

**FACULTY OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND URBAN CHANGE
YORK UNIVERSITY**

**ENVS 5115 (3 credits) Ecological Economics
Fall 2024**

**Eric Miller ewmiller@yorku.ca
Mondays 9:30AM – 12:20 PM HNES 141**

Short Course Description

This course introduces economic concepts and approaches that help to understand and resolve environmental issues, with the broad goals of sustainability, efficiency, and just distribution. Topics include: markets and market failure, the economic consideration of ecosystem services and pollution, ways of directing economies to internalize costs that are otherwise externalized onto others, informing decisions in the public interest, considering trade-offs over time, sustainability, human behaviour, wellbeing, global trade, and the roles of government in affecting (un)employment and income and inflation and wealth.

Expanded Course Description

This course aims to enhance your ecological economic literacy by developing your skills in: 1) appraising scholarly publications that focus on environment-economy interactions and dependencies; 2) applying economic theory to analyze contemporary environmental problems and strategize for solutions; 3) succinctly communicating theory and solutions to an interdisciplinary audience, in writing and verbally. Topic-specific learning objectives are identified in the detailed course outline.

No background in economics is required or assumed, nor will it be a problem if you have already taken a course or a degree in economics.

Each session will follow the pattern of: an appraisal of the required readings, an issue seminar relevant to the topic, and a wrap-up discussion about the topic with additional applications. In advance of each session, you are expected to watch a 30-minute lecture video, then read the assigned readings.

Topics covered by this course are:

- Markets in an environmental and commons context
- Ecosystem services in an economic context
- Non-market valuation of benefits and damages
- Directing markets to affect outcomes
- Informing public decisions with the consideration of tradeoffs
- Discounting and the reconciliation of trade-offs over time
- Human behaviour and its assumptions and implications
- Sustainability involving the consideration of natural and human and built capital
- Wellbeing and the evolution of measures of economic performance
- Global trade and its environmental implications
- Unemployment and inflation and its management

Anticipated Course Readings or Texts

The detailed course outline identifies two required academic articles per topic and optional supplementary readings. Readings are hyperlinked on the course website to be routed through the library proxy.

Evaluation: Grading and Course Requirements

Four assignments will be evaluated: a literature appraisal (20%), an issue seminar (30%), a policy brief (40%), and participation in class discussions and using the course website (10%).

Appraisal of required readings. You will appraise the required readings of one topic of your choice (potentially working with a partner). About 15 minutes will be used to verbally present an organized appraisal of the readings in relation to the learning outcomes of that topic (which are introduced by the lecture), which might include clarifying confusing / ambiguous / contentious aspects of the material, providing connections with other relevant literature (e.g. which recently cited the article), and/or applying the content to contemporary issues. And another 15 minutes will be used to engage your peers in a purposeful discussion. You should not waste time summarizing the readings.

Issue seminar. You will lead a seminar about the issue topic of one session of your choice (potentially with a partner). The seminar will identify relevant economic theory and scholarly research that help to understand why the issue exists and what could be done to solve the issue or to make its outcomes are more manageable. The 50-minute seminar will include a class discussion or another activity that supports peer learning. This seminar will also help to prepare for writing your policy brief, which will be due after classes are finished and assessed separately as another assignment.

Policy brief. You will write a policy brief on the “issue” that was the topic of your seminar. The brief will clearly and succinctly recommend a response to the issue, based on an appraisal of alternative options, and relevant background material. References must include at least three peer-reviewed articles (beyond the required readings) that will be parenthetically referenced in the background section. The brief should not exceed 1500 words (excluding figures, tables, and references) and will follow the template and submission instructions on the course website. You are encouraged to submit a draft of the issue and options, including one option identified as the preferred option, to receive non-graded qualitative feedback.

Participation in student-led discussions. You will be evaluated on the quality of your verbal contributions to in-session discussions and/or written ones posted on the course website. One good in-session contribution is equivalent to half of a good written one posted on the website. Attendance is a necessary but not sufficient condition for satisfactory participation that begins to count in the second session.

Additional guidance and grading details of these assignments are posted on the course website.

Important Course information

All students are expected to familiarize themselves with the following information, available on the [Senate Committee on Academic Standards, Curriculum & Pedagogy webpage](#)

- Senate Policy on Academic Honesty and the Academic Integrity Website
- Ethics Review Process for research involving human participants
- Course requirement accommodation for students with disabilities, including physical, medical, systemic, learning and psychiatric disabilities
- Student Conduct Standards
- Religious Observance Accommodation

Intellectual Property Notice

These course materials are designed to be used as part of the ENVS 5115 course at York University and are the property of the instructor unless otherwise stated. Third-party copyrighted materials (such as book chapters, journal articles, music, videos, etc.) have either been licensed for use in this course or fall under an exception or limitation in Canadian copyright law. Copying this material for distribution (e.g. uploading material to a commercial third-party website) may lead to a violation of Canadian copyright law.