



School of Economics
Academic Year 2025-26
Term 1

ECON240 Family and the Society: Economic Theories and Practices

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Students will learn about the economic approach of analyzing issues related to the family and the society, which are nonetheless topics in other disciplines as well. We use basic economic models to explain the marriage market, fertility choice, decision makings of families in terms of human capital accumulation, and intergenerational mobility. The economic approach to human behavior, both theoretical and empirical, can also be applied to examine parental choice of primary school, interaction of youths across socioeconomic groups, work-family balance, coping strategies of the sandwiched generation, impact on and responses by families and the government to an aging population, and impact of changing social attitudes on families.

Specific topics will be incorporated or will even replace some of the above given the experiential nature of the course; in fact, the topics to be investigated as group projects will be jointly formulated by the students, the faculty, and the partners based on issues and problems they are facing currently. As the SMU-X course is experiential in nature, the coverage may vary according to the needs and interests of the partners at the time the course is offered.

Students will conduct literature review, develop their research questions in consultation with the faculty and partners, gather data from the public domain or provided by the partners, and analyze the data using qualitative and quantitative methods. If feasible and appropriate, they may conduct experiments, design survey questionnaire, conduct focus group discussions, or write an opinion piece for the newspaper.

Students are expected to submit a group project proposal (**Week 6**), to present a progress report (**Week 10**), and to complete a final report and presentation (**Week 12**), to be graded by the faculty and partners. Quantitative and qualitative skills are needed in the group projects. As confidential data may be used, partners may be involved in the selection (interviews) of students.

IMPORTANT NOTE

Previous project groups had been invited to present their findings to other departments/divisions of the agency, and even the CEO of the agency.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This course enables students to learn from and interact with the partners on real-world issues, problems, and policies related to the family and the society at large, especially for the case of Singapore. Starting with some economic theories, students will explore quickly other disciplines such as sociology, social work, psychology, law, and politics, and hence inter-disciplinary in nature. The topics to be covered are experiential and evolving, according to the current issues or challenges faced by the partners. In essence, students learn not just theories, but also have an opportunity to contribute to actual research and practices of the partners.

SOME SPECIFIC COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES (CLO)

CLO1: Analyze issues related to family and the society using economic models

CLO2: Interact with partners and classmates on real-world issues and policies

CLO3: Practical experience in collecting and/or analyzing data, quantitative and/or qualitative, primary and/or secondary

CLO4: Identify research gaps, formulate hypothesis, design questionnaire and in-depth interviews

CLO5: Communicate ideas and present findings and conclusions effectively

CLO6: Be resilient, creative, and overcome challenges in teamwork and demands from partners

PRE-REQUISITE/CO-REQUISITE/MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE COURSE(S)

Please use the class search function at OASIS > Study > BOSS > BOSS Bidding (Plan & Bid page > Add to Cart and Perform Course Search) or the course catalogue in OASIS to check the most updated attributes of this course.

WHAT STUDENTS SAY ABOUT ECON240

“That working with actual clients in a real working context is very different from economic theories. We were taught that there are many models that cannot be effectively brought over. The conduct of our secondary research against our primary research taught us the differences between the two.”

“I felt that partly **because** of the **ambiguous expectations, self-guided** and **exploratory approach** of the course, **it has pushed me to think deeper, consider practical constraints and also more like a researcher**. I had the chance to work on my research skills and also conduct some fieldwork, which is less common in other modules. Working with external partners also gave us a peek into perspectives and working styles in the working world, which added much value to the coursework.”

ASSESSMENT METHODS

Project proposal and presentation	10%
Project progress report and presentation	10%
Project final report and presentation	35%
Personal reflection on learning	5%
Peer evaluation within team	5%
Class Participation: Discussions, Comments	5%
Final Examination	30%
Total	100%

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Academic Integrity

All acts of academic dishonesty (including, but not limited to, plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, facilitation of acts of academic dishonesty by others, unauthorized possession of exam questions, or tampering with the academic work of other students) are serious offences.

All work (whether oral or written) submitted for purposes of assessment must be the student's own work. Penalties for violation of the policy range from zero marks for the component assessment to expulsion, depending on the nature of the offense.

When in doubt, students should consult the instructors of the course. Details on the SMU Code of Academic Integrity may be accessed at <https://smu.sharepoint.com/sites/oasis/SitePages/DOS-WKLSWC/UCSC.aspx>.

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Accessibility

SMU strives to make learning experiences accessible for all. If students anticipate or experience physical or academic barriers due to disability, please let the instructor know immediately. Students are also welcome to contact the university's student accessibility support team if they have questions or concerns about academic provisions: accessibility@smu.edu.sg. Please be aware that the accessible tables in the seminar room should remain available for students who require them.

