

## ECON 1222

### What Economics Tells Us about Our Life and Social Policy

Department of Economics · Hong Kong University of Science and Technology  
Summer 2026

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| Item               | Details                                                                                                                                                                           |
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| Instructor         | Professor Hyunchaeol Bryant Kim, Department of Economics                                                                                                                          |
| Email              | hbkim@ust.hk                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Lectures           | Monday, Wednesday, Friday 14:00–17:20                                                                                                                                             |
| Venue              | LSK1010                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Office hours       | I do not hold separate office hours. I will always be the last to leave the classroom after every session — if you have any questions or concerns, just come and talk to me then. |
| Teaching Assistant | TSOI Pang (pangtsoi@ust.hk)                                                                                                                                                       |
| Course website     | CANVAS ( <a href="http://canvas.ust.hk">http://canvas.ust.hk</a> )                                                                                                                |

### 1. Course Overview

This course will provide students with opportunities to critically read and interpret social science literature on human capital development over the life cycle. It will also give students an opportunity to discuss, through examples, how this evidence could be applied in real-world policy design. The questions to be addressed in this course focus on human capital development such as health, education, and labor policies over the course of one's life. The examples will help students understand how to interpret available data and use it to evaluate different policy programs.

### 2. Course Objectives

First, the course aims to challenge students to think critically about social policies in the health, education, and labor areas, and to draw conclusions based on empirical data. Second, it provides several examples of real-life policy designs and allows students to understand the benefits of the methodologies developed and used in economics and the social sciences to evaluate social policy programs. Lastly, the course discusses the strengths and weaknesses of different social policies based on supporting evidence with data.

### 3. Student Learning Outcomes

- Analyze findings and perspectives on social issues of human capital development (health, education, and labor) around the world. (SILO 1, 2, 3)
- Use economic research findings to propose suitable policies to tackle real-world problems (e.g., importance of early childhood environments and investments, gender inequality, job protection programs, and COVID-19 policies). (SILO 1, 2, 3)
- Develop interpersonal skills: communicate to a large audience by presenting and justifying ideas on public policy using statistical evidence. (SILO 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6)

### 4. Reading Materials (Important — Read This Section Carefully)

**All reading materials for this course are posted on CANVAS. There is no textbook to purchase — the readings ARE the course. You are expected to read the assigned materials for each topic BEFORE coming to class.**

**The readings are examinable.** The exam is drawn directly from the assigned readings together with the lectures. Exam questions will ask you to build an argument using specific empirical evidence — the studies, research designs, and findings you will only know if you have actually read the papers. Lecture slides alone will not be sufficient to answer the exam well. Students who skip the readings consistently do poorly on the exam.

**Practical advice:** you are not expected to follow every technical detail of every paper. For each reading, make sure you can answer four questions: (1) What is the policy question? (2) What data and research design were used? (3) What is the main finding, and how large is the effect? (4) What are the limitations, and can we interpret the result as causal? If you can answer these four questions for every assigned reading, you are prepared for both the class discussion and the exam.

- **Where:** CANVAS → Modules → the folder for each topic.
- **When:** before the session in which the topic is lectured (see Section 6, Course Schedule).
- **Why it matters:** the readings feed directly into (i) your country-group presentation, (ii) the class discussion, (iii) the battle debates, and (iv) the exam.

## 5. Class Format

Each session (3 hours 20 minutes) is structured in blocks to keep everyone engaged:

| Block   | Time (approx.) | Activity                                                                                                |
|---------|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Block 1 | 40 min         | Country-group presentations on the previous session's topic (3 selected groups × 10 min each, plus Q&A) |
| Block 2 | 35 min         | Whole-class discussion and cross-country comparison                                                     |
| Break   | 20 min         | Rest and transition                                                                                     |
| Block 3 | 105 min        | Lecture on the new topic (includes 5 min at the end for exit ticket submission on CANVAS)               |

**Country groups.** In the first week, students will be assigned to nine (9) standing country groups of 5–6 students based on their home country or a country of interest (for example, Hong Kong, Macau, Mainland China, Taiwan, Korea, Japan, Singapore, India, or another country you are interested in). These groups study the previous session's lecture and readings and take turns presenting their country-specific case study during Block 1 (3 groups present per session).

