ECON 317 – The Economics of Canadian Health Care

Fall 2021 Course Outline

All times below are in terms of Victoria, B.C. time.

- **Instructor**: Christopher Willmore ([willmore@uvic.ca](mailto:willmore@uvic.ca))
- **Lectures**:
  - TWF 1:30 PM – 2:20 PM, Zoom
  - Some lectures may be rescheduled. This will be announced in advance.
- **Office hours**: Mondays 12 PM – 2 PM (12:00 – 14:00), IRC
- **Course site**: [https://bright.uvic.ca](https://bright.uvic.ca)

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University Policy on Inclusivity and Diversity

“UVic is committed to upholding the values of equity, diversity, and inclusion in our living, learning and work environments. We know that diversity underpins excellence, and that we all share responsibility for creating an equitable, diverse and inclusive community. We recognize that many of the identities of members of groups with historical and/or current barriers to equity intersect and that therefore, equity, diversity and inclusion can be complex. We value the contributions that each person brings, and are committed to ensuring full and equal participation for all in our community.” UVic Equity and Diversity

Instructor addendum: While I expect most of you will treat your peers with the traditional BC kindness and respect, I’d like to take a moment to remind you all in writing that this course and its associated web site and meeting space are intended to be a safe and comfortable place for everyone to learn in. Systematic disrespect or other ill treatment of a person or group of people will not be tolerated.

Course objectives and essential course rules

Economics studies the allocation of limited resources among unlimited needs and wants. This course will introduce students to how this takes place in the context of contemporary Canadian health care.

By the end of the course, students will understand how Canada’s health system is organized, and be able to conduct basic economic evaluations of health care. To this end, the course will focus on A.C.T.-ing: Analysis, Critique & Communication, and Theory.

Analysis: you’ll be expected to apply economic concepts to the analysis of real-world situations. Health care is a practical discipline, and the real world is a messy place. It’s important to understand first-hand the issues that come up when theory meets practice.

Critique & Communication: A focus of this course will be to train you to read published papers on the economics of health care, and to be able to understand and critique them. You will also be trained in how to effectively communicate your ideas and critiques to the relevant audiences.

Theory: A focus of this course will be making sure that students understand the current theory underlying cost-effectiveness analysis of health care.
Essential Course Rules

- “Be excellent to each other.” — Bill S. Preston, Esq.
- Give credit where credit is due
- Give all course components an honest try
- Don’t keep concerns bottled up
- Ask for help if you need it

University Policy on Accessibility

Are you a student with a learning disability, ADHD, mental health issue or long-term recurring physical or sensory disability? Do you have chronic health issues?

If you do, and you want to be part of our programs, or need academic accommodations to address barriers to your education, you need to register with the Centre for Accessible Learning.

After you register, we’ll work with you, your instructors and others to create learning environments that are equitable, inclusive and usable.

Instructor addendum: I’ve had to deal with a number of disabilities myself. If you are a student who needs this sort of accommodation, don’t hesitate to contact me personally. Once you do, I’ll work with you one-on-one and do my best to come up with a custom plan that will hopefully let you get the most benefit possible from this course.

Your mental and physical health are more important than any course. You are taking this course during a time of world crisis and great uncertainty, and having trouble with concepts and deadlines that in a “normal” year would be easy for you is understandable. If you need extra help, or just someone to talk to, don’t hesitate to reach out and send me an e-mail at willmore@uvic.ca
Regarding Attendance (and what it means in an online course)

University Policy on Attendance

“Students are expected to attend all classes in which they are enrolled. An academic unit may require a student to withdraw from a course if the student is registered in another course that occurs at the same time. …

An instructor may refuse a student admission to a lecture, laboratory, online course discussion or learning activity, tutorial or other learning activity set out in the course outline because of lateness, misconduct, inattention or failure to meet the responsibilities of the course set out in the course outline. Students who neglect their academic work may be assigned a final grade of N or debarred from final examinations.

Students who do not attend classes must not assume that they have been dropped from a course by an academic unit or an instructor. Courses that are not formally dropped will be given a failing grade, students may be required to withdraw and will be required to pay the tuition fee for the course.” (UVic Calendar)

That’s the standard “boilerplate”. As for this course, this term:

- **Lectures** will be given live over Zoom on the scheduled dates and times. (If an exception needs to be made, say, due to instructor health, I’ll let the class know beforehand.) Each lecture will have its own unique Zoom link, which will be posted on Brightspace before the lecture starts.

