

**THE COURSE WEBPAGES ARE AT**  
**<http://fubjs.weebly.com/alternative-economics.html>**

**ALTERNATIVE ECONOMICS :  
A CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY**

FreeUniversityBrighton  
November-December 2016

This document includes information on the organisation and composition of this first year, first term Alternative Economics course.

On this page you will find (i) a summary description of the course including aims and objectives of the course, (ii) venue and dates, (iii) an outline of the topics that we'll address week-by-week, (iv) a few words on expectations for the course, and (v) a suggestions for course readings and other materials.

**I. Course Summary**

This course is an introductory course in political economy. The main theme discussed in this course is that of value. We shall consider some concepts and theories of value by looking at three essential concepts : economic preferences, character of goods, and costs

Many people think that Economics is about money and money-related problems. It is in part, but only in part. For most of its history Economics has been referred to as political economy, itself an integral element of philosophy. Indeed political economy is the old name for Economics and part of this course will show why the old phrase is both more appropriate (even if still in need of criticism).

We will focus on introducing and elaborating the concept of value and valuing, and will therefore show how modern Economics' focus on financial value so often distorts or even misleads us from a broader and more varied political economic understanding of value. An initial way of thinking about the concept of value is just to say 'value means whatever matters' or 'value refers to what something is worth'.

This course, as a social science course, will also show how in formal scientific study we need to move constantly from abstract concepts to concrete examples and back again if we want to understand and explain

the world. Most people seem to find it easier to study concrete examples first, before thinking more systematically about concepts (or even theories). Therefore we shall examine concepts of value by looking closely at,

- Preferences : Individual and Social
  
- Goods : Private and Public
  
- Costs : Externalised and Internalised

## II. **Venue and Dates**

There are two venues for Alternative Economics

### Group One

Venue :

Rose Room,  
BMECP Centre,  
10A Fleet Street,  
Brighton.  
BN1 4ZE

Meeting : Tuesday evenings 19.00 - 21.30 on  
15th, 22nd, 29th November and 6th December.

### Group Two

Venue :

USSU Training Room  
2nd Floor  
Falmer House,  
University of Sussex,  
Falmer  
Brighton  
BN1 9QF

Meeting : Thursday evenings 19.00 - 21.30 on  
17th, 24th, 31st, November 8th December.

### III. Course Expectations

The main purpose of this course is to introduce you to academic ways of thinking and analysis. We'll do this by making day-to-day, ordinary experiences of economics open to scrutiny. By introducing a couple of new political-economic concepts in each session, you'll have a helpful set of analytical instruments by the end of the course.

Don't feel intimidated by economics, neither by its jargon nor by its apparent obsession with numbers. The core theme throughout this course - as noted earlier - is the neglected concept of value. So, if by the end of the course you've appreciated that there are many different ways of valuing and many different concepts of value (and not just something that can be measured by money) then you'll have succeeded.

In that light, the most important thing that you can do for the course is to attend with an open but critical mind. There will be some homework in preparation for each following week's seminar. Try to do it - it's never anything too heavy and is designed to make you think rather than stop you with problems - and where possible and time allows, try to take some notes for your own reminder. In these notes you can also jot down any questions or observations that you'd like to discuss in the subsequent class.

Throughout this brief introductory course we will make use of written material (newspapers, magazines, journals and books); graphic material (cartoons, pictures, photos, charts and diagrams); video material; audio material (radio interviews and commentaries as well as music). Links to all material will be provided via the course webpages.

Each class will typically include a brief introduction by the tutor, a summary by the tutor of the key topic questions, discussion in the class amongst students of listed course material as well as material brought by students, occasional exercises and groupwork, rounded off by suggestions of further study and a trailer for the following week's class. If you wish to undertake assessed work for this course just arrange this with the course tutor.

All students - whether wanting to be assessed or not - are encouraged to read, watch or listen to the suggested material before the relevant class. Doing so will help you participate and engage during the class. All are advised to bring a notepad and pen.

Obviously full attendance is encouraged, but if for whatever reason you can't make the class, consider attending the alternative session (either on

Tuesday or Thursday). If you're unable to do this, by all means e-mail me for advice.

Those who wish to undertake an assessment for this course should discuss it with me towards the end of the course. I shall post different assessment options and schedule one these pages in due course.

#### **IV. Course Reading and Preparatory Materials**

This course has no pre-requisites. You do not need to have studied economics or politics before. All you need for this course is interest and curiosity.

There are some reading and video materials which you're encouraged to look at throughout the course. It would be especially helpful if you could watch either or both the films before the second week of the course.

##### **Films**

Island of Flowers

Samsara

##### **Course Reading - General**

There is no set textbook for this course and no pre-requisite reading for this course. However, I would strongly recommend reading one or more of the following books whenever you get the chance.

John Bellamy Foster The vulnerable planet : a short economic history of the environment. Monthly Review Press, New York. 1994.

Ha Joon Chang Economics : the user's guide. Penguin, Harmondsworth. 2014

Michael Sandel What money can't buy.

Andrew Sayer Why we can't afford the rich. Policy Press, Bristol. 2015

Tomas Sedlacek Economics of good and evil : the quest for economic meaning from Gilgamesh to Wall Street. Oxford University Press, Oxford. 2011.

Vandana Shiva Staying alive : women, ecology and development. South End Press, New York. 2010.

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