Digital Readiness for Teaching and Learning (DRTL)

As part of emergency preparedness, instructors may conduct lessons online via the Zoom platform during the term, to prepare students for online learning. During an actual emergency, students will be notified to access the Zoom platform for their online lessons. The class schedule will mirror the current face-to-face class timetable unless otherwise stated.

CLASS TIMINGS

Weekly 3-hr seminars or consultations, **Thursdays 12 pm to 3:15 pm**, with faculty and industrial partner; the first five weeks will cover the relevant topics, theories and empirics, introducing the students to the projects with the industrial partners.

RECOMMENDED TEXT AND READINGS

The tentative reading list is given in the following tentative weekly lesson plan. The list will be reviewed.

PROPOSED WEEKLY LESSON PLAN (Thursdays 12 pm to 3:15 pm @ SOE SR??)

(Subject to changes based on feedback by partners)

	Topic	Remark
1 21/8	<p>Introduction to Family Economics</p> <p>**Partners share potential research projects with faculty before Week 1. Faculty, partners, and students discuss potential project topics in Week 1.</p> <p>Reference Textbooks:</p> <p>Becker, Gary S., (1991), A Treatise on the Family: Enlarged Edition, Cambridge: Harvard University Press. [TF]</p> <p>Peterson, Gary W. and Kevin R. Bush, (Ed.), (2013), Handbook of Marriage and the Family, 3rd Edition, New York: Springer. [HMF]</p> <p>Browning, Martin, Pierre-Andre Chiappori, and Yoram Weiss, (2014), Economics of the Family, New York: Cambridge University Press. [EF]</p> <p>Schultz, Theodore W., (Ed.), (1974), Economics of the Family: Marriage, Children, and Human Capital, Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [EFMCHC]</p> <p>Lecture Readings:</p> <p>Lundberg, Shelly and Robert A. Pollak, (2007), "The American Family and Family Economics", Journal of Economic Perspectives, vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 3-26. https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/jep.21.2.3</p> <p>Ministry of Social and Family Development, (2019), Families and Households in Singapore, 2000-2017, Statistical Series Paper 1/2019, https://www.msf.gov.sg/research-and-data/Research-and-Data-Series/Documents/Families_and_Households_in_Singapore-Statistics_Series_2000-2017.pdf</p> <p>Optional/Reference:</p> <p>Lundberg, Shelly, Robert A. Pollak, and Jenna Stearns, (2016), "Family Inequality: Diverging Patterns in Marriage, Cohabitation, and Childbearing." Journal of Economic Perspectives, vol. 30, no. 2, pp. 79-102. https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/jep.30.2.79</p> <p>Ministry of Social and Family Development, (2015), Ageing Families in Singapore, Insight Series Paper 2/2015, https://www.msf.gov.sg/research-and-data/Research-and-Data-Series/Documents/Ageing%20Families%20Report%20Insight%20Series%2020151124.pdf</p> <p>Ministry of Social and Family Development, (2020), Intergenerational Effects of Divorce on Children in Singapore, Research Series Paper 1/2020, http://go.gov.sg/intergenstudydivorce#:~:text=Compared%20to%20children%20whose%20parents,among%20those%20who%20were%20married</p> <p>Thomas, P.A. et al. (2017), "Family Relations and Wellbeing", Innovation in Aging, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1–11, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5954612/pdf/ixq025.pdf</p> <p>Quah, Stella R., (1999), Study on the Singapore Family, Singapore: Ministry of Community Development.</p>	
2 28/8	Research Methods: Qualitative, Quantitative, Experiment, Policy Evaluation	

