

Report on Course Evaluation – ECON4925 Resource Economics

By Danial Ali Akbari, Fall 2022

1- What is working?

Students report a high degree of satisfaction with the course. They also report a high level of interest in the topic and report that they find both the seminars and lectures helping their learning outcomes. Students also report that they show up well prepared to both lectures and seminars. Among the comments they also mention appreciation for the interactive element of the sessions, and that they feel comfortable to ask questions or discuss in class, and that they are satisfied with the feedback and the interaction that they receive.

2- What can be improved?

While students report overall satisfaction with the course, it is also clear that the course is challenging. They find it difficult and report spending a large amount of time on the course. Most of this is likely due to the strongly theoretical (mathematical) content of the course. We should investigate further what kind of additional learning tools could be provided to assist students in their learning outcomes. For instance, I have provided additional manuals on how to draw functions of one variable. Similar tools could make the learning process of the students more efficient. Furthermore, we could change the prerequisites for the course. The course relies on the mathematics of differential/difference equations and dynamic optimization. While we cover these topics during the course, the course ECON4140 – Mathematics 3 at the department covers these topics in detail. Right now, ECON4140 is not a prerequisite for this course, but requiring that could make the students a bit more prepared for the material that we cover. At the same time, there will be tradeoff, as some students who do not want to take a pure mathematics course, would be barred from learning taking this course. Better learning outcome and smaller workload of the students who take this course after taking ECON4140 would then come at the expense of the students who are barred from attending under the new policy. Therefore, such a change should be only conducted after consulting relevant student associations and a more thorough review.

3- What can be done to improve the course?

Among the comments made a few negatives are mentioned. One comment concerns the fact that some seminar sessions run ahead of the material covered in the lectures. This means on Tuesday during the seminar we cover a problem, that relates to the material covered the next day on Wednesday during the lecture. This structure has been intentional. Typically, that has meant that we cover the mathematical details of a model during the seminar, and then focus on the economic interpretation of its predictions during the lecture the next day. Given that students report a high degree of satisfaction with the lectures and seminars, I think this has been mainly appreciated. Nevertheless, we could put in some office hours by the seminar leaders or lecturers to also accommodate those who achieve more satisfactory learning outcomes by having the problem sets reviewed afterwards. Having meaningful office hours has been difficult given the fact that the department has temporary office spaces outside of the campus. That will not be an issue next year. Another comment concerns the interactive element during the seminars and that participation can feel daunting. Students chosen at random are asked to solve the problem at the board or to engage in a discussion. This approach arguably is part of the reason why students report that they show up well-prepared and should be seen as a plus. Finally, a student comments on the fact that it can be difficult to follow along when their classmates are solving parts of the problem at the board. After reading this comment, I have tried to be more vigilant in summarizing the solutions after students, and to solve some difficult parts again to improve the learning outcome of the students. At the same time, having students solve the problem at the board provides a good opportunity to give feedback to the student at the board, and pinpoint

typical mistakes or misunderstandings that students share. As such, this practice is well-motivated from a pedagogical point of view.