Instructor: Noel D. Johnson

Email: njohnsoL@gmu.edu

Office Location: Carow 8

Office Hours: Tuesdays 2:00-3:00 or by appointment

Course Webpage: http://noeldjohnson.net/noeldjohnson.net/US_Econ_Hist.html

Course Description
In this course we will read and discuss a selection of articles about U.S. Economic History. The format of the course is thematic – I will not be teaching the narrative of U.S. history. I place a lot of emphasis on teaching you how to consume cutting-edge empirical research from economics journals. You will also be writing your own research paper. There is no required text and all of the readings are downloadable from the internet. The readings are broken down roughly as follows:

Week 1     Introduction
Week 2     Measurement and Causality
Weeks 3    Deep Determinants
Weeks 4    Institutions: Antecedents, Constitutions, and Coordination
Weeks 5    Industrialization
Weeks 6    Urban Economic History
Weeks 7    Innovation
Week 8     Minorities and Economic Development
Week 9     The Great Depression
Week 10    Mobility and Inequality
Week 11 Recent Developments: Trade

Week 12 Recent Developments: Industrial Organization

Week 13 Student Research Paper Presentations

Week 14 Student Research Paper Presentations

Course Requirements

_Eighty percent of success is showing up_ – Woody Allen

- Research paper worth 40% of your final grade.
- Comprehensive final exam worth 40% of your final grade.
- Research paper presentation worth 20% of your final grade.

A Note on the Paper

Your topic can be from any time-period before 1960 (‘persistence’ papers are a partial exception). It need not be related to the economic history of the United States. The paper _should test or attempt to study a specific hypothesis using historical data_. The test need not be econometric. While it is normal to expect that an economics research paper will involve some modeling and simple regressions it is also possible to produce a good paper making clever use of tables and graphs. What is essential is that you learn how to make an argument and sustain or reject it on the basis of empirical evidence. You might seek to apply an existing model to different data or repeat a test that already exists in the literature using different time periods. The final work should be about 15-20 pages in length, double-spaced in Times Roman 12 pt. font.

To assist you in the writing and completion of the paper I’m providing some credible threats/incentives to encourage you to accomplish three distinct steps in the writing process. The first step is the writing of a preliminary proposal. The preliminary proposal describes the topic (about a paragraph or so) and provides a brief bibliography (about five sources). _At least one of these sources should be a primary source_. I also strongly encourage you to meet with me sometime before choosing your topic and writing the proposal. The preliminary proposal is due September 28 at midnight. The second due date is a presentation of your research that you will make to the class sometime during the last three sessions we meet. These presentations will be 20 minutes long each and they will be graded. The final draft of the paper must be submitted by midnight on December 7. I will take half a letter grade (5%) off your assignment grade if you don’t hand it in when it is due. I will take an additional half a letter grade off for every 24 hour period you don’t hand it in.

I strongly encourage all of you to write the paper in _LATEX_. This is the standard among most researchers in economics today and you might as well learn it now rather than later. Here is a source to get you started:
A Note on Exams

The final will be administered on 14 December from 7:30 pm to 10:15 pm and is comprehensive. You are required to take the final, failure to do so will result in an F for the course. The final exam will only be rescheduled for a University condoned reason and I will ask for a note from your doctor (and will call said to doctor to confirm the note) if this is your excuse.

The exams will consist of a mix of short definitions and essay questions. These questions will focus on the readings that we discussed in class as well as my lecture on these readings.

A Note on Presentations

Twenty percent of your course grade is determined by your paper presentation.

I encourage the use of slides for your presentation, but try not to over-do it. If you have questions on what is over-doing it, please refer to this book:


I will grade your presentations on ‘content’ (how well you have framed and answered your research question) and ‘style’ (how well you present the material).

Since you’re probably writing the paper in \texttt{LaTeX}, you should probably also make your presentation slides using the \texttt{LaTeX}presentation environment known as Beamer. Here are some sample slides:

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/hnccpxzmqjn55d/AACvkPZ25DxR5hhGrURXR91Ea?dl=0

Recommended Texts

There are no required texts for this class that must be purchased. Most of the readings can be downloaded from either JSTOR, the NBER Working Papers archive, EconLit, or the course webpage. You are required to acquire these papers and read them before the week they are listed on the syllabus. You are expected to know the papers on the course reading list for the exams. Some of the readings have stars next to them. I will discuss these in detail in class. The readings without stars are still required for exams, but I will spend less time on them in class. I also include a list of readings from previous iterations of this course. These are optional, though if you plan on taking the Economic History Field Exam, you should familiarize yourself with them.

