Course Outline

Overview
This course examines competing explanations for cross-country differences in long run economic growth, addressing the question, “why are some countries so rich and other so poor” from a historical and comparative standpoint. We also explore the origins of issues that are of economic significance today. The period covers the Middle Ages to the 20th century and more focus is given to Britain and Northwestern Europe because that is where economic growth first occurred, but Asia, Latin America, and Africa are also included as much as possible. Knowledge of standard analytical tools and empirical techniques of macro and micro is strongly recommended.

This course has several objectives: the first is to show how theoretical approaches and quantitative tools can be applied to historical evidence. The second objective is to introduce students to research and paper writing in economic history and other applied fields of economics. We will be reading and discussing articles to learn how a research article is put together. You will also have many opportunities in this class to pose your own questions and present your ideas. This is a skill that is of immense value as you start to enter into the dissertation-writing phase of your program and will be spending more of your time doing research in economics. With practice, you will also feel more comfortable and confident in seminars, whether the seminar is your own or someone else’s.

Course Requirements
Classes will consist of lecture and student presentation and discussion. The course list is intentionally long, to provide you with references and background for that section. For each class meeting, you should read carefully one paper, which is indicated in bold type on the reading list. These are labeled “Student’s presentation” and are the papers that everyone should read carefully for each class. Published articles can be accessed via the library website; most working papers are available via an online search. Talk to me if you can’t find something.

35 minute presentations of research papers, totaling 30% of your grade. These presentations should be made with an eye on content and without any critiquing of the paper. Students should have an organizational meeting during the first week of class to discuss who will be presenting which paper. Most papers fall into a certain format and presenting papers will help you understand the structure of economics paper in detail. We will talk about the sequence of the slides, and what to put into the slides. Please email me your presentation 4 days before you are presenting so that I can review your slides and give you feedback to help make the slides clear and of benefit to everyone in the class.
Class participation, 20% of your grade. Those who are not presenting should carefully read the paper that is being presented that day and write-up 3 slides for class discussion that consists of a balanced critique.

Slide 1: What is good about the paper?
Slide 2: What is a weakness of the paper?
Slide 3: An idea for further improvement, or ideas for further research.

After the main presentation students I will randomly call on someone to present his/her three slides. The idea is to initiate more discussion and participation in an environment similar to a seminar.

A midterm 5-page (double-spaced) draft of your paper proposal and presentation, 20% of grade. The proposal should motivate a question in economic history and discuss existing research that is related to that question. The topic may come from the syllabus, but you may select a topic that is not on the syllabus. The draft should be a minimum of 5 double-spaced pages. Please send me your draft 4 days before your presentation.

A final 15-page (double-spaced) draft of your proposal and in-class presentation, 30% of grade. Ideally this will be the same proposal that you worked on for the midterm presentation. You should include in your proposal reference to potential data sources and how these data can be used to address your key questions; aim to be as specific as you can about your strategy and approach. These presentations will take place during the last week of class. I will be happy to give you feedback on your slides and/or your paper if you send them to me in advance.

The final draft is due by May 4, 2015.
Reading List Outline

I. Introduction

What is this course about? What are the big questions in economic history? What do economic historians do? Why study economic history? I will also give tips on the class presentations and what the paper proposal for this course should aim for.

“The Introduction Formula”, [http://strategy.sauder.ubc.ca/head/brander.htm](http://strategy.sauder.ubc.ca/head/brander.htm)


The Times Atlas of World History.

II. Long-Term Trends in Economic Growth: The Stylized Facts

What do we know? What is to be explained? What are overall trends in income, population, mortality, fertility from pre-industrial times to the modern economy? How does the industrialization of the 18th century compare with modernization in developing countries today? Has there been convergence or divergence the year 1800? Are there differences in historical income trends within Europe, and specifically between Britain and continental Europe? Between Europe and Asia?


Fogel, Robert, The Escape from Hunger and Premature Death, 1700-2100

Implications for Population Theory,” in Rosenzweig and Stark, eds. The Handbook of Population and Family Economics.