	<p>**Students contact partners, start literature review, and formulate project questions.</p> <p>**Correspondence with partners for feedback.</p> <p>Lecture Readings:</p> <p>Acock, Alan C., (1999), "Quantitative Methodology for Studying Families", chapter 10 of HMF, 2nd edition.</p> <p>Presentation by economics research librarian on literature review and research methods.</p> <p>Ng, Ho, Tharmalingam, Lee, Ngiam, 2012, "Designing and Implementing an Evaluation of a National Work Support Program", Evaluation and Program Planning, vol. 35, pp. 78-87.</p> <p>Optional/Reference:</p> <p>HMF Part 1 "Theoretical and methodological issues"</p> <p>Low, Donald, (Ed.), (2012), Behavioural Economics and Policy Design: Examples from Singapore. Singapore: Civil Service College.</p> <p>Richburg-Hayes, Lashawn, et al., (2014), Behavioral Economics and Social Policy: Designing Innovative Solutions for Programs Supported by the Administration for Children and Families, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families.</p>	
<p>3 4/9</p>	<p>Economics of Marriage</p> <p>**Preliminary literature review and proposals, to be uploaded by 1/9, Monday, 5pm; feedback from faculty on ideas from students.</p> <p>Lecture Readings:</p> <p>Becker, Gary, (1992), "The Economic Way of Looking at Life", http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/economic-sciences/laureates/1992/becker-lecture.pdf</p> <p>Pollak, Robert A., (2016), "Marriage Market Equilibrium", NBER Working Paper 22309.</p> <p>Optional/Reference:</p> <p>TF Chapters 3, 4</p> <p>EFMCHC Part 3</p> <p>EF Chapter 2</p> <p>Stevenson, Betsey and Justin Wolfers, (2007), "Marriage and Divorce: Changes and their Driving Forces", Journal of Economic Perspectives, vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 27-52.</p> <p>Lunberg, Shelly, Robert A. Pollak, and Jenna Stearns, (2016), "Family Inequality: Diverging Patterns in Marriage, Cohabitation, and Childbearing", Journal of Economic Perspectives, vol. 30, no. 2, pp. 79-102.</p> <p>Miyazawa, Kazutoshi, (2016), "Grandparental child care, child allowances, and fertility", Journal of the Economics of Ageing, vol. 7, pp. 53-60.</p>	
<p>4 11/9</p>	<p>Household Production, Intergenerational Transmission of Preference and Human Capital</p> <p>Lecture Readings:</p> <p>Becker, Gary, (1992), "The Economic Way of Looking at Life", appendix, http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/economic-sciences/laureates/1992/becker-lecture.pdf</p> <p>Waldinger, Robert J and Marc S. Schulz, (2016), "The Long Reach of Nurturing Family Environments: Links With Midlife Emotion-Regulatory Styles and Late-Life Security in Intimate Relationships", Psychological Science, Vol. 27(11) 1443–1450.</p> <p>OECD, (2019), Working Better with Age, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/c4d4f66a-en/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/c4d4f66a-en&mimeType=text/html</p> <p>Optional/Reference:</p> <p>EF Chapter 3</p>	

