

ECON 204: Global Poverty and Economic Development

Department of Economics
Williams College
Spring 2026
(syllabus revised February 5, 2026)

1 Contact Information and Course Logistics

1.1 Instructor

Dr. Pamela Jakiela (email: pj5@williams.edu)

1.2 Course Meetings

Mondays, Wednesdays from 8:30 AM to 9:45 AM in Schapiro 141

1.3 Office Hours

Professor Jakiela's office hours will be held on Mondays from 2:00 to 3:00 and on Wednesdays from 3:00 to 4:00. Office hours take place in 339 Schapiro. If you have a course that conflicts with my scheduled office hours, you can email me to set up an appointment for an alternative time. Please note that I am unable to meet in the evening or on weekends.

1.4 Course Websites

<https://pjakiela.github.io/ECON204/>

Most course material is available on the public website for the course. Specifically, the github website will have lecture slides, empirical exercises, and links to readings.

<https://www.gradescope.com/courses/1231363>

All assignments will be posted on and submitted through gradescope. You'll receive an email inviting you to join the course, and that will allow you to set up a gradescope account linked to your Williams email address.

1.5 Communication

Email (pj5@williams.edu) is the best way to contact me. Under normal circumstances, I will try to respond to course-related emails within two working days of receipt.¹ I am sometimes overwhelmed by the volume of email I receive; if I have not responded to you within two working days, please feel free to send me an email reminder.

¹So, if you send me an email on Tuesday at noon, I will try to respond by the end of the day on Thursday. I do not check my email on weekends. If you send me an email on Friday afternoon, I will respond to it by the end of the day on Tuesday.

2 What Is This Course About, and Who Should Take It?

2.1 Course Description

This course explores the historical determinants of global poverty and inequality, and analyzes the range of policy options available to promote economic development and equalize opportunities. Drawing on research in development economics, development studies, political science, and anthropology, we seek to understand the factors that shaped the global economy and contributed to the cross-country income disparities observed today. In addition, we'll use the tools of modern empirical microeconomics to assess the possibilities for eliminating global poverty and underdevelopment in the future.

2.2 Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be familiar with:

1. The geographic distribution of global poverty, and its evolution over time;
2. The geographies, histories, and cultures of low- and middle-income countries;
3. The key stages and themes in the history of development thought;
4. The theory and practice of impact evaluation as applied to the assessment of the efficacy of development projects and other policies intended to alleviate global poverty;
5. The range of policies available to reduce poverty, equalize opportunities, improve firm productivity, and promote sustainable development, and the evidence base associated with such policies.

3 Assignments and Grading

Grades are calculated as follows:

Class participation	10 points
Readings comprehension questions	5 points
In-class worksheets	10 points
Stata/R labs	20 points
Colonialism project	10 points
Policy brief	15 points
Final exam	30 points

3.1 Class Participation

Active, constructive participation in class discussions is a critical part of the course. During class discussion, I will make notes on who is present (2 points), who contributes (3 points), and who elevates the discussion (4 points). Arriving late or using your phone during class will reduce your class participation grade.

For the in-class labs, you should come to class ready to work in Stata or R. Bring your laptop to class, and either make sure that it is fully charged or bring your power cord with you. During labs, I will be looking over your shoulder to assess whether you are fully engaged with the activity in a constructive manor.

3.2 Reading Comprehension Questions

Assigned readings should be completed before class. To earn credit for each reading assignment, you must complete the associated comprehension questions on gradescope prior to the relevant class meeting.

3.3 In-Class Worksheets

In addition to the reading comprehension questions, there will be three unannounced one-question reading quizzes over the course of the semester.

3.4 Stata/R Labs

You will complete five data analysis activities intended to build empirical skills. No prior experience with data analysis is assumed.

3.5 Impacts of Colonialism Project

Working in groups of two or three, you will make a short presentation summarizing a recent empirical study of the impacts of colonialism on long-run development.

3.6 Policy Brief

You will prepare a policy brief summarizing the results of an impact evaluation on a development policy topic of their choice.

3.7 Final Exam

There will be a short, in-person final exam during the exam period. Your final exam score counts for 30 percent of your final grade.

3.8 Late Assignments

Unless otherwise stated, all (unexcused) late assignments will be penalized: the maximum grade will be lowered by 10 percent for every day late for the first five days (including weekends). All assignments submitted more than five days late will receive half credit (less any reductions for incorrect responses).

4 Tentative Schedule of Topics and Important Dates

The schedule below is approximate, and will definitely be updated as we progress through the semester.

Dates	Description
2/6	Organizational Meeting
2/9	What Is Poverty?
2/11	Lab: Geography
2/16	The Long-Run Implications of the African Slave Trade
2/18	Lab: The Long-Run Implications of the African Slave Trade
2/23	The Long-Run Implications of Colonialism
2/25	Impacts of Colonialism Presentations
3/2, 3/4	Theories of Development
3/9	Industrial Policy
3/11	Investments in Agriculture and Structural Transformation
3/16	Personalized Rule
3/18	The Washington Consensus and Structural Adjustment
3/21– 4/1	Spring break, no class meetings
4/6	Randomized Trials in Development Economics
4/8–5/6	<i>Topics including management practices and firm productivity, learning-by-doing in the export sector, education, youth unemployment, micro-finance, rural development and poverty traps, agricultural productivity and food security, crop burning, indoor air pollution</i>
5/13	No class, Policy Brief group meetings with Professor Jakiela

5 Honor Code

Students are expected to adhere to the Williams College Honor Code. You should not present any work produced by individuals (or companies, institutions, or AI) outside this class as your own work under any circumstances. Any written work that you submit for any assignment must either be your own intellectual property or cited appropriately. If, at any point, you are unsure about how to appropriately cite others' work, please discuss this with me during office hours or over email.

You **are** allowed to use ChatGPT and other generative AI to assist with your coding. Generative AI is a powerful tool, and you should learn how to use it. On each assignment, I will ask you to describe your use of generative AI, but your use of such tools has no direct impact on your grade.

You are always responsible for submitting code that is correct, well-commented, etc., and for making sure that you understand the code that you are running. I reserve the right to ask you to explain any code that you submit; if you are unable to do so, you will not receive credit for the assignment. The exam will also include questions that are based on the Stata/R labs.

6 Tutoring through the Peer Academic Support Network

As a Williams student, you can use the free tutoring services provided by the Peer Academic Support Network. Step-by-step instructions for finding and scheduling tutoring sessions are on the Peer Academic Support Network webpage: <https://www.williams.edu/peer-academic-support/>.

7 Health and Accessibility Resources

Students with disabilities or disabling conditions who experience barriers in this course are encouraged to contact me to discuss options for access and full course participation. The Office of Accessible Education is also available to facilitate the removal of barriers and to ensure access and reasonable accommodations. Students with documented disabilities or disabling conditions of any kind who may need accommodations for this course or who have questions about appropriate resources are encouraged to contact the Office of Accessible Education at oaestaff@williams.edu.

8 Classroom Culture

The Williams community embraces diversity of age, background, beliefs, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, and other visible and non visible categories. I welcome all students in this course and expect that all students contribute to a respectful, welcoming and inclusive environment. If you have any concerns about classroom climate, please come to me to share your concern.

9 Concluding Thoughts

Congratulations on making it to the end of the syllabus. Do professors enjoy writing syllabi? Not really. Do students enjoy reading them? Probably not. Hopefully, this document will provide us with a shared set of expectations for the semester, making the course more constructive and enjoyable for everyone. Also, if you send me an email containing a picture of an elephant before February 9 (subject line: ECON 204 ELEPHANT), you will earn a point of extra credit.