

Household Economics

Short course to be taught at University of Bologna May 2026

Lecture 1: May 27 14.30-15.30 Seminar Room

Lecture 2: May 28 14.30-15.30 Seminar Room

by [Shoshana Grossbard](#)

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Total hours of teaching: 2 hours, divided over two days.

Abstract

Households play a central role in producing essential META-goods such as children's human capital, care for elderly relatives, and nutrition. This course presents a framework of household decision-making that explicitly incorporates the production of these meta-goods and the role of spouses or partners in that process.

The model highlights two key forms of substitution. First, households can substitute between home production and market provision, such as cooking at home versus eating out. Second, they can substitute between partners within the household, as tasks such as caregiving or meal preparation can be performed by either spouse. These substitution margins generate new insights into how households allocate time and resources across members and activities. The framework helps interpret widely documented gaps in behavior among individuals in couples, including differences by gender, age, income, education, and other characteristics in consumption, labor supply, and time spent on caregiving and domestic work. Rather than viewing these gaps solely as outcomes of preferences or constraints at the individual level, the model emphasizes the importance of household production and intra-household allocation.

The course emphasizes the important role of explanatory factors related to marriage markets, such as sex ratios, changes in marriage and divorce laws, and characteristics that influence the likelihood of partnering. These factors shape both the availability of partners and the division of labor within households, thereby affecting observed economic behavior.

The conceptual foundations presented here are applicable whenever the topic of research involves household production. This includes analyses of labor supply, caregiving, and consumption decisions.

Syllabus

Section I. Household Economics: a Historical Perspective

- Modern Household Economics at Columbia and Chicago in the period 1960-1980
- The outcomes of interest:
 - (1) Type of relationship: marriage, cohabitation or ...?
 - (2) decisions that individual often make while in intimate relationships, such as labor supply, personal consumption, and investments in own or children's human capital
- Household Economics prior to 1960

Readings:

Folbre, Nancy. "The 'Sphere of Women' in Early Twentieth Century Economics." In *Gender and American Social Science*, edited by Helene Silverberg. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998. <https://press.princeton.edu/titles/6259.html>.

Grossbard, Shoshana. "The New Home Economics at Columbia and Chicago." In *Jacob Mincer: A Pioneer of Modern Labor Economics*, edited by Shoshana Grossbard. Springer US, 2006. <https://www.springer.com/us/book/9780387291741>.

Section II. the WIHO model

- WIHO stands for Work-in-Household

Required Readings:

Chapter 1, Chapter 2, Chapter 3 and Chapter 6 in Grossbard, Shoshana. *The Marriage Motive: A Price Theory of Marriage: How Marriage Markets Affect Employment, Consumption, and Savings*. New York: Springer-Verlag, 2015. <https://www.springer.com/us/book/9781461416227>.

Grossbard, Shoshana. Entry on Household Economics for Encyclopedia

Grossbard, Shoshana "[Spouses as home health workers, childcare workers and cooks: Insights for applied research.](#)" *Economics and Human Biology*, December 2025. Article 101540

Porter, Maria. "How Do Sex Ratios in China Influence Marriage Decisions and Intra-Household Resource Allocation?" *Review of Economics of the Household* 14, no. 2 (June 1, 2016): 337–71. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11150-014-9262-9>.

Recommended Reading:

Grosjean, Pauline and Rose Khattar. "It's Raining Men! Hallelujah? The Long-Run Consequences of Male-Biased Sex Ratios." *Review of Economic Studies*, Vol. 86(2), March 2019: 723–754.

Section III. Modeling Decision-Making in Households and marriage markets. Applications to labor supply, household production, couple formation, fertility and more

Required Readings:

Grossbard, Shoshana. *The Marriage Motive: A Price Theory of Marriage. How Marriage Markets Affect Employment, Consumption and Savings*. Springer, 2015. [ISBN 978-1-4614-1623-4](#).

Grossbard-Shechtman, Shoshana A., and Shoshana Neuman. “Women’s Labor Supply and Marital Choice.” *Journal of Political Economy* 96, no. 6 (1988): 1294–1302.

Recommended readings:

Badgett, M. Lee, Gary Gates, and Natalya Maisel. “Registered Domestic Partnerships among Gay Men and Lesbians: The Role of Economic Factors.” *Review of Economics of the Household* 6, no. 4 (2008): 327–46.

Gary Becker, *A Treatise on the Family*, Harvard U Press, 1981 (first edition) or 1993 (second edition).

Section IV. Economic analyses of laws related to marriage and divorce

Readings:

Alshaikhmubarak, Hazem, R. Richard Geddes, and Shoshana A. Grossbard. “Single Motherhood and the Abolition of Coverture in the United States.” *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies* 16, no. 1 (2019): 94–118. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jels.12210>.

Beleche, Trinidad “Domestic violence laws and suicide in Mexico.” *Review of Economics of the Household* (2019) 17:229-248

[“How to police intimate partner violence against women? New lessons from women’s police stations in Brazil.”](#) (by Júlia Sbroglio Rizzotto, Shoshana Grossbard and Marco Túlio A. França) Human Capital and Economic Opportunity Working Group Working Paper 2026-001, January 2026.