

ECON 0360 – Federal Reserve Challenge – Fall 2023
Professor Wolcott

Class: 1:30-4:15PM, Tuesdays, Warner Hall 100
Website: TBD
Office Hours: TBD
Email: wolcott@middlebury.edu (response within 24 weekday hours)

***Note: There is summer reading for this course. Professor Wolcott has copies of the book *Limitless* by Jeanna Smialek in her office. In advance of the first day of class, students will answer prompts.**

COURSE DESCRIPTION & OBJECTIVES:

In this course we will study the tools of monetary policy to achieve the Federal Reserve’s dual mandate of maximum employment and stable prices. We will use macroeconomic theory, data, and cutting-edge research to analyze current economic conditions. The class will formulate a monetary policy recommendation for the U.S. central bank, emulating the Federal Open Market Committee, and five members of the class will present this recommendation in the annual Fed Challenge Competition at the at the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston. For a final project, each student will design their own mock monetary policy briefing and present it to the class.

CLASS PARTICIPATION:

You are expected to complete all assignments, and read all papers, articles, books, and listen to all video recordings and podcasts prior to class. I will evaluate your involvement during in class discussions on assignments and contributions to group work.

MINI PRESENTATIONS:

Each person will be assigned one of the following topics: housing, financial markets, labor market, international developments, Fed balance sheet and monetary policy. You will become an expert on your topic and prepare for a 5-minute presentation and Q&A for September 19 and 26.

BIG PRESENTATION:

The class will be divided into teams of 4-5 students that will each build and present a 15-minute slide deck analyzing economic and financial conditions and formulating a monetary policy recommendation, modeling the Federal Open Market Committee, during class October 3. Each team will then be asked a series of follow-up questions about their presentation and the state of the economy more generally.

VOTING:

The class will anonymously vote for peers to participate in the collegiate competition. One of each topic expert will be chosen. All other students will be assigned tasks to merge the best parts of each Big Presentation into a final presentation for the collegiate competition and to prepare their peers for the Q&A.

THE COLLEGIATE COMPETITION:

On Friday, October 13, the class team will give a 15-minute live presentation on Zoom to Fed Challenge judges followed by a Q&A. The top two teams from each of the three brackets will advance to a second-round competition (6 teams total) on Sunday, October 15. From the Sunday competition, the top three teams identified will advance onto the Board of Governors regional final/national process. All students in the class should have these dates open and listed on their calendars.

DRAFT: Last Updated: September 2, 2023

MOCK BRIEFING:

Suppose you are an economist at the Federal Reserve Board of Governors. Every month a handful of economists give a special briefing to the Board of Governors. You were selected to give this month's presentation on a topic of your choice, but one that is of interest and importance to the Federal Reserve. You will prepare 1-2 pages of beautifully formatted charts, each with 6 panels per page, and write script to accompany your charts. You will give each Board Member (i.e. your classmates here) a chart sheet and read your script which references the charts. After each briefing there will be a Q&A.

GRADES:

Participation (20%); Mini presentation (10%); Big competition (30%); Collegiate competition prep (10%); Final mock briefing (30%).

SCHEDULE:

Tue Sep 12	Introduction lecture and group formation
Tue Sep 19	Mini presentations
Tue Sep 26	Mini presentations
Tue Oct 3	Big presentations
Tues Oct 10	Fed Challenge presentation and workshop
Fri Oct 13	Collegiate competition, first round
Sun Oct 15	Collegiate competition, second round
Tue Oct 17	No class
Tue Oct 24	Recap, mock briefing instruction and examples
Tue Oct 24	Mock briefing workday
Tue Oct 31	Discuss <i>Economical Writing</i> ; mock briefing workday
Tue Nov 7	Watch FOMC meeting
Tue Nov 14	Mock briefing workday
Tue Nov 28	Mock briefing presentations
Tue Dec 5	Mock briefing presentations

DUE DATES:

Date	Assignments
Tue Sep 12	Take survey, read <i>Limitless</i> by Jeanna Smialek, answer prompts
Tue Sep 19	Prepare big pres. outline, prepare mini pres., Jackson Hole
Tue Sep 26	Prepare big pres. charts, prepare mini pres., Sep FOMC press conference
Tue Oct 3	Prepare final big presentation
Tue Oct 10	Prepare class Fed Challenge presentation
Tue Oct 17	Break
Tue Oct 24	Mock briefing topic and preliminary charts
Tue Oct 31	Read <i>Economical Writing</i> by Deirdre McCloskey, answer prompts
Tue Nov 14	Draft mock briefing
Tue Nov 28 or Dec 5	In-class mock briefing presentation

OTHER DETAILS:

1. Please take care of yourself. College is a demanding (and rewarding) experience. If you or one of your friends, peers, classmates is facing mental health problems, please consider seeking help. Resources include Resident Life Staff, Middlebury College Counseling center, and ULifeLine website.
2. You must sign the Honor Code on all written assignments. Directly copying someone else's work, ideas, or answers is an Honor Code violation with serious consequences.
3. You may use AI tools (e.g. ChatGPT, Bard) to help generate ideas and brainstorm, but only on assignments for which I have given permission to use AI tools, as specified on the syllabus or course website. Outputs generated by these programs may be inaccurate, incomplete, or otherwise problematic. I will hold you accountable for the accuracy of your work. Be aware that use of AI may also limit your own independent thinking and creativity. Do not submit any work generated by an AI tool as your own. If you include material generated by an AI tool, it should be cited like any other reference material (e.g., [MLA](#) or [APA](#) style citation). Any uncited or inappropriate use of AI tools will be treated as a violation of Middlebury's Honor Code.
4. Students who have Letters of Accommodation in this class are encouraged to contact me as early in the semester as possible to ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion. For those without Letters of Accommodation, assistance is available to eligible students through the Disability Resource Center (DRC). Please contact ADA Coordinators at ada@middlebury.edu for more information. All discussions will remain confidential.
5. At Middlebury, we strive to make our campus a respectful, engaged community that embraces difference with all the complexity and individuality each person brings. Each student in this course is expected to contribute to an inclusive and respectful class environment. Students of all backgrounds including gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and religion are to be treated fairly and with honesty, integrity, and respect. Civil discourse without degrading, abusing, harassing, or silencing others is required of all students in this class.