During the lecture, I ask that students mute themselves and turn video off. Chat will also be turned off except for certain points during (and just after) the lecture, when it will be turned on to allow students to ask questions. This way of doing things has been developed in cooperation with students taking my online courses during the pandemic, and is a compromise between delivering the necessary content and responding to students who attend the live lecture.

The live lectures will be recorded, and the video will be uploaded to Brightspace as soon as possible. That means **you do not need to attend the live lectures – it’s fine to keep up via the recordings**. Each lecture will have an associated multiple choice quiz, which you may attempt up to three times (though the questions may be different each time). Your mark on the quiz is the highest mark achieved. The quiz will cover material from the lecture and the associated required reading. These questions are intended to be very basic, so that anyone who attended the lecture and did the reading can answer them correctly. These quizzes are due on the last day of term (Dec. 6).
Online Office Hours

In addition to official office hours, you’re always free to send questions via e-mail to willmore@uvic.ca – if you’re stuck, or frustrated, or need advice, or feel overwhelmed, remember that you’re not alone. I’m here to help, and I want you to succeed in a way that helps you learn and grow without sacrificing your mental and physical health.

Online office hours will be held on Mondays, from noon to 2:00 PM, in the #econ317 channel on dal.net. IRC, or Interactive Relay Chat, is a plaintext protocol created in 1988 and remains a popular 'chat room' protocol. It IS a plaintext protocol, which means it is **NOT encrypted**, so **do not reveal any private information**, and **do not use your real name as your nickname**. Pick a creative nickname to minimize the chances of its being in use.

There are many ways to connect. If you haven't used IRC before, the easiest is probably to point your browser to [https://www.dal.net](https://www.dal.net) and on the 'Chat Now' box on the right, enter your preferred nickname and #econ317 as the chat room and click 'Go'. You do NOT need to create an account or log in. The image below shows an example of how to set up the session.

![Chat Now](image)

If you HAVE used IRC before, or if you're feeling adventurous, or if you're having trouble with the browser interface, there are hundreds of free solutions that will connect you. (Make sure you connect to irc.dal.net on the default IRC port, 6667/TCP.)
Why IRC?

I’ve found students are often shy about asking questions when the instructor or their peers can identify them. IRC is anonymous, so students can feel free to ask questions without this source of anxiety. Being an entirely text-based medium, it’s also very well suited to answering economics questions in a group setting. I can post formulas, links, give step by step explanations, add incoming questions to the queue while answering other questions, etc. It’s also trivial to save IRC logs for later use (since it’s text, this can be done even by copy-pasting into a document editor).

I’ve used IRC for office hours many times in the past, and it’s proven very popular with students. I expect that will also be the case this term, but if there is enough demand, I will consider holding at least some of the office hours via Zoom.

How Grading Works this Term

Course assessment this term involve quizzes, assignments, projects and a final exam. Multiple-choice questions will be marked in the usual fashion. To make it possible to mark your projects in a timely fashion, most assignment and project questions will be marked rather coarsely. Each project question will receive only one of the following grades: 0, 48, 58, 68, 78, 88, 100.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship between letter grades and number grades</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-100</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

From the UVic Undergraduate Grading Scale:

- 0 or 48 (F): Unacceptable or missing work.
- 58 (D): Shows “minimal command of the course materials”.
- 68 (C+): This is “earned by work that indicates an adequate comprehension of the course material and [...] indicates the student has met the basic requirements for completing assigned work.”
- 78 (B+): “earned by work that indicates a good comprehension of the course material, a good command of the skills needed to work with the course material, and the student’s full engagement with the course requirements and activities. A B+ represents a more complex understanding and/or application of the course material.” The mark earned by ‘good’ work.
- 88 (A): This is “earned by work which is technically superior [and] shows mastery of the subject matter”. I will typically include a ‘challenge’ condition for each project question that takes some of the training wheels off and allows you to show mastery (and earn an 88) if done well.
• 100 (A+): For work that “offers original insight and/or goes beyond course expectations.” I expect very few students will get 100 on questions, due to the extra work involved relative to the benefit.

The typical question in an assignment or research project will have three components:

1. The regular part of the question, worth 78 marks. This question is designed to test ‘good’ understanding with as little frustration as possible. It is NOT designed to test for mastery. The only possible marks on the regular part of the question are 0, 48, 58, 68, 78.