**Exit ticket (attendance).** There is no separate roll call. In the last five minutes of every session, you will submit a short exit ticket on CANVAS: (1) the most persuasive piece of evidence you encountered today, and (2) one question you still have. The exit ticket serves as the attendance record, and selected questions will open the next session's discussion. Exit tickets can only be submitted during class time.

## 6. Course Schedule

| Session | Block 1–2 (Presentations & Discussion)                             | Block 3 (Lecture)                                                                                     |
|---------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1       | Introduction; formation of nine country groups (5–6 students each) | Topic 1 — Policies related to Pregnancy: Fetal Origin Hypothesis. I am pregnant: how do environmental |

| Session | Block 1–2 (Presentations & Discussion)                                  | Block 3 (Lecture)                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|---------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|         |                                                                         | conditions during pregnancy affect my child's life?                                                                                                                                                  |
| 2       | Group presentations & discussion (Topic 1)                              | Topic 2 — Early Childhood Policy. I have a three-year-old son: what are the long-term effects of childhood health and education?                                                                     |
| 3       | Group presentations & discussion (Topic 2)                              | Topic 3 — Working Mother and the Role of the Father. What are the long-term effects of a working mom on child outcomes?                                                                              |
| 4       | Group presentations & discussion (Topic 3)                              | Topic 4 — Friends. How important are my friends in my life?                                                                                                                                          |
| 5       | Group presentations & discussion (Topic 4)                              | Topic 5 — Determinants of Life Success. What are the determinants of life success?                                                                                                                   |
| 6       | Group presentations & discussion (Topic 5)                              | Topic 6 — Sex Discrimination and Parental Investment. Does sex discrimination still exist?                                                                                                           |
| 7       | Group presentations & discussion (Topic 6)                              | Topic 7 — Policy Failures: COVID-19. How do policy interventions fail to achieve their goals? A close look at COVID-19 policies (lockdowns, school closures, vaccination incentives, cash transfers) |
| 8       | Group presentations & discussion (Topic 7)                              | Battle debate 1 — COVID-19 policy                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 9       | Battle debate 2                                                         | Synthesis and review                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 10      | Battle debate 3                                                         | Synthesis and exam review                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 11      | Exam (during class time; in person, closed book, no electronic devices) |                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

**Reading reminder:** the readings for each topic are posted on CANVAS and must be read before the session in which that topic is lectured.

## 7. Course Requirements and Grades

| Component                                            | Weight                         |
|------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Country-group presentations                          | 30%                            |
| Attendance & class participation                     | 20%                            |
| Exam (in person, closed book, no electronic devices) | 50%                            |
| Battle debate                                        | Extra credit (up to +5 points) |

**You are expected to read the assigned reading materials on CANVAS for each topic before coming to class. Every component below assumes you have done so.**

### 1) Country-group presentations (30%)

Students are assigned to nine standing country groups of 5–6 students in the first week. Throughout the sessions, three selected groups present for 10 minutes each during Block 1, introducing how the previous session's topic applies to their country: what the current policy is, what evidence exists, and what should

change. Your presentation must engage explicitly with the assigned readings for that topic — a description of your country's policy with no reference to the evidence base will receive a low grade.

**Peer evaluation (crucial).** Peer evaluation is the most critical component of this grade. After each presentation, every team member confidentially evaluates the contribution of each teammate using the rubric in Appendix A. Individual presentation grades are adjusted by peer-evaluated contribution, so free-riding will directly lower your grade.

**Q&A focus.** Q&A is the core of the presentation. I will ask many questions during and after your presentation, and a substantial part of your presentation grade depends on how well you answer them. This tests whether you actually understand the material — not whether you can recite it.

**No manuscripts.** Writing out a presentation script and reading it aloud is strictly prohibited. You may use brief keyword notes, but reading from a prepared manuscript (on paper or on screen) will result in a significant grade penalty. Speak from understanding, not from a script.

## 2) Attendance and class participation (20%)

- **Exit tickets (10%):** submitted on CANVAS in the last five minutes of every session, as described in Section 5. Your attendance score is based on the number of sessions with a submitted exit ticket.
- **Participation (10%):** you earn participation points for good questions or comments in the classroom, for substantive contributions to the CANVAS discussion threads (about 200 words is recommended), and for submitting evaluator scoresheets during the battle debates. Multiple routes are available, so students who are less comfortable speaking in a large class can still earn full participation credit.

