Anth 4075: Economic Anthropology

University of Georgia • Fall 2018 • G32 Baldwin Hall • T, TH 3:30 - 4:45

Dr. Bram Tucker
bramtuck@uga.edu
Office hours: Tuesdays, Thursdays 11:00am - 12:15pm
and by appointment

N.B.: The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.

I. Course description:

*Anthropology* is the study of human diversity; *Economics* is the study of how people make decisions about resources. *Economic anthropology* examines the diversity of peoples' preferences, choices, behaviors, habits, activities, customs, and institutions relating to resources, and their production, consumption, exchange, and investment.

College courses in economics are often limited to business applications, which is to say, economic behavior under capitalism. *Economic anthropology* is equally interested in how hunter-gatherers decide which prey to exploit, how peasants reduce risk, why people give gifts and host feasts, and why rural villagers cooperate to achieve communal goals. Economic anthropology addresses classic questions within anthropology such as how social structure and social identity affects individuals’ actions, why objects have value, whether and when it is human nature to cooperate or compete, and how people cope with shortages to make ends meet. It also addresses classic questions within economics such as the origins of wealth, market value, and social inequality, and how best to help poor people and “develop” poor countries.

During this course we will read and discuss classic, canonic, contemporary, and cutting-edge research articles from economic anthropology.

This course is divided into three themes.

Part 1: Value and valuables

- How do we decide how much something is worth? How do we compare the worth of two dissimilar things (apples versus oranges? the color purple versus spaghetti)?
- What is the purpose of economic behavior: personal advancement, or social cohesion?
- Do non-Western people value things the same way as Western people?
- Why is it customary in some societies to give wealth away, while in other societies wealth is hoarded?
- Why do people give gifts? What does it mean to receive a gift?
- How does value change with the introduction of the market economy?
- Do hunter-gatherers and peasant farmers strive to maximize profits?
- How does the group influence the decisions of the individual?
- How does money differ from valuables in non-capitalist societies? How does money change the way things are valued?
- Is it better to work hard for high gains, or work little, spend little, and enjoy more leisure time?
- What is the purpose of money: to acquire stuff, to show off to your friends and enemies, or to pay off the powerful?

Part 2: Sociality and human nature: Cooperation and competition

- Why is economic theory based on the assumption that human nature is selfish? Is this accurate?
- Why is evolutionary theory based on the assumption that human nature is selfish? Is this accurate?
- Given theories about the selfishness of human nature, why do people regularly and routinely cooperate?
- Do individuals make decisions at all, or simply do what the group accepts as normal?
- How do groups stop individuals from cheating or breaking rules?
- How do groups manage common property, such as natural resources? How can we better protect natural resources from abuse by those who don’t want to follow the rules?
- Why do hunter-gatherers share food (most of the time, at least)?
- Is private property a cultural universal? Why do people own things?
- Do we live with the fact that our neighbors often do better than we do?
Part 3: Markets and other economic systems
- Why do international development agencies see expanding capitalism as the best way to reduce poverty?
- What are economies like before capitalism?
- Is capitalism necessarily good for rural peoples? Does it increase income? Does it exacerbate social inequality? Does it erode social structure?
- Who is more wealthy: someone with lots of money and things, or someone with a strong network of friends?
- Why are there peasants in the world?
- Why, in the words of Mel Brooks, are the peasants “revolting”? Why don’t peasants behave the way governments and international development projects expect them to?
- How do households cope with food shortage, political events, and bad weather? How do they make ends meet?
- What is poverty? What is wealth? What is inequality?
- Is social class important in America today?
- When you buy stuff at Walmart, where does it come from? Who produced it? Are they well compensated for their labor? Does it matter?
- What are markets? What were markets like before capitalism?
- How will climate change affect rural economies?

II. Course objectives
- To expose students to the basic arguments and literature of economic anthropology, so as to encourage students to think about cross-cultural economic phenomena in a more informed and less ethnocentric/Eurocentric way.
- To train students to be more effective readers, by reading actual academic literature including primary sources.
- To train students to be more effective researchers and writers. Students will use on-line and library sources to research a topic of their choosing, and construct a 5 – 10 page paper, with multiple deadlines and feedback from the instructor.
- To train students to be more effective at oral argumentation, by encouraging them to discuss their ideas and interpretations in class.