2. The challenge part of the question, worth 10 marks. This part IS designed to test for mastery, and is appropriately challenging, and often quite a bit of (necessary) work. The only possible marks are 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. A good student is expected to skip these at least some of the time, if they find the additional work is not worth the additional marks.

3. A communication bonus, worth 6 marks (doubled under certain conditions, allowing you to get 100 on the question). A theme of this course is that it is important to be able to communicate your ideas.

You will be assigned a communication bonus of between 0 to 6 marks for each question, or sometimes for the whole assignment. 0 does not mean you failed at communication – it means you are communicating at the minimum acceptable level for a third-year university course (e.g. at a level that would let you pass ECON 225, but with a low mark). Note that citing your sources is part of good communication.

Students who communicate their ideas well should be able to get between 1 and 3 marks without any additional effort. Putting extra work specifically into communicating, and being successful at doing so, can earn you a 4 or a 5. Per UVic’s policy regarding 100% marks, a communication bonus of 6 is reserved for exceptional work that displays mastery of communication and goes beyond course expectations (e.g. work that reads like a polished, published piece).

It is up to you to decide whether putting additional work into communication is worth it. Many students may find the additional marks are not worth the additional effort (especially if your normal level of communication is such that you can get a 3 without really trying).

It can be very easy to communicate a wrong idea well. For example, you could assume the answer to all the questions in the course is ‘42’, and perfectly communicate that you have made this assumption because you read in a book by Douglas Adams that 42 is the answer to life, the universe and everything.

It is considerably more difficult to communicate correct ideas about a complicated problem. Because of that, the highest communication marks are reserved for students
who have answered the questions correctly. If your mark on the question before the bonus is 85 or above (full marks on the regular question, and at least 7/10 on the challenge question), then your communication mark will be doubled. A communication bonus of 1 becomes 2, and 6 becomes 12. This way, students who deliver exceptional work are able to get 100%. (Note that even without this doubling, it is still possible to get up to 90% = 84 + 6.)

**It’s very difficult to fail this course**

I think this is important to point out, because we’ll be covering some challenging material which can be overwhelming to students who aren’t used to reading papers or writing up their own research.

**It’s tough to get an A+, but it’s even more difficult to fail, as long as you give each part of the course an honest try. This is intentional.**

The two lowest marks possible on the regular questions are 0 and 48. There’s a huge difference between a 0 and a 48, so even an answer that is not very good is likely to get at least a 48. That puts you very, very close to passing. If you communicate at a pretty good level, that’s a communication bonus of 1. Try ANYTHING relevant in the challenge part of the question? That’s at least 1 mark out of 10. So, right away, even a rushed, not very good answer, will probably get a (barely) passing mark.

Put a LITTLE bit of effort in (don’t’ forget to ask me for help if you need it!) and you’re likely to get a 58 instead of a 48 on the regular question.

Like with most other activities, there are diminishing returns to effort. It’s very easy to go from 0 to 48, a bit harder to go from 48 to 58, tougher to go from 58 to 68, and then from 68 to 78, and it’s a lot of work, compared to the rest, to get from 78 to 88, or from 88 to 100.

It’s up to you to decide how much work you wish to put into the course – but when making that decision, remember that you (probably) don’t need to worry about failing the course. Hopefully that’ll reduce your stress by at least a little bit.

**Expectations**

A good student in ECON 317 is expected to do the following:

- **Attend all lectures or keep up with the recordings.**
- **At least skim the required reading for each lecture** within a week of viewing the relevant lecture (live or via recording).
• Work individually on quizzes, assignments and projects (except group projects) and become familiar with assignments or projects by at least skimming them within two days of their being posted.
• Cite any sources you use in your assignments or projects in APA format.
• Complete optional readings to obtain greater familiarity with the course material, if necessary (for example, if the required readings aren’t enough to clear up a concept).
• Ask questions during office hours and via e-mail to clear up course material and concepts.
• Ask the instructor for additional help with course material and concepts, if the student encounters difficulties not cleared up via required and optional readings, practice problems or talking with fellow students.
• Bring any constructive criticism and feedback to the instructor’s attention before the end of the course, so that the course may be adjusted if necessary.

