Economics 69a: Economics of Race and Gender
Fall 2014

Professor Brainerd
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Office hours: Thursdays, 10:00 am - 12:00 noon

Course description: Economics 69a provides an introduction to the economics of race and gender with an emphasis on policy issues. We will learn and use the tools of microeconomic analysis to understand how economists model individual decision-making, and to gain insight into how microeconomic theory can explain some of the changes experienced by women and minorities in the United States and other countries over the last century.

Some of the questions we will examine include:
- Why do women typically specialize in household work in married households? How and why has this changed over time?
- How did welfare reform in the United States impact low-income women?
- Why do women earn less than men?
- Why do African Americans earn less than whites?
- What has been the impact of affirmative action on employment and wages of targeted groups?
- What are the causes and consequences of ‘missing women’ in developing countries?

Learning goals: The primary goal of the course is to develop your ability to study, analyze and ultimately reach informed opinions about the numerous policy questions that arise with respect to race and gender in the economy. To help develop this ability, we will study these policy issues drawing on economic models of the family, fertility, and labor markets, examination of the role of labor market institutions, and empirical evidence on these issues.

Specific learning outcomes: after successfully completing this course, students will be able to:
- apply and explain at an introductory level the economic models that relate to family and career decision-making
- describe how economic theory and evidence apply to and explain the trends in women’s and minorities’ economic experiences over the past 50 years
- demonstrate proficiency with simple quantitative and economics tools useful in understanding the changing role of women and minorities in the economy.

Prerequisite: Economics 2a or Economics 10a

Course materials: There is no required textbook for the course. Chapters from relevant textbooks and articles from economics journals and the popular press are required reading and will be posted on the course website on Latte. You are responsible for all assigned reading whether or not the material is covered explicitly in class.
Course requirements: Students will be evaluated on the basis of class participation, problem sets, class debates and discussions, two quizzes, and a final exam:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Problem sets (5)</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class debates and discussions</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quiz 1 (Friday, Oct. 17)</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td>Quiz 2 (Tuesday, Nov. 11)</td>
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<td>Final exam (cumulative)</td>
<td>30%</td>
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Class participation: It is essential that you have done the readings before class and are prepared to actively participate in the class discussion about the readings. You will be graded on the quality of your comments and your ability to respectfully engage your fellow students.

Problem sets and quizzes: Five problem sets will be due during the semester, on the dates listed below. Complete problem sets must be turned in at the beginning of class on the due date. *Late problem sets will not be accepted under any circumstances, including medical emergencies, printer malfunctions, track meets, and the failure of your roommate to turn your problem set in for you.* To accommodate illness and unforeseen conflicts, I will drop the lowest score among your problem sets in the grade calculation. In other words, you must turn in four of the five problem sets; alternatively you can turn in all five problem sets and I will take the top four grades in calculating your problem set grade. The dropped grade can be used for any problem, but it is advisable to save it for medical or personal emergencies as only one grade will be dropped.

You may discuss your homework assignments with other students in the course and form study groups. However, you must write up your own answers to all questions. Please write the name(s) of any students you have worked with on the first page of the problem set.

No make-up exams or quizzes will be given in this course. Please note that absence from an exam or quiz will be excused ONLY for a serious illness or family emergency that is appropriately documented; otherwise a grade of zero will be assigned. There are NO EXCEPTIONS to this rule. For documented, legitimate absences, the weight of the exam or quiz will be added to the final exam weight.

Recitations: TBA

Laptop, tablet and cell phone policy: I come to class to help you learn, and I assume that you are here because you want to learn. Using a cell phone, tablet or laptop to talk, text, email, or surf the internet is both disrespectful and distracting to me and to your fellow students. Because of this, *the use of cell phones, tablets, and laptops in class is prohibited.* If you must take a call due to an emergency situation, please leave the classroom. If you are unable to take notes without the use of a laptop, please speak to me.

Special accommodations: If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately. Please keep in mind that reasonable accommodations are not
provided retroactively.

