

Course FAQs

AY 2026-27 t1

1. What course material is there every week?

- **In-person lecture:** From 90 – 120 min per week.
- **Video lecture:** Around 50 min of video produced by the instructor (on YouTube). 
- **Tutorial video:** A 10 – 15 min step-by-step presentation of technical aspects of the material (on YouTube). 
- **External video:** A 5 – 10 min video by an independent creator connecting the material to the real world (on YouTube). 

2. How do I get updates for this course?

- All course materials can be found at the **course website** at www.kmarinakis.org/teaching/economics-society.
- There is a **Telegram channel** for the course (link on the course website) where I post updates, reminders, and useful information for the course. **Please, subscribe.**

3. How do I know what materials are available every week?

There is a “Course Calendar” section on the website with links to all readings and videos. There is also another section on the website: “Weekly Schedule” with links and info for online Q&As.

4. Can I have access to lecture slides before the lecture?

Yes, but note that in-person lectures, video lectures, and tutorials have **different slides**.

In-person lecture: Slides will be available on the website a few hours before the lecture.

Video lectures and tutorials: Slides are available in the YouTube description of each video.

Do not use video lecture slides for the in-person lectures, as they may not match.

5. What should I study before each in-person lecture?

In weeks 2, 3, 5, and 10, you must pre-watch segments from the video lecture before the in-person lecture. These are **denoted with an asterisk (*)** on the course calendar on the website. For all other weeks there is no pre-watch.

6. Is it recommended to take notes during the lectures?

Strongly recommended. Good notes let you review the material in minutes rather than rewatching for hours. **I also recommend handwriting** — pen and paper or tablet with stylus. Typing is cognitively inferior for this material and ill-suited for graphs, figures, and notation with superscripts, subscripts, or non-standard symbols that we will use often.

7. Are there any rules for the in-person lecture?

Yes.

1. Avoid making **noise**. Do not whisper, chat, or make it harder for others to listen.
2. Avoid **eating** in class. The classroom is a work setting. Please keep food for the break.
3. Do not use your **laptop, tablet etc.** during class for course irrelevant content.

If you do any of the above, please expect me to interrupt the lecture and ask you why.

8. What are the Practice Sets that are posted every week on the website?

Practice Sets are problem sets designed for practicing the most important concepts covered in the course. You do not have to submit your solutions for Practice Sets. An instructional answer key will be posted on the website after the lecture, allowing you to check your answers or explore alternative solutions.

9. What are the Self-Tests?

Weekly optional MCQ quizzes on eLearn. Take them after studying each week's material. eLearn grades them automatically, but the score will not count toward your course grade. An answer key with comments will be posted on the website. Self-Tests can significantly improve your performance by encouraging you to study while the material is fresh. In the course survey, 97% of students agreed that "Self-Tests make it significantly easier to perform well in the course."

10. Will Self-Tests be easy?

No. They are designed to challenge your understanding and analytical thinking. The hard part, however, is decoding what the question actually asks — once you understand it, the answer follows. Do not expect 95+ scores. For the past 3 terms, A+ students averaged 87.

11. Is there a midterm test for the course?

There is an open-book, open-notes midterm (date and time on the website). It will be online and you can take it from home. Half of the test will be problems and short answer questions and the other half MCQs. Detailed information for the test will be posted on the website ahead of time. If you miss the test for an approved reason, the final exam will substitute for the test.

12. What about the final exam?

The final exam (date and time on the website) will be taken on campus. It will be comprehensive and closed-book / closed-notes (a requirement by SoE). You will be allowed one A4 cheat sheet (both sides). Detailed information will be posted on the website ahead of time. If you miss the exam for an approved reason, you will be assigned an "I" (incomplete) in the course.

13. Are past tests and exams available?

Midterm tests for the past 3 years are available on the website. You will also find a practice final exam.

14. What is the score composition in this course?

25% Midterm test; 15% Class participation; 20% Group project; 40% Final examination. All grades will be in the 100 scale and only the final adjusted score for the course will be converted to the letter scale. This composition was decided and implemented by SoE, not by me.

