This course will explore the economic and social challenges facing contemporary France as a result of demographic change, European integration and globalization. We will consider how high unemployment, job insecurity, and mounting social and economic inequality have called into question the prevailing French systems of income redistribution and social protection. And we will examine how policy makers have tried to reform key elements of the “welfare state” (pensions, social security, healthcare) and how they have addressed the problems of unemployment and socio-economic exclusion. We will then consider how economists, sociologists and other critics and intellectuals have responded to the policies and proposals that the different political actors have advanced, both at the national and European levels.

The course as a whole aims both to give students a basic understanding of the contemporary French economy and to introduce them to the conceptual framework of modern political economy. There are no prerequisites, though the course assumes a basic knowledge of the political history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century France.