

**This is an abbreviated sample for reference purposes. Syllabus content is subject to change.**

## MPA 2450: Economics of Government Intervention

Summer 2025

### **Instructor:**

Alex Poterack, PhD  
alex\_poterack@brown.edu  
Office: Robinson Hall 212  
OH: W 11-12, Th 12:45-1:45 (beginning 7/23)  
Email is by far the best way to contact me.

### **Teaching Assistants**

All TA office hours will be posted on the Canvas page.

### **Logistics**

Class will meet Monday, Tuesday, Thursday from 2:00 to 4:00 PM ET. There will be a lab session held jointly with MPA 2040 on Wednesdays from 1:30 - 3:30 PM, and a discussion section on Fridays.

## Course Overview

This course considers the cases for and implications of government intervention in the economy. When is government intervention desirable? Why is it desirable? What are its consequences? Over 5 weeks, students will spend 8 hours per week in class (40 hours total), and two hours in discussion section (10 hours). Homework, reading, and studying for the final exam will take approximately 24 hours per week (120 hours total). In addition, there is a 2-hour final exam for which approximately 8 hours of review is assumed. Total: 180 hours.

## Textbook

The textbook for this course is *Public Finance and Public Policy*, by Jonathan Gruber, available wherever fine textbooks are sold. I'm making the textbook RECOMMENDED but NOT REQUIRED; you will only be responsible for the material I go over in class, and I will be posting problem sets online. It will probably be helpful to have the textbook, to have a reference apart from your notes for the material, but the choice is yours. Relatedly, I will also go over material which is not covered in the textbook; you are responsible for knowing this.

## Problem Sets and Grading

There will be one problem set per week assigned during the course, due on Sundays. They will be made available on Canvas. The problem sets are primarily for your benefit, as the best way to learn this material is by doing it. Problem sets will be graded; I will not accept late problem sets, but I will drop your low-est grade. Collaboration with other students on problem sets is fine. Obviously, no such collaboration is allowed on exams.

Grades will be weighted according to the following scale:

- Problem Sets: 40%
- Final Exam: 60%

The letter grade scale will be as follows, with the caveat that I may adjust it to give better grades. In other words, you can view this chart as the worst case scenario. If you get, for example, an 88%, you will definitely get *at least* a B, and you may do better, depending on how the class as a whole does.

Grade	Percentage
A	90-100%
B	80-89%
C	60-79%
NC	<60%

## Course Outline

This is tentative, and may change.

- July 21st-24th: Trade and Immigration (not in textbook), Externalities, the Coase Theorem (Ch. 5-6)
  - **July 23rd: Joint Lab on Immigration**
- July 28th-31st: Development and Industrial Policy (not in textbook), Fiscal Policy (Ch. 18-20)
  - **July 30th: Joint Lab on Development**
- August 4th-7th: Adverse Selection and Health Policy (Ch. 12, 15), Monetary Policy (Ch. 4)
  - **August 6th: Joint Lab on Healthcare**
- August 11th-August 14th: Policies directed at equity, transfers vs. regulation (Ch. 13, 14, 17, 21)
- August 18th-20th: Review and Final Exam