Economics 365-001  
Topics in Economic History  
Meeting Time: **Tuesday, 7:20-10:00 PM**, Room: **Planetary Hall 126**  
Course Pre-Requisites: Econ 103 and 104

**Contact Information**

Instructor: Scott King  
Office: Buchanan Hall, Suite D101  
Email: mking18@gmu.edu  
Office Hours: Wednesday 1:00-3:00, by appointment

**Required Books:**


2.) Timur Kuran (TK), *The Long Divergence: How Islamic Law Held Back the Middle East* (2011)

**Course Description:** Why is it that some countries became wealthy, whereas others remained poor? What do economists mean by “institutions”, and why do they matter? What are transactions costs, and how can they be mitigated? Why did innovation and technological progress start in Western Europe, but not in other parts of the world—most notably the Middle East? What relevance does economics have for studying the past, and how can economics help illuminate historical phenomena? Does economy history have any lessons for the future? These are some of the questions we will attempt to tackle in this course.

This will be a **reading heavy course**. If you do not keep up with the readings, it is very likely you will find it difficult to do well. Keeping up with the assigned readings and being an active classroom participant are the best ways to maximize your grade and get the most of the course. Readings will come from the assigned books and others that I select. A link to assigned readings not in the assigned texts will be available on Blackboard.

**Writing Intensive Course:** This course is designated as a “Writing Intensive” course. It fulfills the writing intensive requirement for the economics major. It will do so by having you plan and complete an original research paper in the field of economic history.

To aid you in this process, I will require you to turn in a research proposal that is **at least** 1000 words (about 4 pages) long, describing what question you are answering and how you will go about answering it. Your research proposal must contain a clear hypothesis using the tools of economics, and how you plan to test such a hypothesis. I will give you feedback and advice on these proposals which will be useful for you as you complete the final paper.

Your final paper should be **at least 3000 words (about 12 pages) including references**, Papers must also be appropriately sourced, and **not plagiarized**. Any paper that is plagiarized will be automatically assigned a failing grade. A good paper should include a survey of the relevant literature, be written in clear English, and explicitly highlight the way that the tools of economics can help answer your question.

I encourage you to start thinking of a topic early, and I would be more than pleased to discuss any ideas you may have at any time during the semester. You will be required to submit your research proposal by Spring break. Alternatively, if you have a rough draft completed before the final due date (within reason) I am more than happy to read it for you and provide comments where applicable. Please do take note of
GMU’s Writing Center for advice on academic writing (https://writingcenter.gmu.edu/) I will also post some resources on Blackboard that should be useful as well!

**Grading:** Your grade will be determined by one midterm, one final, your research proposal, a final term paper, reading quizzes given at the beginning of class, and classroom participation. The grade breakdown is as follows:

- **Midterm 1:** 20%
- **Final Exam:** 20%
- **Bibliography:** 5%
- **Proposal:** 10%
- **Term Paper:** 25%
- **Quizzes:** 10%
- **Participation:** 10%

**Grading Scale:**


**Exams:** Exams will be closed book. You will not be able to use a calculator (you won’t need one) or any cell phones, tablets, computers, or mobile devices. The final exam will be cumulative, and cover material from the whole class. Exams will be made up of multiple choice questions, true/false questions, short response, and long response questions.

**There will be no make-up exams.** If you have to miss the midterm for a documented medical emergency (I will require a doctor’s note) then the percentage for that exam will be added to your final exam—ergo, your final exam will now be worth 40% of the grade. You will be required to take the final—failing to do so will result in an F for the course.

**Reading Quizzes:** At the beginning of class, I will distribute a short quiz based on the week’s assigned readings, no more than two questions at most. All quiz questions will be answerable in a short paragraph. The goal of this quiz is not to test your in-depth knowledge of the concepts in the readings, but to give you an incentive to keep up with the readings and be able to come to class prepared to discuss them. If you diligently keep up with the readings, these will be easy points for you! I will also drop your lowest two quiz grades. If you are unable to attend class or miss the quiz at the beginning, you will be assigned a score of zero, which can be dropped. **I will not be offering make-up quizzes.**

**Annotated Bibliography:** You should send me a list of at least five sources you are planning on using for your term paper, along with a brief (about 150 words) description and evaluative paragraph to let me know why you are choosing the source and what you will get out of it. This means that you should have an idea of a potential topic by this time. Please include the question you are trying to answer in this as well—you don’t need to have a well-formulated hypothesis yet, but you should give me an idea of what you will be studying, and what time period it is in.

**Proposal:** You will be required to submit a proposal for your term paper. This will give you the chance to receive feedback and advice from me about your topic of choice, which should be incorporated into your final paper draft. While you will only be required to submit one proposal draft to me, I am more than happy to discuss subsequent revisions to it if you would like.
**Term Paper:** The term paper should be **at least 3000 words, double spaced.** I will be sending out a rubric later on regarding specifics such as font choice and citation style. You are allowed to choose any event between the fall of the Western Roman Empire and the end of World War II, but you must ask a novel question and utilize outside scholarly sources. An economic analysis will be mandatory—a mere description of events will not be enough. Your paper should propose a well-specified economic hypothesis to link two or more phenomena together, and support your hypothesis using historical information.

