International Economic History/ Development

Professor: Matthew J. Hill

Introduction

This course will examine the central questions in economic history: why did the world become very rich, very quickly, and why did it only happen in certain countries? We will link these questions to issues facing developing countries today.

In this course, students will be guided through a social science based research process. They will learn how to develop a research question, find data on that question, analyze the data and then communicate their findings to a broad audience.

The small class size of the seminar allows for supervision, advice, and feedback from the professor and peers through each step of that research process. Further, students can choose a topic of direct interest to them for their main project related to the themes of the course. By the end of the course, students will be familiar with some of the most recent research methodologies in economics.

In terms of knowledge, students will leave the course with a solid understanding of the economic forces that shaped the world today and with an understanding of factors that have impacted economic development, historically.

In terms of skills, students will leave the course with skills that are a high value in virtually any field they will enter: data analysis and the ability to articulate the results of that data analysis to a larger audience.

Specific Objectives

1. Understanding: Students will gain a basic understanding of the theories surrounding economic development with particular attention to religion, culture, geography, and technology.

2. Research and Data Analysis: Students will become well versed in the basics of research in quantitative social science, data analysis, and how data can and should be used to support a thesis/argument.

3. Communication: Students will develop written and oral skills to communicate research findings and analysis results to an audience. Additionally, students will learn how to present data in a easily understood manner.

Class Sessions

Sessions will be broken down into three parts
1. Lecture – Professor will present the lecture material.
2. Discussion – Group discussion of lecture and readings.
3. Research methods – Student’s research project will be discussed. With every stage of the project, the appropriate research methodology will be taught and students will be prepared to discuss/present specific phases of their project (see Research Project).
Readings

The readings of each class will be uploaded to the course website prior to each meeting. Students are required to download and review the required readings. Part of each class session will be devoted to the readings. Students should be familiar with the author’s argument and the evidence the author showed to support that argument. Students should prepare both discussion questions and criticisms of the reading and be prepared to share those with the class.

Grading Policy

The course grade will be based on:

1. Participation (20%) See Reading above.
2. Research Project (50%): 10% for each part (See Research Project below).
3. Final exam (30%): Exam material will be based on the required readings and the lecture slides. The final will be mostly essay-based analyzing major themes in the course and arguments.

Research Project

Students will be guided through a research project with feedback from the professor and peers. The project will consist of 5 steps.

1. Choosing a topic/ question. Students will choose a topic from the course of interest to them and share their initial ideas on the topic with the class.
2. Literature review. Students will read the relevant academic literature and also other sources, such as journalism, podcasts, and blog posts. Students will present brief literature reviews to the class.
3. Acquiring data. Students will do research and find appropriate data from the web to analyze their topic. There will be a lecture on locating common data sources.
4. Data analysis. Students will analyze data with either Excel or Stata. There will be a lecture on simple data analyses.
5. Presentation of results. Students will present their results to the rest of the class by conveying the results in a clear fashion to a broad audience and by using data visualizations (e.g. interactive charts and maps) which summarize their main findings. Guidelines and examples of data visualizations will be distributed to the class in advance.

General Course Plan†

Lecture : Let’s Economic History
Lecture : Overview of GDP
Lecture (2 classes): Overview of 3 big explanations for Economic Growth
Lecture : The Malthusian World

† This plan is tentative. It is subject to change during the quarter.
Lecture: Early Agriculture
Lecture: Trade and Growth
Lecture (2 classes): Religion
Lecture: Industrial Revolution Part 1
Lecture: Industrial Revolution Part 2 (Workers)
Lecture: Late Industrialization (Failure of Latin America)
Lecture: Late Industrialization (Success of East Asia)
Lecture (2 classes): Great Depression
Lecture: Colonialism and Exploitation
Lecture: 20th Century: Growth, Inequality and Women
Lecture (2 classes): Persistence

Detailed Course Plan and Reading List

Lecture: Let’s Economic History

Required Readings:

http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/foreigners/2014/12/the_world_is_not_falling_apart_the_trend_lines_reveal_an_increasingly_peaceful.single.html

26 Charts that show the world is getting much, much better – Dylan Matthews
http://www.vox.com/2014/11/24/7272929/charts-thankful


Background:


Angus Deaton on EconTalk. Health Improvements Over Time
http://www.econtalk.org/archives/featuring/angus_deaton/

Louis CK- Everything is Amazing and No one is happy
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uEY58fSK8E&t=0m20s

Lecture: What is GDP and Why do we care?

Required Readings:

Planet Money on the Invention of the Economy:
http://www.npr.org/blogs/money/2014/03/05/286366404/episode-521-the-invention-of-the-economy
Background:


Lecture : The Big Question and 5 Explanations

Required Readings


Background:

On geography:

Summary of Jared Diamond’s Geographic Determinism argument: http://www.economist.com/node/151364

On markets/values:


Alex Tabarokk and Tyler Cowen on Jared Diamond : http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-OobkQyTN9k#t=23


McCloskey’s review of Mokyr http://www.deirdremccloskey.com/docs/pdf/Article_64.pdf

Eric Jones’ European Miracle interactive presentation: http://prezi.com/xascr9zsbj_1/eric-jones-the-european-miracle/


Lecture 3: The Malthusian World

Required Readings

Background:

Kelly, Morgan, and Cormac O'Gráda. "Living Standards and Mortality Since the Middle Ages." (2010).

Economist Fight!

Review of Farewell to Alms

Lecture 4: Early Agriculture

Background:


On the Possible Role of Ancient Agriculture and Personality:

Lecture 5: Trade and Growth

Required Readings:


Background:


Lecture 6: Religion

Required Readings (pick 1):


Background:


Lecture 7 and 8: Industrial Revolution

Required Readings:


Roderick Floud, Bernard Harris, “Health, Height, and Welfare: Britain, 1700-1980”

Background Readings:


http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/IndustrialRevolutionandtheStandardofLiving.html
Lecture 9: Late-Industrialisation (I): Latin America’s Challenges

Background Readings:


Lecture 10: Late-Industrialisation (II): East Asia’s Success

Required Readings:


Background


Lecture 11: Great Depression (The Failure of Economic Growth)

Required Readings:


Background:

Crafts, N. and Fearon, P. “Lessons from the 1930s Great Depression” (2010) CEPR 8057

Planet Money on how a bubble develops: http://www.npr.org/blogs/money/2014/03/19/291485828/episode-525-trouble-inside-a-babysitting-economy
Lecture 12: Colonialism

Required:


Background:


Lecture 13: Economic Growth in the future: Inequality and the Role of Women

Required


Background


On inequality—

Pro-Piketty
Lecture 14: Persistence

Required:


Required (Pick 1):