III. Academic Misconduct: Cheating is for losers
As a University of Georgia student, you have agreed to abide by the University’s academic honesty policy, “A Culture of Honesty,” and the Student Honor Code. All academic work must meet the standards described in “A Culture of Honesty” found at: www.uga.edu/honesty. Lack of knowledge of the academic honesty policy is not a reasonable explanation for a violation. Questions related to course assignments and the academic honesty policy should be directed to the instructor.

IV. The grade
Student’s grades will be calculated as follows:

Exam 1: 20 pts
Exam 2: 20 pts
Exam 3 (Final exam) 20 pts
Term paper: 30 pts
Attendance/reading check/comprehension check/participation: 10 pts
TOTAL: 100 pts

Exams: The format of exams will be short answer. Exams will occur in class. The final exam will require cumulative knowledge from the course.
- Can I take an exam late? Not unless you have a really good reason—trouble with the law, unforeseen illness or death, savage attack by wild baboons, etc. If you are savaged by baboons, I require a note signed by the alpha male, or one of his high-ranking lackeys (because baboons cannot hold pens very well, a paw print would be acceptable in this case). Whether a make up exam will be permitted, and the format of a make up exam, are at the discretion of the instructor. The probability that the instructor will permit a make-up is dramatically increased if the student contacts the instructor before the exam date.

Term paper: The term paper offers students (1) the opportunity to explore a topic of their choosing in greater depth, and (2) an exercise in anthropological writing. Topics should pertain to economic anthropology. Further instructions will be provided on a separate handout. The paper is something you should be working on throughout the semester. The assignment has several parts and due dates.
Attendance/reading check/comprehension check/participation: Learning involves much more than just studying for exams. First, learning requires that you be present at all lectures and pay attention. And second, learning requires that you be prepared, which means that you complete the assigned readings before the class meeting for which they are assigned and that you look over your notes after each class meeting. To encourage these good learning habits, at every class meeting there will be either an attendance check (for 1 pt) or a question to answer based on the assigned readings or based on previous days' lecture material (for 2 pts).

Doctors' notes, obituaries, and attendance to academic conferences are the only justifiable excuses for missing class. If weather, vehicle maintenance, heartache, savage attack by two-toed or three-toed sloths, etc. cause you to miss class, the instructor will be sympathetic, but you will not earn the missing points.

V. Course bibliography.
All of the following readings are available for download from the electronic Learning Commons, more commonly known as eLC.

Mandatory readings (you gotta do these):


Tucker, B. 2017. Do the cultural institutions of identity and ancestor veneration serve adaptive functions in the high-risk subsistence ecology of SW Madagascar? Grant proposal, National Science Foundation.


Optional readings (to sate your curiosity, prepare you for grad school, etc.; but, not necessary to pass this course).

Basen, I. 2011. Economics has met its enemy, and it is economics. Globe and Mail (Oct 15).


## Part 1: Value and valuables

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Have this read before class:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tue, Aug 14</td>
<td>Lecture: Why economic anthropology is extremely interesting and very important</td>
<td>Nothing, but read this syllabus. Optional: Basen 2011; Dow et al. 2009; Krugman 2009</td>
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<td>Thu, Aug 16</td>
<td>How to write a great term paper</td>
<td>Read the posted “guidelines.”</td>
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<td>Tue, Aug 21</td>
<td>Lecture: Formalists on value</td>
<td>Wilk and Cliggett, chapter 3</td>
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| Thu, Aug 23   | Discussion: Two examples, one marginally interesting and the other will leave you feeling indifferent (marginal utility and indifference analysis) | Winterhalder 1996. Read pages 37-42 and try to decipher the graphs in Figure 1.  
Optional: Hill 1988. Read as much as you need (esp pages 169-182) to decipher Figure 9. |
| Tue, Aug 28   | Lecture: More on the utility of utility: risk and expected utility theory | Kuznar 2001                                                                                   |
| Thu, Aug 30   | Discussion:  Mauss's *the Gift*                                           | Mauss, chapters 0-1.                                                                          |
| Thu, Sep 6    | Discussion: Value and valuables                                          | Wiener 1994                                                                                   |
| Tue, Sep 11   | Discussion: Origins of money                                              | Greber 2011, chapters 2 and 3                                                                 |
| Thu, Sep 13   | Lecture: Marx, the labor theory of value and commodity fetishism          | Marx, K. 1993 (1867)                                                                         |