**Participation:** Part of learning how to be an economist is engaging with and critiquing ideas. To facilitate this, a large portion of our class will be discussion oriented. To facilitate discussion, I will require each of you to **submit two questions related to the week’s readings to me via email**, at mking18@gmu.edu. Questions must be submitted by 11:59 PM on Wednesday, the day before lecture, and stay for the discussion portion to receive full credit. These questions will be the center piece of our classroom discussions. Like quizzes, you will be given two “freebies”, so if you forget to submit questions one week, it will not damage your grade.

**Attendance:** While attendance is not strictly mandatory, it is worth noting that a full 20% of your grade, in terms of quizzes and classroom participation, requires you to be present and attentive. Missing a class or two will not harm your grade, but any more than this could have severe ramifications. Plan accordingly.

**Important Dates:**

- Bibliography: **February 28th**
- Midterm: **March 7th**
- Research Proposal Due: **March 7th**
- Term Paper Due: **May 2nd**
- Final Exam: **Thursday, May 9th, 7:30-10:15 PM**

**Class Schedule:** The following schedule should be viewed as tentative, and subject to change. However, I will notify you of any changes in class beforehand.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
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<tr>
<td>Week 1 (January 24th)</td>
<td>What is economic history? Why do we do it? Syllabus review</td>
<td>“Institutions”—Douglass North</td>
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<td>“The Importance of History for Economic Development”—Nathan Nunn</td>
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<td>“Transactions Costs”—Douglas W. Allen</td>
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<td>“The Economic Theory of Rent-Seeking”—Robert Tollison</td>
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<td>Week 2 (January 31st)</td>
<td>Institutions, Transactions Costs, and Economic History: A conceptual toolset.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>February 14th</td>
<td>Rulers, Religion, and Riches: Introduction</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>February 21st</td>
<td>Rulers, Religion, and Riches: Applications</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>February 28th</td>
<td>Rulers, Religion, and Riches: European Comparisons</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>March 7th</td>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>March 14th</td>
<td>NO CLASS—SPRING BREAK</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>March 21st</td>
<td>Islam and Underdevelopment: an Old Puzzle Revisited</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>March 28th</td>
<td>Organizations and Stagnation I</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>April 4th</td>
<td>Organizations and Stagnation II</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>April 11th</td>
<td>Innovation and Intellectual Origins</td>
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“Inducing Ideas for Industrialization”—Anton Howes |
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| Week 14 (April 25th) | Ideas: The Bourgeois Dignity | “Bourgeois Dignity: Why Economics Can’t Explain the Modern World”—Deirdre McCloskey—chapters 1, 2, 3  
“Deirdre McCloskey and Economists’ Ideas About Ideas”—Liberty Matters, all essays |
| Week 15 (May 2nd)   | Final Lecture, Review  
Term Paper Due |  |
| Thursday, May 9th   | FINAL EXAM |  |

**Disability Services:** No person should be denied educational access due to a disability. All accommodations for disabilities must be set up at the beginning of the semester with the Office of Disability Services. They can be reached at (703)-993-2474 or ods@gmu.edu. Additional information about GMU policy can be found at ds.gmu.edu.

**Honor Code:** At George Mason University, Academic Integrity is demonstrated in our work, community, the classroom and research. We maintain this commitment to high academic standards through Mason’s Honor Code. It is an agreement made by all members of our community to not “cheat, steal, plagiarize, or lie in matters related to your academic work.” Students sign an agreement to adhere to the Honor Code on their application for admission to Mason and are responsible for being aware of the most current version of the code.

For more information about the honor code—including definitions of what counts as cheating, lying, and plagiarism—please visit the Office of Academic Integrity’s website.

George Mason University is committed to providing a learning, living and working environment that is free from discrimination and a campus that is free of sexual misconduct and other acts of interpersonal violence in order to promote community well-being and student success. We encourage students who believe that they have been sexually harassed, assaulted or subjected to sexual misconduct to seek
assistance and support. University Policy 1202: Sexual Harassment and Misconduct speaks to the specifics of Mason’s process, the resources, and the options available to students.

**Notice of mandatory reporting of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking:** As a faculty member, I am designated as a “Responsible Employee,” and must report all disclosures of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking to Mason’s Title IX Coordinator per University Policy 1412. You may seek assistance from Mason’s Title IX Coordinator, Jennifer Hammat, by calling 703-993-8730 or email cde@gmu.edu. If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact one of Mason’s confidential resources, such as Student Support and Advocacy Center (SSAC) at 703-993-3686 or Counseling and Psychology Services (CAPS) at 703-993-2380. The 24-hour Sexual and Intimate Partner Violence Crisis Line for Mason is 703-380-1434.

*If you are still reading the syllabus at this point, you are indeed a dedicated and diligent student. Send a picture of the cutest dog you know of for an extra credit point before Thursday, January 31st. This is not a group project, so don’t tell your classmates about it!*