Seminar in contemporary economic issues (LECON2820)

Teacher: Benoit DECERF

Credits: 5 ECTS

Semester : 2nd

Learning outcomes

Students learn how to intervene in a debate on a controversial societal issue using well-articulated reasoning. Students learn how to produce arguments trading-off and reconciling economic considerations with considerations of different nature: social, political, etc. They are able to present orally their opinion and able to write a report synthetizing divergent opinions.

Content

Over the past decades, many developed countries decided to centralize the allocation of public school seats in order to reduce segregation and improve social mixing. Heated public debate took place in all countries where such a centralized allocation procedure has been organized. These debates have been fueled by different stakeholders such as parent organizations, school networks or political parties, as well as by academic observers. Focusing on the particular case of the French Community in Belgium (Décret Inscription), the seminar investigates the issues at stake when designing such a centralized allocation mechanism, e.g. :

• which criteria are used to establish the priorities of students in the schools?
• which algorithm leads to efficient allocations while avoiding strategic manipulations of the parents?
• how does students diversity relate to school performance?

Teaching methods

Several talks and interventions introduce the topic. Students read and summarize research and newspaper articles before discussing them in class. In small groups, students prepare a presentation on a controversial question related to the seminar. Their talk is orally debated in class. Finally, they produce a report synthesizing the debate.

Evaluations

The grade is based on three components.

• Participation in class and home reading (20%)
• Oral presentation (40%)
• Final report (40%)

Recommended readings

The course is based on research articles and newspaper articles.