15. How is class participation graded?

I find it highly problematic to pressure students to speak up in class simply to grade their every word. Instead, I prefer to facilitate open discussions in class and then assess participation through objective quizzes that focus on the specific topics we discussed. There will be two participation quizzes, each with 5 questions, designed to evaluate each student's engagement in our class discussions. The first quiz will be given alongside the midterm, and the second will be administered with the final exam.

16. What about the group project?

You will write about an economic story of your choice, related to one or more economic concepts, in groups of 5 students. Detailed instructions will be posted after the midterm test. Do not worry about the group project before the midterm.

17. How can I attend consultations with the instructor?

I hold face-to-face consultations after every lecture in the seminar room — stay after class and ask me anything for as long as you need. I also host online Q&A sessions on Zoom.

18. Am I allowed to ask a question during class?

Yes, and PLEASE! If you have a question during class, I prefer that you **ask me at THAT moment**. Questions often allow me to realize where my presentation is not well understood, and the answer may benefit the entire class.

19. How should I study for this course?

Five steps to follow each week:

1. Take thorough notes during lectures and videos.
2. Consolidate your notes with the slides.
3. Attempt to solve the Practice Set, using the answer key only if you get stuck.
4. Complete the Self-Test to test your understanding.
5. **If you are unable to understand or solve a task, chances are that the issue is NOT in the task, but that you have not grasped the relevant material from the lecture, video, tutorial, or practice set.**

20. When should I use the textbook or other readings?

Use the textbook or other readings as references or for concepts that you could not understand from the lecture or other materials. Many students have excelled in this course without ever opening the textbook.

21. How much time will this course require on a weekly basis?

According to SMU's recommendations to instructors, a course should require around 8 hours of work per week for the average student. In this course, you'll need to dedicate approximately 3 hours per week to attending or watching the material, 1 hour to consolidating your notes, and another hour for the week's Practice Set. Once you've mastered the material, the Self-Test should take about 1 more hour. This adds up to 6 hours per week, leaving 2 hours x 13 weeks "in the bank" to be used for test preparation, the final exam, and the group project towards the end of the term.

22. Objectively, how difficult is this course?

Among approximately 1,000 past students, 4% found the course "easier than fair", 34% found it "harder than fair" and 62% found it "of fair difficulty". The course is definitely doable but **do not expect it to be a fluff course**. Also, do not underestimate it. If you fall behind, catching up will be challenging.

23. Will students who have taken econs before have an advantage in this course?

Not at all. Junior College and Polytechnic courses cover economic concepts. This course examines how those concepts connect to society. We start from scratch, so prior economics experience makes no difference. According to the course survey, students taking E&S as their first economics course have the same chances of receiving an A as students who had economics before.

24. Are you a strict grader?

It doesn't really matter what I am. Grades in E&S (and any other multi-section course at SMU) are moderated for fairness and consistency among instructors. If I submit strict grades, the moderator will ask me to revise them upwards. If I'm too generous, they'll ask me to lower them. I aim to not have my grades sent back for revision but, historically, my grades are slightly above SMU average.

25. Are you seriously offering “insurance” for grades?

Yes. The midterm test and the final exam are covered by **Grade Insurance (GI)**. In case the assessment’s average across all students falls below 75, every student will receive an equal GI bonus for the average to increase to 75. For example, if the raw average in the midterm test is 67, every student will have +8 points added to their original score, so that the average will become 75. I offer GI to make you feel secure, so you can try your best against any task no matter how hard it initially seems.

26. Is there something that I may NOT like in this course?

2 things:

- (i) **The teaching approach is different from other courses.** E&S is designed to nudge you to think outside the box. This will develop your critical thinking tremendously but may be uncomfortable at first, as it pushes you outside your comfort zone.
- (ii) **Assessment differs from other subjects.** The tasks require analytical thinking rather than derivation skills. The most challenging aspect will be understanding what each question is truly asking. In the real world, phenomena are rarely clear-cut, so do not expect the assessments to be.

27. What should I do if I miss an in-person lecture due to health or family reasons?

Email your TA only, attaching your MC or other documentation. **Do not email MCs to me** — TAs handle attendance, and I am not authorized to access your medical records.

28. Is there any way I can make suggestions or complain about how this course is run?

Yes, there is an electronic suggestion box on the website. Write whatever you want — suggestions, criticism, compliments — anonymously or with your name. I read all submissions and take them seriously.