Evaluation and Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multiple choice Quizzes</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>December 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Assignments</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>Various</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Research Project Steps</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>Various</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>December Exam Period</td>
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</table>

Quizzes (16%)

There will usually be one multiple-choice quiz per lecture, with two questions: one question is about material covered in the lecture, and the second question is about material in the required reading for that lecture. You may try each quiz up to three times. Your mark on the quiz is your highest mark out of the three attempts. In many cases, the questions will be different each time you try the quiz.

These quizzes are intended to be extremely easy, as long as you’ve actually viewed the lecture and at least skimmed the reading. They’re here mostly to check (and reward you) for keeping up with course material.

All quizzes are due on the last day of term (December 6). The idea is that this allows you to work through course content at your own pace.

Preliminary Lecture, Assignment & Project Schedule

See following page. Subject (but not expected) to change.

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1 Preliminary and subject to change. See Brightspace for accurate due dates.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Lecture</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Project</th>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>Introduction</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>The Basics II</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Determinants of Health</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<td>Demand for Health Care</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Framing</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Opiates</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Opium &amp; Morphine Users</td>
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<td>Supplier Induced Demand</td>
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<td>Primary Care Reform in ON</td>
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<td>From QALY to Dollars</td>
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<td>Cost Effectiveness &amp; Cost Utility Analysis II</td>
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<td>Pills and Patents</td>
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<td>Efficiency vs Equity</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Measuring Production Efficiency</td>
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<td>Organ Transplants</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Toward the Northern Door</td>
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<td>December</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>COVID-19 I</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>COVID-19 II</td>
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</table>
Assignments (32%)

Your assignment mark is the average mark over the four assignments. Assignments are submitted via Brightspace, and your submissions must be in PDF and/or Microsoft Office format (Excel, Word, Powerpoint). Late assignments are generally not accepted. Missing or late assignments will receive a mark of zero. Plan accordingly. I recommend acting as if the due date is one or two days earlier than it actually is, to make sure everything is done on time.

Each assignment consists of two main parts: a purposeful reading report, where you analyze the assigned reading, and general assignment questions that will usually have you ‘do’ the economics of health care.

It is possible to score 100% on the reading report by providing everything asked for in a concise but thorough, professional and organized manner (APA citations, correct use of language, putting concepts in one’s own words, etc.). It is expected that most students will do very well on this component.

Projects (32%)

The projects will ask you to advocate for or against a health care intervention in a particular Canadian population. You will have to choose your topic (Step 1, 8%), communicate your argument to the relevant general public using insights from behavioral economics (Step 2, 8%), make your case to the relevant Canadian government using your knowledge of cost-effectiveness analysis (Step 3, 8%), and finally (Step 4, 8%) analyze the situation as an economist, from the point of view of a hypothetical benevolent social planner. More details are available on Brightspace. These projects are submitted via Brightspace, and your submissions must be in PDF and/or Microsoft Office format (Excel, Word, Powerpoint).

Though I’ve used the plural, ‘Projects’, this is really just one big project, which I’ve divided into steps to make it manageable.

Final Exam (20%)

The final exam will be held during the December exam period. At the time of writing this outline, the final exam is an in-person exam on the Victoria campus. (This may change depending on the progress of the pandemic.) You do NOT need to pass the exam to pass the course, and you do NOT need to even attend the exam to pass the course.

2 Except for assignments from students with approved accommodation, per UVic guidelines.
Required Textbooks and Software

Required readings & textbooks will be provided online, in a form that is free to UVic students. Course files will be distributed via Brightspace in PDF and Microsoft Office/365 form (Excel, Powerpoint, Word). You will need to be able to open these files. These are also the file formats that you are required to submit your projects in. You are also encouraged to install Zoom to attend live lectures.

UVic students get access to Microsoft 365 for free:

https://www.uvic.ca/systems/support/computerssoftware/microsoft365/index.php

We will make use of a number of textbooks and sources, all of them free in digital form to UVic students. Links will be provided as texts become relevant.

On Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UVic Policy on Plagiarism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“A student commits plagiarism when he or she:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- submits the work of another person as original work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- gives inadequate attribution to an author or creator whose work is incorporated into the student's work, including failing to indicate clearly (through accepted practices within the discipline, such as footnotes, internal references and the crediting of all verbatim passages through indentations of longer passages or the use of quotation marks) the inclusion of another individual’s work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- paraphrases material from a source without sufficient acknowledgement as described above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The University reserves the right to use plagiarism detection software programs to detect plagiarism in essays, term papers and other assignments.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Single or multiple instances of inadequate attribution of sources should result in a failing grade for the work. A largely or fully plagiarized piece of work should result in a grade of F for the course.” (Emphasis mine.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: UVic Academic Calendar January 2021)

tl;dr: Cheating just once can get you a zero on the course, and this course has been designed to be hard to fail. It just isn’t worth it.

