

**AGEC 2xxx**  
**Practice Makes Perfect:**  
**Applying Principles of Economics to Current Agricultural and Agribusiness Problems**  
**Fall Semester 2015**

Professor: / Office: / Voice message: (307) 766-xxxx /Email: xxx@[uwyo.edu](mailto:xxx@uwyo.edu)

**Class Time:** TBA

**Location:** TBA

**Office Hours:** TBA

Email me anytime with questions or to arrange alternative office hours. And feel free to stop by my office and stick your head in.

**Prerequisites:** AGECECON 1020 and AGECECON 1010, or equivalent Principles of Economics courses, and satisfactory completion of COM1 course requirements; COSC 1200 highly recommended.

**Required Texts:** Technical writing, oral and digital communications guides to be selected later based on recommendations from the ECTL. Examples include Strunk and White, *Elements of Style*; Venolia, *Write Right!*; O'Hair, Rubenstein, and Stewart, *A Pocket Guide to Public Speaking*.

**Course description:** This elective course is designed primarily for Agricultural Business majors<sup>1</sup> who have completed AGECECON 1010 and AGECECON 1020 (Principles of Macro and Micro Economics) and have not yet taken the 4000-level courses in the major; however, it is open to students with other majors who have met the prerequisites. As recommended, the course will be limited to 24 students.

The purpose of the class is twofold: (1) to practice the application of concepts, tools, and models from principles of economics to real-world problems and issues affecting agriculture and agribusiness; and (2) to develop foundational written, oral, and digital communication skills for sharing knowledge and understanding of applied economic analyses.

**Learning objectives:** The course will meet the seven USP 2015 learning outcomes for Communication 2 (COM2) courses:

1. Develop and share written, oral, and digital messages through **a variety of assignments**.
2. **Find, analyze, evaluate, and document information** appropriately using a variety of sources.
3. Understand the different purposes of written, oral, and digital messages and employ appropriate **organizational strategies**.
4. Make effective use of a **writing process** and **collaboration** in the achievement of a final work of communication.
5. Observe accepted **conventions** including spelling, grammar, organizational structure, punctuation, delivery and documentation in oral, written, and digital messages.
6. **Deliver prepared presentations** in a natural, confident, and conversational manner.

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<sup>1</sup> The Agricultural Business major includes four options: Agribusiness Management, Farm and Ranch Management, International Agriculture, and Livestock Business Management.

7. **Interact effectively** with audience members, engage opposing viewpoints constructively, and demonstrate active listening skills.

**Grades will be based on the following:**<sup>2</sup>

- Written communication of economic information and analysis (3 individual assignments) (60%)
- Oral and digital communication of economic information and analysis (individual contributions to 2 team assignments) (40%)

**The grading system is as follows:**<sup>3</sup>

<b>A</b>	<b>90-100 percent</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>80-89 percent</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>70-79 percent</b>
<b>D</b>	<b>60-69 percent</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Below 60 percent</b>		

**Course Outline and Schedule:**

*The course will be organized into three application-centered modules, each 5 weeks long. Each module involves investigation, analysis, and different modes of communication of one real-world economic issue important for the agricultural and agribusiness sector.*<sup>4</sup> Each of the three modules will be structured as follows:<sup>5</sup>

*Class period 1:* Introduction to the current problem or issue that we will analyze.

Example: The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has proposed changes to the renewable fuel standard. What does this mean for agricultural and food markets?

Activities: The issue will be introduced using print and web-based communications that illustrate the different approaches and perspectives that can be brought to the same issue by different writers from different organizations or media outlets.

*Class periods 2-3:* Identify core concepts and tools from introductory economics that can be used to analyze the issue.

Example: Market demand and supply curves, derived demand, elasticities of demand and supply, and market equilibrium are all concepts that can be used to analyze this issue.

Activities: Review the concepts and tools. Review graphing and algebra skills also, as appropriate. Do in-class and take-home exercises to practice the concepts and tools.

