

# Syllabus: ECO 277: Economic and social impacts of abortion policy

Prepared: 2022-01-31

## Course Information

Semester	Spring 2022
Course Number	EC 277
Course Title	Economic and social impacts of abortion policy
Classroom	Harbert 329
Meeting Times	M/W 2-3:20
Materials	<i>The Turnaway Study</i> by Diana Greene Foster <i>Abortion and the Law in America: Roe v. Wade to the Present</i> by Mary Ziegler

## Instructor Information

Name	Randy Cragun
Office Hours	M/W 12:30-1:40 by appointment only Tuesday 11-3 by appointment only
Office Location	Harbert 320
Office Phone	205-226-7748 (please use email or Teams instead)
Faculty E-Mail	rscragun@bsc.edu
Email policy	I typically respond to emails within one day. Subject format you <b>must</b> use: "EC 277: description of the email". Acceptable for response: "Re: EC 277: description of the email". If the subject does not include "EC 277", I may not see your message.

## Course Description

A survey of empirical quantitative social science research on effects of abortion policy with an emphasis on hypotheses predicted by economic theory and methods of causal inference with observational data pioneered in economics.

Recent changes in the partisan makeup of the US Supreme Court have led many US states to pass restrictions on abortion access, and these are working through courts right now. Texas' new law banning abortions after (approximately) six weeks of pregnancy went into effect last year, was briefly halted, and has now gone into force again. The Supreme Court heard a case on Mississippi's ban on abortion after fifteen weeks of gestation on December 1 and could even soon overturn the landmark ruling from *Roe v. Wade* (which may have been the purpose of the law). The Alabama legislature similarly passed a law in 2019 with the goal of pushing the Supreme Court to overturn *Roe*, but this law has not (yet) gone into effect, pending legal challenges. At the same time, other countries have expanded access. For example, Mexico's Supreme Court decriminalized abortion this year.

This class will give you tools to think about how laws and policies around this medical practice will change the world you will live in. This is not a class about whether abortion is murder. It is not a class on the morality of abortion except to the extent that effects inform our moral judgments. We will not cover legal arguments (except to predict likely future laws if *Roe* is overturned to predict likely effects of overturning *Roe*). Nor will we discuss much of medical practice (except where outcomes of medical practice change or differ because of changes or differences in policy). This class is about what we know about social outcomes through science.

For example, we have evidence that being denied an abortion decreases schooling attainment and labor force participation and increases loan defaults. We also have evidence that higher abortion costs reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies and increase use of oral contraceptives.

## Prerequisites

You do not need any previous knowledge of economics, but some exposure to the scientific method, quantitative research methods, economics or other social science, or statistics will be helpful.

## Course activities and assignments

Class time will almost always be used for discussion of the readings. There will be very few lectures. *Your most important responsibility is to come to class prepared to use the knowledge gained from the reading.* If everyone usually comes to class prepared, our time together can be intellectually rewarding and even fun sometimes.

## Participation

I want to hear what you have to say. You will learn about the tools science gives us to analyze effects of policy, and I want you to leave this class with the ability to apply those tools, but that means that you need to practice. Your participation in discussion will also improve recall of course content both for you and for your classmates. Note, however, that this class is not an appropriate place to shout down your political opponents.

For these reasons, you must contribute meaningfully to class discussions and to solving problems with others. If you put effort into your reading responses and study regularly, participation should not be a problem.

You will be expected to lead class discussions often. The class has few students, so this is an opportunity for you to take ownership of the class environment. Even when you are not in charge, help your fellow student who are leading the discussion.

For grading purposes, “participation” does not mean attendance. It means contributing insightful ideas to class discussion. You should not expect a 100% grade on participation by default. I will grade participation with a rubric that is almost identical to the one for the reflection assignments.

## Readings

- The Turnaway Study by Diana Greene Foster
- Abortion and the Law in America: Roe v. Wade to the Present by Mary Ziegler
- Blog posts reporting on research
- Portions of academic journal articles
- Economists' amicus brief for a Supreme Court case on Mississippi's anti-abortion law

## Reflection assignments

You will submit a reflection on class activities or readings **before every class**. If there was a reading assignment, your reflection will be on the reading. Otherwise, you will reflect on what you have learned in class. I will not announce these unless I am giving you specific instructions for what to focus on. The purpose of reflections is to improve recall and incentivize against free-riding on other students who are prepared for class.

Each should be 2-6 paragraphs.

Reflection assignment will be graded on engagement with the material, accuracy, and their ability to contribute to class discussion. See the rubric on Moodle. I am looking to see evidence that you did the entire reading, worked to understand it, considered strengths and weaknesses, and generated some of your own applications or extensions of the content or research. Here are some example ideas to help guide your critical analysis:

- Are you convinced by the author's results/arguments? Why or why not?
- Do you believe they found a causal relationship? Why or why not?
- Did the results obtained justify the interpretation and conclusions?
- Were appropriate controls used or did the approach adequately test the hypothesis?
- Do you think the results could be biased in some way? Explain.

Reflections on readings should generally include these components:

- Summary
- Critical analysis and application
- At least one thing that was confusing
- At least one discussion idea

I will sometimes ask you to do something very specific for your reflection. Examples:

- Evaluate this claim: the Turnaway Study tells us little about effects of gestation limits because it focused only on pregnant people near the gestation limit
- Compare and contrast parental consent laws and parental notification laws and what we know about their effects from the six research studies we covered last week

## Final project

You will choose some issue from class and write a description and analysis that could inform

friends and family about that issue. You will cover

- Why it matters
- Current state of the issue
- What we know, how we know it, and how strong the evidence is
- What we do not yet know and how we might find answers

## Grading Policies and Procedures

Grades will be assigned by calculating a weighted mean of assignment grades. The weights are in the right panel of the table below. The weighted mean ("Score") will be compared to the cutoffs in the left panel to assign a letter grade. Important caveat: to get an A in the class, you must get a score over 85% on the final project (in addition to meeting the overall score requirement in the table).

Grade	Score	Assignment	Portion of grade
A	90%	Reflections	45%
A-	87%	Participation	40%
B+	83%	Final project	15%
B	80%		
B-	77%		
C+	73%		
C	70%		
C-	67%		
D	50%		

I reserve the right to change the grading procedures. However, any changes will be small.

## Attendance Policy

Attendance is mandatory, but I will make reasonable accommodations for those who need to miss class due to Covid-19 exposure or testing. Please do not come to class if you have been exposed to someone with Covid-19, have tested positive for Covid-19, or have symptoms of *any* infection that could spread to others. If participation ceases to be possible for you due to illness or some other life challenge, tell me as soon as possible so we can work out a plan (also, talk to your advisor if this happens).