	<p>TF Chapter 2</p> <p>HMF Part 3 "Families and other institutions" and Part 4 "Diversity in family life"</p> <p>Haas, Linda, (1999), "Families and Work", chapter 21 in HMF, 2nd edition.</p> <p>Fellows, Kaylene J., Hsin-Yao Chiu, E. Jeffrey Hill, and Alan J. Hawkins, "Work-Family Conflict and Couple Relationship Quality: A Meta-analytic Study", (2015), Journal of Family and Economic Issues.</p> <p>Zannella, Marina, (2015), "Reallocation of resources between generations and genders in the market and non-market economy. The case of Italy", Journal of the Economics of Ageing, vol. 5, pp. 33-44.</p> <p>Jee Young Lee, Sora Park, Eun-Yeong Na & Eun-mee Kim, (2016), "A comparative study on the relationship between social networking site use and social capital among Australian and Korean youth", Journal of Youth Studies.</p> <p>Woosang Hwang & Injee Kim, (2016), "Parental financial support and filial responsibility in emerging adulthood: a comparative study between the United States and South Korea", Journal of Youth Studies.</p>	
<p>5 18/9</p>	<p>Happiness of Society and Family Policies</p> <p>**Students refine group project proposals.</p> <p>Lecture Readings:</p> <p>Moen, Phyllis and Kay B. Forest, (1999), "Strengthening Families: Policy Issues for the Twenty-First Century", chapter 23 in HMF, 2nd edition.</p> <p>Adema, 2012, "Setting the scene: The mix of family policy objectives and packages across the OECD", Children and Youth Services Review, vol. 34, pp. 487-498.</p> <p>Olivetti and Petrongolo, 2017, Journal of Economic Perspectives, "The Economic Consequences of Family Policies: Lessons from a Century of Legislation in High-Income Countries", vol. 31, no. 1, pp. 205-230.</p> <p>Ho, Kong Weng (2019), Contributors of Singaporean Youths' Wellbeing: Life Goals, Family-Community-Nation Capitals, Opportunity, and Social Mobility, in YOUTH.sg: The State of Youth in Singapore 2018, National Youth Council, pp. 108-123.</p> <p>Ong, Qiyang, Kong Weng Ho, and Kong Chong Ho, (2013). "Altruism Within the Family: A Comparison of Father and Mother Using Life Happiness and Life Satisfaction," Social Indicators Research, Springer, vol. 111(2), pp. 485-510.</p> <p>Harvard Study of Adult Development: https://www.adultdevelopmentstudy.org/</p> <p>Optional/Reference:</p> <p>Giele, Janet Zollinger, (2013), Family Policy and the American Safety Net, Los Angeles: Sage.</p> <p>Loveless, A. Scott, and Thomas B. Holman, (2007), The Family in the New Millennium, Volume 3 Strengthening the Family, Section 2 Government Policy, Westport: Praeger Publishers.</p> <p>Gauthier, Anne H., (2001), "The Impact of Public Policies on Families and Demographic Behaviour".</p> <p>Hudson, Eibhlin, and Anne Nolan, (2015), "Public healthcare eligibility and the utilization of GP services by older people in Ireland", Journal of the Economics of Ageing, vol.6, pp. 24-43.</p>	
<p>6 25/9</p>	<p>Project Proposals for Partners (Potential Partners for this Term: SG Assist; NTUC Strategy Group; National Youth Council)</p> <p>** PPTX Presentation Slides and Proposal DOCX to be submitted to eLearn Assignment Dropbox "Project Proposal and Presentation" by 23/9, Tue, 5 pm. Comments for other Project Teams, to be uploaded by 29/9, Monday, 5pm.</p> <p>**Presentations in SMU: Discussions among groups, partners, students, and faculty.</p> <p>Past topics include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Underemployment and the Gig Economy with a Focus on Delivery Riders • Concerns of Social Mobility, Education, Cost of living: The Role of Societal Sentiments • Scams: Economics and Behavioral Approaches 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upstream Intervention of Youth Suicides: A Cost-Benefit Analysis The Cost of Mental Health Conditions of Youths to Caregivers and Families Upward mobility investment by female workers: Challenges and Outcomes Resource allocation and 5 components of well-being Navigating Career Transitions in Singapore: A Study of the Influential Factors on Individuals in their 30s Multi-generational workplace in healthcare sector How awareness and consumption of products and services are influenced by education of non-spousal caregivers <p>Optional/Reference (To be updated by faculty, students, and partners):</p> <p>Ho, Kong Weng, (2020), "Upward Mobility of Workers in Singapore", video presentation at Labour Research Conference, Oct 2020, © NTUC https://mediacast.smu.edu.sg/media/Upward+MobilityA+Family+and+Social+Support+%28Preliminary+Findings%29/1_p2av5ckt</p> <p>Ho, Kong Weng, (2021), Challenges to Social Mobility in Singapore, https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/soe_research/2394/ https://www.msf.gov.sg/publications/Documents/Improving-the-lives-of-low-income-and-vulnerable-families-in-Singapore.pdf https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/soe_research/1660/</p>	
7 2/10	<p>Consultations with Faculty and TAs, Correspondence with Partners</p> <p>**Further literature review, collection/compilation of data, preliminary analysis, onsite/consultation with supervisor and faculty</p> <p>**Data include those defined and provided by partners, as mentioned in Week 1, if available; desensitized and anonymous data will be used, with formal agreement signed. Data may include those in the public domain, or gathered by students themselves.</p> <p>**Students may propose and design a survey to collect data, for current or future projects for the benefits of partners.</p>	
8	Recess	
9 16/10	<p>Preparation of Progress Report and Presentation</p> <p>**Continued consultation with faculty, TAs, and partners</p>	
10 23/10	<p>Progress Report/Presentation to Partners and Faculty</p> <p>**Venue: SMU</p> <p>** PPTX Presentation Slides and Progress Report DOCX to be submitted to eLearn Assignment Dropbox "Progress Report and Presentation" by 21/10, Tue, 5 pm. Comments for other Project Teams, to be uploaded by 27/10, Mon, 5pm.</p>	
11 30/10	<p>Project Report Writing</p> <p>**Continued consultation with faculty, TAs, and partners</p>	
12 6/11	<p>Project Presentations and Final Report Submissions to and Graded by Partners and Faculty</p> <p>**Venue: SMU</p> <p>** PPTX Presentation Slides and Final Report DOCX to be submitted to eLearn Assignment Dropbox "Final Report and Presentation" by 4/11, Tue, 5 pm.</p>	
13 13/11	<p>Review Lecture for Final Exam</p> <p>**Self and Peer Evaluation: Upload by 17/11, Monday, 5pm.</p>	

	**Personal Reflection on Learning: Upload by 17/11, Monday, 5pm.	
14	Self-Revision Week	
16? ??	Final Exam, ??day, ?? to ?? (To be announced/confirmed by Registrar's Office) Venue to be confirmed: ??	