All ECON 317 students are required to read and become familiar with the Policy on Academic Integrity detailed at the URL cited in the box above. A brief summary is at
A breach of academic integrity will result in a non-droppable mark of zero on the assignment, quiz or final exam in which it is detected. Additional penalties may also apply.

What about my classmates? Can I work with them on assignment questions?

To a degree, absolutely, but there are limits. All of you are here to learn, and as the instructor I’d like to avoid a situation where a small number of people do all the work and everyone else just ‘adapts’ it.

You can study together, or help each other out with assignments, but such collaboration should stop short of something that would absolutely require citation, such as a direct quote or a duplicate, non-obvious solution method.

Good idea:

You: “Hey, Sam. I’m stuck on Question 6. I tried using the method in the lecture notes, but my answer’s too small and the sign is wrong.”

Sam: “Did you convert all the costs to annual values? I got the same mistake until I did that.”

You: (several minutes later) “You’re right! That fixed it. Thanks, Sam.”

Bad idea:

You: “Hey, Sam. I’m stuck on Question 6. I tried using the method in the lecture notes, but my answer’s too small and the sign is wrong.”

Sam: (hands over a paper) “Here, take a look at my answer. I had that mistake, too, but then I fixed it.”

You: (after going over Sam’s solution line by line, you cross out your old answer and write a new one using the same method) “Thanks, Sam. That worked. You can have your assignment back.”
The Course Experience Survey

UVic Statement on the Course Experience Survey

“I value your feedback on this course. Towards the end of term you will have the opportunity to complete a confidential course experience survey (CES) regarding your learning experience.

The survey is vital to providing feedback to me regarding the course and my teaching, as well as to help the department improve the overall program for students in the future. When it is time for you to complete the survey, you will receive an email inviting you to do so. If you do not receive an email invitation, you can go directly to http://ces.uvic.ca.

You will need to use your UVic NetLink ID to access the survey, which can be done on your laptop, tablet or mobile device. I will remind you nearer the time, but please be thinking about this important activity, especially the following three questions, during the course.

1. What strengths did your instructor demonstrate that helped you learn in this course?

2. Please provide specific suggestions as to how the instructor could have helped you learn more effectively.

3. Please provide specific suggestions as to how this course could be improved.”

Instructor note: I much prefer to receive feedback during the course, so that I can change things that need changing in time to benefit you. Feel free to send your feedback via e-mail, to willmore@uvic.ca, or anonymously via IRC during office hours.
How can I get help?

I'm stressed and overloaded!

I’m always happy to engage with students regarding their concerns. **ECON 317 is just a course – your health, including mental health, comes first.** You may send me an e-mail at willmore@uvic.ca, pm me during office hours or schedule a private Zoom appointment by e-mail.

**You don’t have to go through this alone.** I’m here to help, and I care about making sure that your course experience is healthy and productive. If you contact me, I’ll listen carefully to what you have to say, and work with you to find a solution.

If you don’t feel comfortable talking to the instructor about your situation, that’s okay! The university has a number of resources available to help students who are stressed. You may find a list of them here:


*Many of these resources are available even if you are not currently in Victoria (or Canada).*

If you’re having difficulty with lecture materials, assignments or projects…

- Read the required readings, and carefully go through the examples in them
- Read optional readings cited in lecture notes
- Ask questions during online office hours
- E-mail the instructor (willmore@uvic.ca) with your questions
- E-mail the instructor (willmore@uvic.ca) to schedule a private Zoom or IRC session

Passing ECON 317 is important for your degree, and probably for your plans for the future, but remember: **Your time is valuable. Your perspective is unique. No one else has lived your life. You matter more than any course.**

I’ve kept that very much in mind while designing this course – since I *am* taking up some of that time, I want to make sure that it’s well spent, and I’ve worked hard to make the course as relevant, useful and engaging as possible.

It is also, however, important for *students* to remember this. In my experience, it’s all too easy when bogged down with projects and deadlines to lose track of other things that matter.