

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
Department of Economics

Econ 815 – FINANCIAL ECONOMICS I
Syllabus – Fall 2025

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COURSE OBJECTIVES AND PREREQUISITES

This course is the first of a two course sequence in financial economics. The goal is to survey a variety of topics in asset pricing theory. The follow-up course by Bertille Antoine (Econ 818), will then focus on empirical issues. Financial economics provides a great example of the interaction between theory and empirical evidence. The goal of this two-course sequence is to illustrate this.

We are going to discuss 8 key ideas in asset pricing theory; roughly one per week. Students will be asked to read the following 8 papers: (1) Arrow's (1964) model of dynamic spanning, (2) Sharpe's (1964) CAPM model, (3) Merton's (1969) dynamic partial equilibrium model of optimal consumption/portfolio decisions, (4) Black & Scholes' (1973) option pricing model, (5) Lucas's (1978) general equilibrium consumption-based CAPM model, (6) Harrison & Kreps' (1978) model of speculative trading with heterogeneous beliefs, (7) Grossman & Stiglitz' (1980) informational efficiency impossibility theorem, and (8) Tirole's (1982) No Trade theorem. Although these papers may appear to be a bit 'dated', they continue to exert a profound influence on modern financial theory and practice. If time permits, we will discuss some of these recent extensions.

Much of modern financial theory uses the tools of continuous-time stochastic processes and continuous-time dynamic optimization. The first couple weeks of the course will provide a 'crash course' tutorial on these methods.

COURSE EVALUATION

	<u>Weight in Grade</u>
Problem Sets	– 20%
Midterm exam Monday, October 20	– 40%
Final exam (To Be Decided)	– 40%

COURSE MATERIALS

There is no required textbook for this course. Papers and notes will be posted on the website as we go along. For those seeking a good textbook treatment of modern asset pricing, I recommend John Cochrane's (2005) book, *Asset Pricing*, which is available at the bookstore and on reserve at the library.

COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS

I. MATHEMATICAL BACKGROUND

- Sept 8 – **Introduction and Overview**
Cochrane text, Preface
Shiller, “Nobel Prize Lecture: Speculative Asset Prices” (class webpage)
- Sept 8 – **Stochastic Processes**
Dixit & Pindyck, Chpt. 3 (pgs. 59-71)
Key Terms & Concepts: *Sample Paths, Stationarity, Martingales, Binomial Tree, Filtration, Weak Convergence, Mean-Squared Convergence, Ito Integral, Wiener Process, Brownian Motion, Diffusion Process*
- Sept 15 – **Stochastic Calculus**
Dixit & Pindyck, Chpt. 3 (pgs. 79-81)
Cochrane (2013), “Continuous Time Summary/Review” (webpage)
Key Terms & Concepts: *Ito’s Lemma, Stochastic Differential Equations, generator, Feynman-Kac Formula*
- Sept 15 – **Dynamic Programming**
Dixit & Pindyck, Chpt. 4 (pgs. 93-107)
Key Terms & Concepts: *Value Function, Hamilton-Jacobi-Bellman (HJB) Equation*

II. ASSET PRICING THEORY

- Sept 22 – **Financial Markets and Arrow-Debreu General Equilibrium**
Arrow (1964), “The Role of Securities in the Optimal Allocation of Risk-Bearing”
Athreya (2013, pgs. 208-13), “Time, Uncertainty, and the ADM Model”
Key Terms & Concepts: *Complete Markets, Contingent Claims, Arrow Securities*
- Sept 22 – **Dynamic Spanning**
Radner (1972), “Existence of Equilibrium of Plans, Prices, and Price Expectations”
Athreya (2013, pgs. 214-21), “The Radner Version of the ADM Economy”
Key Terms & Concepts: *Radner Equilibrium*
- Sept 29 – **Portfolio Theory**
Campbell (2003), “Lecture Notes” (pgs. 1-11)
Campbell (2000), “Diversification: A Bigger Free Lunch”
Key Terms & Concepts: *Diversification, Mean-Variance Efficiency, Systematic Risk*
- Sept 29 – **The CAPM**
Sharpe (1964), “Capital Asset Prices: A Theory of Mkt. Equil. under Conditions of Risk”
Luenberger (1998), “The Capital Asset Pricing Model”
Campbell (2003), “Lecture Notes” (pgs. 12-22)
Cochrane (1999), “Portfolio Advice for a Multifactor World”
Key Terms & Concepts: *The Market Portfolio, Beta, Sharpe Ratio, Capital Market Line*

Oct 6	–	Dynamic Consumption/Portfolio Rules Merton (1969), “Lifetime Portfolio Selection Under Uncertainty: The Continuous-Time C <u>Key Terms & Concepts:</u> <i>CRRA vs. CARA Utility</i>
Oct 6	–	Applications and Extensions of the Merton Model Class Notes <u>Key Terms & Concepts:</u> <i>Hedging, Learning</i>
Oct 13	–	Thanksgiving (No Class)
Oct 20	–	Midterm Exam
Oct 27	–	Derivative Securities Cochrane text, Chpt. 17 (pgs. 313-320)
Oct 27	–	The Black-Scholes Formula Black & Scholes (1973), “The Pricing of Options and Corporate Liabilities” Black (1989), “How We Came Up with the Option Formula” <u>Key Terms & Concepts:</u> <i>Replicating Portfolio, Delta Hedging, No Arbitrage Pricing, Heat Equation, PDEs</i>
Nov 3	–	The Consumption-Based CAPM Model Lucas (1978), “Asset Prices in an Exchange Economy” Cochrane text, Chpt. 1 (pgs. 3-7, 25-30) <u>Key Terms & Concepts:</u> <i>Euler Equation, Stochastic Discount Factor</i>
Nov 3	–	Applications and Extensions of the Lucas Model Class Notes <u>Key Terms & Concepts:</u> <i>The Equity Premium Puzzle, Hansen-Jagannathan Bounds</i>
Nov 10	–	Heterogeneous Beliefs Harrison & Kreps (1978), “Speculative Investor Behavior..with Heterogeneous Expectatio <u>Key Terms & Concepts:</u> <i>Priors, Subjective Beliefs, Merging, Agreeing to Disagree, Resale Option</i>
Nov 10	–	Applications of Heterogeneous Beliefs Scheinkman & Xiong (2003), “Overconfidence and Speculative Bubbles” Kasa, Walker & Whiteman (2014), “Heterogeneous Beliefs & Tests of Present Value Mod
Nov 17	–	Information and the Grossman-Stiglitz Paradox Grossman & Stiglitz (1980), “On the Impossibility of Informationally Efficient Markets”
Nov 24	–	Speculation, Common Knowledge, and No-Trade Theorems Tirole (1982), “On the Possibility of Speculation under Rational Expectations” <u>Key Terms & Concepts:</u> <i>Common Priors, Aumann’s Theorem, Liquidity Traders</i>
Dec 1	–	Market Microstructure and Insider Trading Kyle (1985), “Continuous Auctions and Insider Trading”