## 3) Exam (50%)

- The exam is held during class time in the final session (Session 11).
- It is less likely to consist of multiple-choice questions and more likely to consist of open-ended questions requiring you to make your own argument. You must be able to make your argument based on scientific evidence.
- **The exam covers both the lectures and the assigned readings posted on CANVAS.** You will be asked to name and use specific studies — their research design, their findings, and their limitations. A well-argued answer that cites concrete evidence from the readings scores far higher than a plausible-sounding answer based on general opinion.
- **The exam is fully in person and closed:** no internet, no AI tools, and no electronic devices are allowed during the exam.

## 4) Battle debate (extra credit)

Three times during the course (Sessions 8, 9, and 10), we will hold a structured 3-versus-3 battle debate on a contested policy proposition — for example: "School closures during COVID-19 were a policy failure" or "Mandatory work-from-home orders were the right policy."

- Debaters (3 per side) can earn up to 5 extra points added to their final course score. Debater slots are assigned by application; priority is given to students who have not yet presented.
- The debate is evaluated by your peers: all other students act as evaluators, scoring both teams on use of evidence and structure of argument. Debaters' extra credit is determined by the average of the peer evaluators' scores. Submitting a completed evaluator scoresheet counts toward your participation score.
- Debates are won with evidence, not rhetoric. The readings on CANVAS are your ammunition.

## 8. Generative AI Policy

- **Exam: no AI.** The exam is fully in person with no internet, no AI tools, and no electronic devices.
- **All other coursework:** you are free to use generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini) as you wish for presentation preparation, discussion posts, and debate preparation.
- **The presentation Q&A is the accountability check:** because I will question you extensively on your own slides and arguments, and manuscripts are prohibited, you must genuinely understand whatever you present — regardless of which tools you used to prepare it. AI can help you organize what you have read; it cannot substitute for reading.

## 9. Others

### Academic Integrity Statement

Absolute integrity is expected of every HKUST student in all academic undertakings. Integrity entails a firm adherence to a set of values, and the values most essential to an academic community are grounded on the concept of honesty with respect to the intellectual efforts of oneself and others. Academic integrity is expected not only in formal coursework situations, but in all University relationships and interactions connected to the educational process, including the use of University resources. A HKUST student's submission of work for academic credit indicates that the work is the student's own. All outside assistance should be acknowledged, and the student's academic position truthfully reported at all times. In addition, HKUST students have a right to expect academic integrity from each of their peers. For further information, see the HKUST Code of Academic Integrity (<http://ugadmin.ust.hk/integrity/regulations-1.html>). Unless you have the express permission of the instructor, you should not buy or sell course materials. Such unauthorized behavior constitutes academic dishonesty.

### Disabilities

If you have a disability that requires accommodation, especially additional time for exams, please let me know as early as possible in the semester so that I can make arrangements. If you have any questions regarding this, please do not hesitate to contact me or speak to me directly.

## Appendix A. Peer Evaluation of Team Contribution

After your team's presentation, rate each teammate (excluding yourself) on each criterion below on a scale of 1 (far below expectations) to 5 (far above expectations). Evaluations are confidential and are seen only by the instructor and the TA. Individual presentation grades are adjusted by the average peer-evaluated contribution.

| Criterion                 | Description                                                                                                                     | Weight |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| Contribution to content   | Research, analysis, and development of the team's core arguments and evidence (including engagement with the assigned readings) | 30%    |
| Preparation & reliability | Met internal deadlines, attended team meetings, completed assigned parts                                                        | 25%    |
| Collaboration             | Communicated constructively, integrated others' work, helped teammates                                                          | 20%    |
| Delivery contribution     | Role in preparing slides and delivering/answering questions during the presentation                                             | 15%    |
| Initiative                | Proposed ideas, solved problems, went beyond the assigned minimum                                                               | 10%    |

Optional comment: briefly describe one concrete contribution of each teammate (one sentence each). Concrete comments help me interpret the scores fairly.