Instructor: Noel D. Johnson
Email: njohnsoL@gmu.edu
Cell Phone: 314-420-5735
Office Location: Carow 8 and Hazel Hall 434B
Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays: 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. in Carow 8
Course Web Page: http://web.mac.com/noeldjohnson/Site/Teaching.html

Course Description

In this course we will read a selection of articles in U.S. Economic History that I believe are important. Aside from learning some history and economics, a major component of the the course is to learn to think, read, and write critically. To that end, classroom discussion of the articles and a research paper on a topic of your own choosing are central components of the course. We will not have a text and all of the readings are downloadable from the internet. The readings are broken down roughly as follows:

Weeks 1, 2: Introduction and Discussion of deep determinants of U.S. economic growth.


Weeks 5, 6: Other sources of growth and the consequences of that growth.

Weeks 7, 8, 9, 10: Topics from the nineteenth century. The Civil War and the long-run consequences of the institution of Slavery, Immigration and Labor Mobility, Technology, Biology, and Common Pool Resource Problems.

Weeks 12, 13: The Great Depression.

Weeks 14: Historical Perspectives on recent issues. The regulatory state. The race between education and technology.

Course Requirements

Midterm Exam worth 20% of your final grade.

Comprehensive Final Exam worth 20% of your final grade.

Required to read the articles and participate. During the first class we will work out who will introduce the papers each week. This is worth 20% of your final grade.

Research paper worth 20% of your final grade.

Stuff Leading Up To Research Paper (see below) is worth 20% of your final grade.

The paper should contain a literature survey and critical essay on one important issue in the study of economic history. Your topic can be from any period of history, however, it must be related to either the pre-history (which we don’t cover), origins, or development of the United States. Most importantly, you 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 this 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 four distinct steps in the writing process. The first step is the writing of a preliminary proposal. The preliminary proposal describes the topic (about a page) and provides a brief bibliography (about a page). I also strongly encourage you to meet with me sometime before choosing your topic and writing the proposal. The preliminary proposal is due October 4. The second step is the completion of a detailed proposal. The detailed proposal contains the introduction and literature review of your paper and is due November 1. The third and fourth steps are the completion of rough and final drafts of your paper. The rough draft is due November 29. The final draft is due in my mailbox before the end of the day on December 13.

**Recommended Texts**

There are no required texts for this class. All of the readings can be downloaded from either JSTOR, the NBER Working Papers archive, or EconLit. You are required to acquire these papers and read them before the week they are listed on the syllabus. You are only expected to read the starred papers. You are expected to know the starred papers for the exams. The other readings are optional.

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, many of the articles we will be reading 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 accordingly) if you don't understand the basics. Two excellent sources for the basics (plus some more advanced material) are:


Some Important Dates

First Day of Classes:
Labor Day Holiday (No Class):
Thanksgiving Recess:
Last Day of Class:
Preliminary Proposal Due: October 5
Detailed Proposal Due: October 26
Rough Draft Due: November 30
Final Draft Due: Monday December 14 at 7:30 pm
Midterm Exam:
Final Exam: Monday, December 20 from 7:30 to 10:15 p.m.

Course Outline

Week 1: Introduction


Week 2: Deep Determinants


Week 3: The State I: Antecedents and Construction


The United States Constitution


Week 4: The State II: Structure and Change


Week 5: American Industrial Development I: Geography, Capital, and Finance


**Week 6: American Industrial Development II: Labor, Trade, and Firm Organization**


**Week 7: The Civil War, Slavery, and Its Consequences**


**Week 8: Midterm Exam and Catch-up**

Exam 1 covering all readings and discussion through Week 7

**Week 9: Immigration and Labor Mobility**


**Week 10: Technological Change**


**Week 11: Biology and the Environmet**


**Week 12: The Great Depression: Causes**


**Week 13: The Great Depression: Recovery**


**Week 14: Historical Perspectives on Current Issues:**


*This Time is Different, NBER Paper...


