Students provide non-partisan economic advice to state legislators for academic credit

University of Colorado Boulder Economics 4231
“Applied Economic Analysis and Public Policy”

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Description and motivation

This course
- applies economic analysis to current issues of public policy in the State of Colorado
- explores the challenges of integrating informed economic analysis into the legislative process
- allows students who are interested in issues of public policy to learn about the relevant economic analysis and to apply it to the process of determining public policy
- provides the State of Colorado with improved and more consistent economic analysis.

Course structure
- begins with lectures developing the theoretical foundations for government engagement in the economy
- then provides a description of the structure and procedures of the Colorado General Assembly
- continues with lectures on the economic justifications for and limits to government intervention in specific markets
- concludes with the contents of specific Assembly bills

Public policy issues
- arise in many Economics courses
- few, if any, engage the public policy process directly.
- engagement is valuable to the many students who will be active in public policy after graduation, either as participants or as citizens.

Process

Lectures establish analytical foundation
- the provision of public goods, the internalization of externalities, and the remediation of market imperfections are potentially efficiency-enhancing
- redistribution is potentially welfare-enhancing

Students each choose 4 Assembly bills
- determine whether the bill addresses public goods, externalities, market imperfections or redistribution
- review relevant economic literature

Students write 5-page papers
- up to four closely-edited drafts for each bill
- minimum standard required to continue to oral presentation

Students present papers orally
- three-minute maximum, strictly enforced
- minimum standard required to continue to testify

Students testify on 2 bills
- testimony occurs in front of Assembly committees
- committee members question students spontaneously

Outcomes

Legislative Score Card
- students participate in a joint project rating economic content of all bills considered during the first half of the Assembly session

Grades
- 10 points for each of 4 papers
- 5 points for each of 4 oral presentations
- 10 points for each of 2 testimonies
- 10 points for participation in Legislative Score Card
- 10 points for final examination
- 100 points total

History of Assembly participation

Evaluation
- State Representative Shannon Bird
- “The serious members of the Assembly all read your students’ papers.”