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<sup>2</sup> Complete grading rubrics will be provided along with each assignment.

<sup>3</sup> The grading scale may be revised to allow for plus and minus grades, in accordance with the grading system that will go into effect in fall 2014.

<sup>4</sup> The agricultural and agribusiness sector is broadly defined to encompass agricultural and food businesses and markets; natural resource management associated with agriculture, ranching, and agribusiness; and rural community economic development and wellbeing.

<sup>5</sup> Class periods are assumed to be 1.25 hours, twice a week.

*Class period 4:* Identify the appropriate data needs and data sources.

Example: USDA commodity market data sets are one potential source

Activities: Practice locating and presenting economic data. Develop a table or chart that illustrates relevant information, for example, the percentage of the corn crop that has gone into ethanol versus livestock feed over a period of several years.

*Class period 5:* Identify the appropriate economics literature, prior research, and other source materials that relate to the issue at hand. (This session may draw on the expertise of our librarians.)

Example: In addition to relevant journal articles, USDA's Economic Research Service and EPA may have relevant research reports.

Activities: Practice appropriate use of citations and formatting of references.

*Class periods 6-7:* Discuss and explore an economic model (an analytical framework) that incorporates the concepts, tools, and data from the previous class periods.

Example: A multi-market supply-demand model linking the corn, livestock, and biofuel markets could be used to analyze this issue. The model can be explored graphically or (if we are really ambitious) using a spreadsheet.

Activities: Explore using supply-demand graphs how changes in demand for corn for biofuel would affect corn, livestock, and food markets.

*Class period 8:* Discuss the outcomes of the analysis. What did we learn? Who wants to know or should know this information? What are the various modes of communicating the information to these audiences?

Example: Structured class discussion of who wins and who loses if the renewable fuel standard is changed; who benefits and who loses? What private and public sector audiences are customers for this "winners versus losers" information?

Activities: Engage in structured discussion of the analysis. Review examples of published communications regarding the issue. Apply (as an in-class example) an assessment rubric to one or more communication examples.

*Class periods 9-10:* Oral presentations by two teams and informal assessment by audiences. (See oral and digital communication assignments below).

Example: A team might present a panel discussion of the revised renewable fuel standard, including a moderator, a proponent of the proposed change, an opponent of the proposed change, and a neutral economist.

Activities: Presentations by two of the 4-member teams. Informal assessment of the presentations by non-presenting students (peers), based on an assessment rubric. Formal assessment by the instructor.

The first formal writing assignments are due at the close of the module. Individualized feedback on the first writing assignment will inform the development of the second writing assignment during the second module. And feedback on the second assignment will inform development of the third assignment associated with the third module. (OUTCOME 1)

Modules two and three will follow the same outline and schedule as above. However, class periods 4 and 5 will be refocused on other communications skills, as needed, rather than repeating the data and literature search activities. For example, they may address class trends in grammar and punctuation mistakes, techniques for developing websites, or integrating digital materials into written and oral communications. These class periods may involve presentations by digital communications experts, from IT or from UW Extension, for example.

#### **Written communication assignments:**

For each applications module, each student will be assigned one of the 3 written communications formats (OUTCOME 1). In a class of 24, eight students will have format 1, eight will have format 2, and eight will have format 3. At the end of the third module, each student will have a portfolio that includes each form of written assignment. Initial assessment and feedback on the written assignments will follow each applications module. Final assessment will be based on the complete, revised portfolio compiled by each student. The following are examples of the formats under consideration.

Format 1: A “text box” to be incorporated into a Principles of Economics textbook. The text box will incorporate a description of a graph, data table, or chart, as well as a written explanation of how the current issue illustrates economic concepts. (A digital form of communication may be incorporated.)

Format 2: A short “policy brief” to inform a decision maker (e.g. a legislator or a company executive) about the issue. The policy brief will help a legislator understand who among her constituents is affected by the issue and in what way; or a company executive decide how to lobby her state senator.