The British Industrial Revolution


III. Pre-industrial Economy

What does the Malthusian model imply about birth rates and material living standards? What is the relationship between population growth and the rate of technological change? How long did it take for a population to rebound from a crisis? Do famines matter from the longer-run perspective? Were there lasting effects of famine? What is the important relationship between markets and famines? What are other examples of health crises from more recent times that also have long-term effects?

1. Marriage and Births


Clark, Gregory, 2005, Chapter 2 & 3 of Farewell to Alms, Princeton University Press.


2. Pre-industrial Family Structure


3. Mortality


IV. Demographic Transition

What explains the historical fertility decline? Gary Becker models demand for children in the framework of consumer theory. Can such a theory be applied to all periods? Was there conscious and strategic fertility control in the 18th century or before? What is the relationship between demographic transition and industrialization?


V. Modern Growth and the Transition between Regimes

Modern growth theory begins with the Solow Model. This model provides a framework for development accounting and growth accounting, and a basis for understanding proximate and fundamental factors of growth. How did the Malthusian economy transition into the Solow economy? How might the different theories for why sustained growth emerged be categorized?

VI. Modern Economic Growth—Proximate Explanations

1. Productivity from Medieval to Early Modern

What was the nature of the improvements in agricultural productivity from the Middle Ages to the 18th century? How much does agricultural change explain urban growth and population increases? How did British society change in terms of the hours worked and total factor productivity of the economy?


2. Changing Institutions: Political Foundations and Property Rights

a. Property Rights on Land—Enclosures

*In the Middle Ages in Europe, much agricultural land was held in open, scattered fields with common areas for grazing. Why did an apparently inefficient institution persist for so long? What types of risks did pre-industrial households experience and how did the open field system help to smooth fluctuations in income? What accounted for the gradual enclosing of open fields into plots with private property rights?*


b. Political Foundations of Public Finance

*The history of Britain provides a story of how growth followed upon civil warfare in which an exploitative monarchy was turned into a constitutional state where absolute monopoly on power was replaced by checks and balances by Parliament. How can this hypothesis be tested? Does the model of predatory power apply to other regions of the world?*


c. Laws and Legal Origin


3. Openness, Commerce, and Development

*How might trade have affected growth? What are the channels through which trade affects growth? What is the institutional basis of long-distance trade and how are these different across different societies? What impact does transport costs have and what kinds of historical data can be used to estimate the impact of differences in these costs?*


4. Transmission of Knowledge and Techniques

Why were new technologies invented and adopted in Britain but not elsewhere? Was human capital an important condition for technological leadership? Were guilds important for blocking new innovations? What types of situations and data sets allow the testing of assumptions about conditions that may lead to more knowledge production?


5. Risk, Conflict, and Development


VII. Comparative Approaches

**Why did growth begin in the 18th – 19th centuries and not before? Was Britain more productive than China early on? Why did growth start in Britain and not China or somewhere else? What are sources of difference between Britain and other regions and when did they emerge? What kinds of evidence can be used to show that these differences mattered to economic performance?**


VIII. Modern Economic Growth—Fundamental Explanations

Why are some countries so rich and others so poor? Are there ultimate factors (geography, institutions, and culture) that have significant effects on cross-country performance today? Is there a hierarchy of growth factors, from proximate to deeper, and how might they be related? What are the separate contributions of these factors? What are the mechanisms through which fundamental explanations eventually impact on growth? How do cultural beliefs about gender, religion, honor, and trust shape economic growth?

1. Geography and Factor Endowments


2. Institutional Persistence and Colonial Legacy


Li, Ben, Wolfgang Keller and Carol H. Shiue, 2011, “China’s Foreign Trade, Perspectives from the Last 150 Years” *The World Economy* 34(6), pp. 853-892.


### 3. Culture


**IX. Global Comparative Economic Development**


Alesina, Alberto, Stelios Michalopoulos, and Elias Papiannou, forthcoming.”Ethnic Inequality”.

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