

ECON 136: Working with Economic Data: Valuing the Environment

Econ 136 is a topics course with no prerequisites that applies selected principles of economics to the quantitative analysis of economic data; using spreadsheets and other tools to collect, display and judge the reliability of economic data. This course will enhance your ability to use economic and quantitative reasoning to explain and persuade.

This semester's Working with Economic Data will focus on what economists have to say about valuing the environment. The course is designed both to stand alone and also to contribute to the Eco-Literacy 360.

Economists treat nature as providing environmental services that contribute to the production of goods and services that address human needs and desires. So, this course will focus in part on the measurement and valuation of those services as part of quantifying market outcomes. Within the discipline, environmental harm is seen as a failure of the market. We will consider how economists measure the magnitude of this deviation from the ideal, and assess efforts to ameliorate the failure.

Economics – whether the overlapping subfields of environmental economics or ecological economics – takes an anthropocentric view of the universe. Analysis from the perspective of whales, or a wetland, or the Earthly biosphere would ask different questions and reach different conclusions about optimality and failure. An underlying theme of this course is to think about what we mean by value. If we can't or don't choose to count something, does it count?