Format 3: A short “annotated literature review” appropriate to researching the issue. The annotated literature review will help a professor understand the status of the prior research on the issue.

Each writing assignment will be evaluated based on analytical content, use and documentation of sources (OUTCOME 2), effective organization and integration of data or digital materials (OUTCOME 3), and accepted conventions for written communications (OUTCOME 5).

#### **Oral and digital communication assignments:**

Students will be grouped into six teams of 4 members each. Two teams will have responsibility for oral and digital communications associated with module one; two for module two; and two for module

three. Each group has two formal oral and digital communication assignments related to its module (OUTCOME 1). The formal assignments are as follow:

1. Develop an oral presentation that communicates about the issue, the analysis, and the findings. Examples include a panel discussion by experts, a Congressional hearing, a structured discussion between a professor and students, or a town hall meeting with a politician. There must be a clearly defined and documented role for each member of the team as well as overall presentation cohesiveness. Presentations will be assessed based on an oral communications assessment rubric, but they may incorporate digital elements.
2. Develop **and orally present** a website that explores and communicates messages about the issue and the economic analysis of the issue. The website must incorporate and integrate text, data (or links to data), and tables, graphs, or charts. Other digital media, such as a video or an audio tape of a discussion of the issue may be incorporated in the website. There must be a clearly defined and documented role for each member of the team as well as overall project cohesiveness. Websites will be assessed based on a digital communications assessment rubric. The presentations of the websites will be assessed based on an oral communications assessment rubric.

The first assignment will be presented and evaluated informally by peers and formally by the instructor during the final week of the team's assigned module (that is, in week 5, 10, or 15). The second assignment (the presentation of the website) will be presented and evaluated during finals week. (There are no exams in this class.) *Feedback on the first oral presentation will inform the second oral presentation (of the team's website).*

Oral and digital communication assignments will be evaluated based on economic content, including use, evaluation, documentation, and organization of analytical content (OUTCOMES 2 and 3), accepted oral and digital communication style conventions (OUTCOME 5), effectiveness of delivery and presentation (OUTCOME 6), and effectiveness of interactions with team collaborators and audiences (OUTCOMES 4 and 7).

#### **Student Portfolios:**

Each student will develop a portfolio of communication pieces, for final evaluation by the instructor. The portfolio includes:

- Three short writing assignments (which may incorporate digital communications)
- Documentation and personal assessment of individual contributions to the two group oral communication activities.
- Documentation and personal assessment of individual contribution to the development of a website that informs audiences about the economic dimensions of a current agricultural or agribusiness issue.

**Academic Dishonesty.** Presenting as one's own work the work or ideas of another is considered academic dishonesty (as is assisting another student in such misrepresentation). The university may

assess serious penalties for engaging in academic dishonesty (UNIREG 802, Revision 2). Please ask if you have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism or how to credit a source. Students who submit plagiarized work (individually *or* collaboratively) will receive an 'F' for the course. <http://www.uwyo.edu/generalcounsel/support/clean%20uw%20regulations/UW%20Reg%206-802.pdf>

**Class Conduct.** UNIREG 29, section III:D states, “[A student] has no right to impinge upon the instructor’s freedom to teach or the right of other students to learn. The instructor shall establish reasonable standards of conduct for each class . . . and the instructor may, through orderly procedures, dismiss any student who violates such standards.” In class, students contributions are encouraged, but the contributions should be thoughtful, relevant, and respectful. Unnecessary talking, texting, sleeping, or reading of unrelated material during class is often rude and disruptive.

**Disability support services.** UW offers a variety of services and information to support students with disabilities. Please don’t hesitate to ask about them early in the course. University Disabilities Support Services (UDSS) is located in the Student Educational Opportunities (SEO) office, rm. 330 Knight Hall. The website is accessible at: <http://uwadmnweb.uwyo.edu/UDSS/>.