

Department of Economics, HKUST

ECON 4134 Economics of Uncertainty and Information

Course Outline

Instructor

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Course Webpage: <https://canvas.ust.hk>

Lecture time: Tuesdays & Thursdays 1:30 – 2:50 p.m

Lecture venue: Rm 1033, LSK Building

Teaching Assistant

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Tutorial time: Thursdays 3:00 – 3:50 p.m.

Tutorial venue: Rm 1014, LSK Building

Course Description, Objectives and Learning Outcomes

All human endeavors are constrained by limited knowledge – about the laws of nature, external events in the past, present and future, how other people (including ourselves) are going to behave, etc. Life is filled with decision problems without perfect information of their consequences. In view of these, research on the decision making and strategic interaction under risk and uncertainty have been extremely active for the past few decades. This course aims to provide an introduction to this exciting field of research and suggestions for further exploration. The first part of the course is devoted to the economics of uncertainty and covers topics including the expected-utility model, market allocation of risks and asset pricing. The second part of the course is devoted to the economics of information and covers topics including moral hazard, mechanism design, and information aggregation in the market.

Per Program Intended Learning Objective (PILO) for BSc in Economics and Finance, upon completing the course, students are expected to be able to

- Understand the logic, scientific basis, and critical thinking of economic analyses (PILO 1)

- Apply frameworks and concepts in information economics to explain rationales for commonly observed social and business phenomena (PILO 4);
- Apply frameworks and concepts in information economics and game theory to explain the reasoning behind strategic interactions among agents and make predictions concerning the outcomes of the interactions (PILO 4);
- Identify distortions and inefficiency arising from misalignment of interests between individual agents and the total welfare, and implications for policy intervention (PILO 8);
- Develop simple theoretical models and apply them to analyze current business issues (PILO 9).

Reference Books

The primary learning materials are lecture and lecture notes. Lecture notes/slides will be posted a few days prior to the lecture for preview.

The following books provide excellent coverage of topics discussed in the course.

- Asset Pricing
 - *Intermediate Financial Theory* by J. Danthine and J. Donaldson, 2014, Academic Press.
(Available online through HKUST library)
- Game Theory and its Applications
 - *Game Theory: An Introduction* by S. Tadelis, 2013, Princeton University Press.
- Mechanism and Contract Design
 - *Contract Theory* by P. Bolton and M. Dewatripont, 2005, MIT Press.
 - *An Introduction to the Economics and Information: Incentives and Contracts*, by I. Macho-Stadler and D. Perez-Castrillo, 1995, Oxford University Press

Prerequisite

Econ 3014 Managerial Microeconomics,

or

Econ 3113 Microeconomic Theory I & Econ 3133 Microeconomic Theory II

Basic calculus and algebra is expected.

Assessment

Participation (3%)

You are expected to behave civilly and showing respect to the instructors, teaching assistants and fellow students in lectures, tutorial sessions, and office hours. Common-sense classroom etiquette, such as turning off or silencing mobile phones during class time, is also expected.

Problem Sets (10%)

Problem sets are assigned **almost every week**. They will be posted on Canvas on Thursdays, and due the following Wednesday.

Group study/discussion is encouraged, but you have to turn in **your own written answers** (word-to-word copying is **not accepted**). Grading of problem sets is based on effort instead of accuracy. The score of the lowest one will be dropped.

Please submit your homework online at canvas.ust.hk, and make sure it is completely and successfully uploaded. Full solutions will be posted on Canvas, and more challenging questions will be discussed in the tutorial sessions.

In this assessment, you are allowed to use generative artificial intelligence (AI) to aid you in any manner. However, you must give proper credit for any use of generative AI.

(PILOS 1, 4, 8)

Midterm Test (27%)

The midterm test is tentatively scheduled on Tuesday, **October 20** during the regular lecture time. The style and format is similar to questions in problem sets.

There is **no make-up test**. Students who miss the midterm test with a legitimate and documented reason will have the weight of the midterm test transferred to the final exam. Missing the test without a legitimate and documented reason will result in zero marks.

(PILOS 1, 4, 8, 9)

Final Examination (59%)

The final exam is **cumulative**. The style is similar to the midterm exam. The style is similar to questions in problem sets.

The exam is centrally administered during December 8-19 and the date and time will be announced by the ARR.

(PILOS 1, 4, 8, 9)

Rubrics for Final Grades

A Range: Excellent Performance

Students demonstrate a strong grasp of course materials, effectively utilize tools introduced, excel in problem sets, and perform exceptionally on the midterm and exam. They display exceptional analytical skills, critical thinking, and effective class participation.

B Range: Good Performance

Students exhibit a solid understanding of course materials, proficient use of tools introduced, and competent completion of problem sets. They perform reasonably well on the midterm and exam. They show commendable analytical skills, effective critical thinking, and class participation.

C Range: Satisfactory Performance

Students demonstrate an adequate understanding of course materials, satisfactory use of tools introduced, and completion of problem sets. Their performances on the midterm and exam are fair. They display acceptable analytical skills and class participation.

D: Marginal Pass

Students show limited understanding of course materials, inconsistent use of tools, and incomplete performance in problem sets. They perform poorly on the midterm and exam. Their class participation is minimal.

F: Fail

Students display a lack of understanding of course materials, inadequate use of tools, and unsuccessful completion of problem sets. Their performances on the midterm and exam are disappointing. They show little to no participation in class discussions.

Regrading

In order to avoid problems associated with self-selection (grading mistakes that increase and decrease scores can happen, but only the one that decrease scores will be reported), disputes on individual questions will result in re-grading of the entire exam by the instructor. The re-graded score will be final and it may be higher or lower than the original one. Requests for re-grading must be submitted in writing to the instructor within one week since the score is first published.

Academic Honesty and Integrity

Academic integrity and honesty are key values of HKUST. Cheating and plagiarism are treated with **zero tolerance**. Please read the information on academic integrity carefully. It is your responsibility to be familiar with the Academic Honor Code and the content on the Academic Integrity website (<http://www.ust.hk/provost/integrity>). The Code is to be **strictly enforced**. All cheating cases are to be reported to the University **without exception**.

Outline and Schedule

The plan below is tentative and may be modified as we go. Major changes will be announced in advance in lectures and/or Canvas.

1. Review of decision-making under uncertainty (3 lectures)

- Expected utility
- Risk attitude and optimal risk bearing

2. Market allocation of risk (6 lectures)

- General equilibrium of pure exchange economy
- The market of contingent claims
- Asset market
- Consumption-based CAPM

3. Games of incomplete information (5 lectures)

- Review of basic game theory
- Bayesian games
- Auction
- Bargaining/ double auction

4. Information processing (6 lectures)

- Belief updating
- Disclosure
- Common-value auction
- Voting
- Rational herd/ information cascade

- Reputation

5. Mechanism design (5 lectures)

- Revelation principle
- Designing efficient mechanisms
- Designing second-best mechanisms

6. Moral hazard (if time permits)

- Risk-incentive tradeoff
- Multitasking, dynamic incentives, career concern