**Academic honesty:** You are expected to be familiar with and to follow the University’s policies on academic integrity (see http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdje/ai/). Instances of alleged dishonesty will be forwarded to the Office of Campus Life for possible referral to the Student Judicial System. Potential sanctions include failure in the course and suspension from the University. If you have any questions about my expectations, please ask. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated.

**IMPORTANT DATES FOR ECON 69A:**

- Friday, Sept. 19  Problem set 1 due in class
- Tuesday, Sept. 23  No class (Brandeis Thursday)
- Friday, Sept. 26  No class (Rosh Hashanah)
- Friday, Oct. 10  Problem set 2 due in class
- Friday, Oct. 17  Quiz 1
- Friday, Oct. 31  Problem set 3 due in class
- Tuesday, Nov. 11  Quiz 2
- Friday, Nov. 21  Problem set 4 due in class
- Friday, Dec. 5  Problem set 5 due in class
Course outline and assigned readings

I. Introduction (Friday, Aug. 29)

- Gary Becker, *The Economic Approach to Human Behavior*, pp. 3 - 14
- Optional: Joyce Jacobsen, *The Economics of Gender*, Ch. 2

II. Economics of the household: economic approach to the family; costs and benefits of marriage and divorce (Tuesday, Sept. 2; Friday, Sept. 5; Tuesday, Sept. 9)

- Joyce Jacobsen, *The Economics of Gender*, Ch. 3 (including Appendix)
- Steven E. Landsburg, “Microwave Oven Liberation,” *Slate*, January 4, 2001

Class discussion: The gains from specialization: Is Gary Becker’s theory obsolete?

III. Labor supply and trends in labor force participation (Friday, Sept. 12; Tuesday, Sept. 16; Friday, Sept. 19)

- George Borjas, *Labor Economics*, pp. 21 - 64

Policy application: the welfare system in the United States


Debate 1: Did welfare reform go too far? Or not far enough?
IV. The economic approach to fertility (Tuesday, Sept. 30; Friday, Oct. 3; Tuesday, Oct. 7; Friday, Oct. 10)

- George Borjas, *Labor Economics*, pp. 77 - 83
- Jonathan V. Last, “Make Boomsa for the Motherland!” *Slate.com*, April 25, 2013

Policy application: teenage fertility

Debate 2: Benefits and costs of government subsidies for childcare

QUIZ 1: FRIDAY, OCT. 17

V. Explaining gender and racial wage gaps

A. Historical background (Tuesday, Oct. 14)

- Joyce Jacobsen, *The Economics of Gender*, Ch. 14

B. Occupational segregation and compensating differentials (Tuesday, Oct. 14; Tuesday, Oct. 21)

- Joyce Jacobsen, *The Economics of Gender*, Ch. 6

Class discussion: the economic effects of the Pill

C. Differences in human capital: economics of schooling and labor market experience (Tuesday, Oct. 21; Friday, Oct. 24; Tuesday, Oct. 28)

• Sharon Otterman, “Lauded Harlem Schools Have Their Own Problems,” *New York Times*, Oct. 12, 2010

*Class discussion: the new math on campus*

*Class discussion: strategies to reduce racial inequality*

D. **Discrimination and affirmative action** (Tuesday, Oct. 28; Friday, Oct. 31; Tuesday, Nov. 4; Friday, Nov. 7)

• George Borjas, *Labor Economics*, pp. 385 - 398

*Debate 3: Should affirmative action be enforced? Or ended?*

**QUIZ 2: TUESDAY, NOV. 11**

E. **Summary: explanations for changing gender and racial wage gaps** (Friday, Nov. 14)


*Class discussion: gender differences in negotiation and competitiveness*
VI. International perspectives on gender (Tuesday, Nov. 18; Friday, Nov. 21; Tuesday, Nov. 25; Tuesday, Dec. 2)

- Joyce Jacobsen, *The Economics of Gender*, Ch. 13

Policy application: causes and consequences of son preference


Class discussion: fertility control in developing countries

Catch-up and Review for final exam: Friday, December 5th