political economy perspective. We draw inter alia on the following textbook when developing our teaching material.

Abelson, P. (2018). *Public Economics: Principles and Practice*. Online:

<http://www.appliedeconomics.com.au/publications/public-economics/index.htm>

Blankart, C. B. (2012). *Öffentliche Finanzen in der Demokratie*. München: Vahlen.

Frey, B.S., and G. Kirchgässner (1994). *Demokratische Wirtschaftspolitik: Theorie und Anwendung*. München: Vahlen.

Gruber, J. (2022). *Public Finance and Public Policy*. 7th Edition. New York: Worth Publishers.

Mueller, D. (2003). *Public Choice III*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tresch, R. (2015). *Public Finance: A Normative Theory*, 3rd Ed. Academic Press.

Voigt, S. (2020). *Constitutional Economics: A Primer*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Freely accessible via the library of the University of Basel (VPN).

Course outline and reading list

Readings: *marks required material; all others are recommended only.

Lecture 1 Introduction: The economic approach to human behavior and public policy

(Sept. 16) Taught by Prof Hintermann and Prof. Stutzer

*Hintermann, B., Molloy, J., Schoeman, B., Götschi, T., Castro, A., Tchervenkov, C., Tomic, U. and Axhausen, K. (2024). Pigovian Transport Pricing in Practice. *WWZ Working Paper* 2021/11, Faculty of Business and Economics, University of Basel. ([Link](#))

Saez, E. (2021). Public Economics and Inequality: Uncovering Our Social Nature. *AEA Papers and Proceedings*, 111, 1-26.

Lecture 2 Market functioning and failure

(Sept. 23) Taught by B. Hintermann

Samuelson, P. A. (1954). The Pure Theory of Public Expenditure. *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 36(4), 387-389.

Samuelson, P. A. (1955). Diagrammatic Exposition of a Theory of Public Expenditure. *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 37(4), 350-356.

Tresch (2015), Chapter 1.

*Tresch (2015), Chapter 2.

Tutorial 1: Friday, September 26, 14:15 – 16:00

Taught by L. Picard, via Zoom

Lecture 3 Externalities and public goods

(Sep. 30) Taught by B. Hintermann

Atkinson, A., & Stern, N. (1974). Pigou, Taxation and Public Goods. *Review of Economic Studies*, 41(1), 119-128.

Baumol, W. J., & Oates, W. (1988). *The Theory of Environmental Policy*, 2nd Ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gruber (2022), Chapters 5-7

*Tresch (2015), Chapter 6.

Tresch (2015), Chapters 5, 7-8.

Tutorial 2: Friday, October 3, 14:15 – 16:00

Taught by L. Picard, via Zoom

Lecture 4 Health policy. Guest lecturer: Prof. A. Meier

(Oct. 7)

Ahammer, A., & Packham, A. (2023). Effects of unemployment insurance duration on mental and physical health. *Journal of Public Economics*, 226, 104996.

Deuchert, E., & Eugster, B. (2019). Income and substitution effects of a disability insurance reform. *Journal of Public Economics*, 170, 1-14.

Liebert, H. (2019). Does external medical review reduce disability insurance inflow?. *Journal of health economics*, 64, 108-128.

Frimmel, W., Halla, M., Paetzold, J., & Schmieder, J. (2024). Health of elderly parents, their children's labor supply, and the role of migrant care workers. *Journal of Labor Economics* (forthcoming).

Lecture 5 The approach of welfare economics and the critique of Public Choice theory

(Oct. 14) Taught by B. Hintermann and A. Stutzer

Besley, T. (2004). Welfare Economics and Public Choice. In: C. Rowley and F. Schneider (eds.). *The Encyclopedia of Public Choice*. Boston, MA: Springer: 933-937.

*Tresch (2015), Chapter 4, p. 57-65.

Tresch (2015), Chapter 3; remainder of Chapter 4.

Lecture 6 The constitutional approach to public policy

(Oct. 21) Taught by A. Stutzer

*Buchanan, J.M. (1987). Constitutional Economics. In: J. Eatwell et al. (eds.). *The New Palgrave: A Dictionary of Economics*, 1st edition. London Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Rawls J. (1958) Justice as Fairness. *Philosophical Review*, 67(2), 164-194.