## Part 2: Sociality and human nature: Competition and cooperation

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<tr>
<td>Tue, Sep 18</td>
<td>Lecture: How economists think we think</td>
<td>Von Neumann &amp; Morgenstern 1953; Gintis 2000</td>
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<td>Thu, Sep 20</td>
<td>EXAM OVER PART 1 OF THE COURSE (Tuesday is Yom Kippur, thus the exam is Thursday)</td>
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| Tue, Sep 25   | Discussion: How evolutionary biologists (of the 20th century) think we think | Dugatkin 1999  
Optional: Gurven et al. 2002                                                               |
| Thu, Sep 27   | Lecture: Evolutionary and experimental game theory                        | Axelrod and Hamilton 1981  
Henrich et al. 2001                                                                             |
| Tue, Oct 2    | Discussion:  Let's try a whole different set of starting assumptions about human nature | Bird-David 1990  
Optional: Bird-David 2017                                                                    |
| Thu, Oct 4    | Lecture: The tragedy of the commons                                        | Hardin 1968                                                                                  |
| Tue, Oct 9    | Discussion: Collective action FULL SENTENCE OUTLINES DUE                  | Ostrom 2000                                                                                  |
| Thu, Oct 11   | Discussion: Cultural group selection                                       | Boyd and Richerson 2010  
Optional: Richerson et al. 2016                                                                |
| Tue, Oct 16   | Lecture: Case study from SW Madagascar                                     | Tucker NSF 2017                                                                             |
| Thu, Oct 18   | EXAM 2                                                                   |                                                                                               |

## Part 3: Markets and other economic systems

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<th>Have this read before class:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tue, Oct 23</td>
<td>Lecture: Tucker's unwritten paper about markets in SW Madagascar</td>
<td>Plattner 1989</td>
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| Thu, Oct 25   | Discussion: Mesoamerican markets at the time of contact: Capitalism yet? | Kowalewski 2012  
Optional: Millhauser 2017                                                                      |
| Tue, Oct 30   | Lecture: Formalism and the logic of economic growth                      | Smith 2003 (1776)  
Optional: Friedman 1970  
Optional: Vazquez 2001                                                                     |
| Thu, Nov 1    | Lecture: Marxism and the logic of differentiation                         | Marx and Engels 1993 (1848)  
Optional: Trawick and Hornborg 2015                                                        |
| Tue, Nov 6    | Discussion: Case studies in growth and differentiation                   | Lockwood 1991  
Optional: Smith 1984  
Optional: Baks 1988                                                                       |
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<th>Reading Material</th>
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<tr>
<td>Thu, Nov 8</td>
<td>Discussion: Case studies in rural market integration</td>
<td>Godoy et al. 2005</td>
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<td>Optional: Gurven et al. 2015</td>
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<td>Tue, Nov 13</td>
<td>Lecture: The peasants are revolting! PAPER DRAFT 1 DUE</td>
<td>Cancian 1989</td>
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<td>Thu, Nov 15</td>
<td>Discussion: Agricultural intensification</td>
<td>Yapa 1993</td>
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<td>Optional: Denning et al. 2009</td>
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<td>Tue, Nov 20</td>
<td>THANKSGIVING: rest and relax!</td>
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<td>Thu, Nov 22</td>
<td>THANKSGIVING: Frantically catch up!</td>
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<td>Tue, Nov 27</td>
<td>Lecture: The livelihoods approach: capitals and capabilities</td>
<td>Sen 1983</td>
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<td>Optional: Scoones 2009</td>
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<td>Thu, Nov 29</td>
<td>Discussion: Students' choice</td>
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Final exam: The final exam calendar says Thur., Dec. 6, 3:30 - 6:30 pm. PAPERS DRAFT 2 DUE