In addition to the papers listed below, you may wish to purchase a general text on U.S. economic history. Good choices would be:


Also, some of the articles require knowledge of econometric techniques. I will attempt to explain the methods used when they come up, however, this is not an econometrics class and you may wish to have a more detailed treatment of the methods at your disposal. It is a fact of the economist’s life that empirical methods are very, very, important. Even if you don’t plan on using econometrics for your dissertation or in your own research or work, you will look like a fool (and will often be treated like one) if you don’t understand the basics. Two excellent sources for the basics (plus some more advanced material) are:


If you plan on using stata to do some econometrics and you want a thorough conceptual guide to that, check out Shapiro’s and Gentzkow’s guide to ‘Code and Data’ which I have placed in the folder of downloadable readings on the course webpage.

A good place to get advice on how to write a paper is, D.N. McCloskey. Economical Writing. Waveland Press, Incorporated, 2000

Or, you could take a look at the material on my webpage here: http://goo.gl/LBkws1

I also highly recommend this book:


Also, take a look at John Cochrane’s ‘Writing Tips for Ph.D. Students’ which I have placed in the folder of downloadable readings on the course webpage.

**Some Important Dates**

First Day of Classes: 8/28

Labor Day Recess: 9/4

Columbus Day Recess: 10/9 (Tuesday classes don’t meet that week)

Thanksgiving Recess: 11/22 – 11/26

Last Day of Classes: 12/9

Final Exam: Tuesday 12/19 from 4:30 pm to 7:15 pm
PLEASE NOTE: COURSE POLICIES

1. George Mason University Honor System and Code

Honor Code

George Mason University has an Honor Code, which requires all members of this community to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. Cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing are all prohibited.

All violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee.

Plagiarism (statements from Mason Web Site)

Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another person without giving that person credit.

http://mason.gmu.edu/ montecin/plagiarism.htm#plagiarism

Please familiarize yourself with the Honor System and Code, as stated in the George Mason University Undergraduate Catalog. When you are given an assignment as an individual, the work must be your own. Some of your work may be collaborative; source material for group projects and work of individual group members must be carefully documented for individual contributions.

http://mason.gmu.edu/ montecin/plagiarism.htm

2. Class Registration

Students are responsible for verifying the accuracy of their own schedules. Students need to check PatriotWeb regularly to verify that they are registered for the classes that they think they are. This is particularly important since students are no longer dropped for nonpayment. Faculty may not allow a student who is not registered to continue to attend class and may not grade the work of students who do not appear on the official class roster.

Deadlines each semester are published in the Schedule of Classes available from the Registrar’s Web Site registrar.gmu.edu

After the last day to drop a class, withdrawing from this class requires the approval of the dean and is only allowed for nonacademic reasons. Undergraduate students may choose to exercise a selective withdrawal. See the Schedule of Classes for selective withdrawal procedures.

3. Accommodations for students with disabilities:

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Resources at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

The need for accommodations should be identified at the beginning of the semester and the specific accommodation has to be arranged through the Office of Disability Resources. Faculty cannot provide accommodations to students on their own (e.g. allowing a student extra time to complete an exam because the student reports having a disability).
Course Outline

**Week 1: Introduction**

*Peptalk on research from David Weil


**Week 2: Measurement and Causality**


Bellemare, “A Primer on Linear Regression”

Bellemare, “A Primer on Causality”

**Week 3: Deep Determinants**


**Week 4: Institutions: Antecedents, Constitutions, and Coordination**


The United States Constitution


**Week 5: Industrialization**


**Week 6: Urban Economic History**


**Week 7: Innovation**


**Week 8: Minorities and Economic Development**


**Week 9: The Great Depression**


Week 10: Mobility and Inequality


Week 11: Recent Developments: Trade


Week 12: Recent Developments: Industrial Organization


Week 13: Student Research Paper Presentations

Week 14: Student Research Paper Presentations

The Comprehensive Final Exam will be on Tuesday 12/19 from 4:30 pm to 7:15 pm
Readings from Previous Semesters


Scott Aaronson, ‘Shtetl Optimized’


Herbert Gintis. Hayek’s contribution to a reconstruction of economic theory. January 2011


Study of Wheat Prices,” The Economic History Review. 64 (2).


Roger Ransom. “The Economics of the Civil War.” Download from Eh.net: [http://eh.net/encyclopedia/article/ransom.civil.war.us](http://eh.net/encyclopedia/article/ransom.civil.war.us)


W. Walker Hanlon. Necessity is the mother of invention: Input supplies and directed technical change. May 2013


Hoyt Bleakley and Joseph Ferrie. Up from poverty? the 1832 Cherokee land lottery and the long-run distribution of wealth. June 2013


Randall G. Holcombe and Donald J. Lacombe. The growth of local government in the United