*Voigt S. (2021). Constitutional Political Economy. In: A. Marciano and G. B. Ramello (eds.). *Encyclopedia of Law and Economics*. New York, NY: Springer.

Lecture 7 Policies of sustainability. Guest lecturer: Prof. F. Krysiak

(Oct. 28)

*Nordhaus, W. (2019). Climate change: The ultimate challenge for economics. *American Economic Review*, 109(6), 1991-2014.

Tales Kurs „Sustainability Tomorrow“ (<https://tales.nmc.unibas.ch/de/sustainability-tomorrow-48/>). In particular, sections 1.1, 1.2 and 2.1 to 2.5 are relevant.

Lecture 8 Redistribution

(Nov. 4) Taught by B. Hintermann and A. Stutzer

Bellani L. and H. Ursprung (2019). The Political Economy of Redistribution Policy. In: R. D. Congleton, B. Grofman and S. Voigt (eds.). *The Oxford Handbook of Public Choice*, Volume 2. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Meltzer, A. H., & Richard, S. F. (1981). A rational theory of the size of government. *Journal of political Economy*, 89(5), 914-927.

Saez, E. (2021, May). Public Economics and Inequality: Uncovering Our Social Nature. In *AEA Papers and Proceedings* (Vol. 111, pp. 1-26).

*Tresch (2015), Chapter 19.

Lecture 9 Social insurance

(Nov. 11) Taught by B. Hintermann and A. Stutzer

Gruber (2022), Chapters 12-13

Staubli, S., & Zhao, Q. (2022). The Long-Run and Distributional Impacts of Public Pensions. Working paper, Department of Economics, University of Calgary, Calgary.

*Tresch (2015), Chapter 20, p. 339-359

Tresch, Chapter 21

Lecture 10 Cost-benefit analysis and discounting

(Nov. 18) Taught by B. Hintermann and A. Stutzer

*Gruber (2022), Kap. 8

Hammitt, J. K. (2007). Valuing changes in mortality risk: lives saved versus life years saved. *Review of Environmental Economics and Policy*, 1(2), 228-240.

Krupnick, A., & Morgenstern, R. (2002). The future of benefit-cost analyses of the Clean Air Act. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 23(1), 427-448.

Nordhaus, W. D. (2017). Revisiting the social cost of carbon. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 114(7), 1518-1523.

Sunstein, C. R. (2024). The Economic Constitution of the United States. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 38(2), 25-42.

Swiss Federal Office of Spatial Development (2022). Value of Statistical Life (VOSL): Empfohlener Wert der Zahlungsbereitschaft für die Verminderung des Unfall- und Gesundheitsrisikos in der Schweiz. [\[Link\]](#)

Viscusi, K. and J. Aldy (2003): *The Value of a Statistical Life: A Critical Review of Market Estimates Throughout the World*. Journal of Risk and Uncertainty 27(1), 5-76.

Lecture 11 Fiscal Federalism. Guest lecturer: Prof. K. Schmidheiny
(Nov. 25)

Brülhart, M., Bucovetsky, S., & Schmidheiny, K. (2015). Taxes in cities. In *Handbook of regional and urban economics* (Vol. 5, pp. 1123-1196). Elsevier.

Kuminoff, N. V., Smith, V. K., & Timmins, C. (2013). The new economics of equilibrium sorting and policy evaluation using housing markets. *Journal of economic literature*, 51(4), 1007-1062.

Tiebout, C. M. (1956). A pure theory of local expenditures. *Journal of political economy*, 64(5), 416-424.

Lecture 12 Behavioral public policy
(Dec. 2) Taught by B. Hintermann and A. Stutzer

Tresch (2015), Chapter 25

Oliver, A. (2015). Nudging, Shoving, and Budging: Behavioural Economic-Informed Policy. *Public Administration*, 93(3), 700-714.

Lecture 13 Research discussion and questions
(Dec. 9)

The date for the written exam is not yet fixed.