

# ECON 365 Topics in Economic History

Time: 3:00-4:15  
Place: Music/Theater Building 1005  
Instructor: Andrew Thomas  
Contact: athoma5@gmu.edu

## 1 Class Overview

In this section of Topics in Economic History, we have three goals: 1) examine the school of economic history that focuses on the role of **institutions** in determining economic outcomes; 2) familiarize you with how modern econometric tools can be brought to bear on important historical social themes of persecution and toleration; 3) produce a paper and presentation that deeply engage with a recent work of economic history. We will be reading four books: three of my choosing (see 2.1), and one of your own (see 2.2). This course will be both reading and writing intensive, and our in-class meetings will be primarily discussion based.

## 2 Readings

### 2.1 In Class

We will be reading 3 books in class that interpret economic history through an institutional framework:

North 1990. *Institutions, Institutional Change, and Economic Growth*.

North, Wallis, and Weingast 2009. *Violence and Social Orders: a conceptual framework for interpreting recorded human history*.

Johnson and Koyama 2019. *Persecution and Toleration: the long road to religious freedom*.

This will be, on average, about 70 pages of reading per week, with an additional 300-500 pages of reading throughout the semester depending on which book you choose for your review. There may also be additional readings assigned periodically.

## 2.2 Outside Class

You will also be responsible for writing an in-depth book review of an economic history book taken from one of the below or of your own choosing; books not on this list will require instructor approval. Books will be assigned by the third week of class unless a title is requested for instructor approval. This book will be the subject of your term paper, and in the spirit of specialization and exchange 1) only one student may choose any given book, and 2) you will be asked to update the class periodically on your progress.

- Acemoglu, D. & Robinson, J. 2019. *The Narrow Corridor: states, societies, and the fate of liberty*. 558 p.
- Allen, R. 2009. *The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective*. 342 p.
- Clark, G. 2007. *A Farewell to Alms: a brief economic history of the world*. 420 p.
- Ekelund and Tollison. 2011. *Economic Origins of Roman Christianity*. 288 p.
- Engerman and Sokoloff. 2011. *Economic Development in the Americas since 1500: endowments and institutions*. 444 p.
- Findlay, R. & O'Rourke, K. 2007. *Power and Plenty: trade, war, and the world economy in the second millennium*. 648 p.
- Harris, R. 2020. *Going the Distance: Eurasian Trade and the Rise of the Business Corporation, 1400-1700*. 465 p.
- Henrich, J. 2017. *The Secret of Our Success*. 464 p.
- Hugh and Grier. 2015. *The long process of development: building markets and states in pre-industrial England, Spain, and their colonies*. 448 p.
- Lindert & Williamson. 2016. *Unequal Gains: American growth and inequality since 1700*. 424 p.
- Mokyr, J. 2012. *The Enlightened Economy: an economic history of Britain 1700-1850*. 550 p.
- Rubin, J. 2017. *Rulers, Religion, and Riches: why the West got rich and the Middle East did not*. 2017. 265 p.
- Scheidel, W. 2019. *Escape From Rome: the failure of empire and the road to prosperity*. 670 p.
- Scott, James C. 2010. *The art of not being governed: an anarchist history of upland southeast Asia*. 464 p.

- Turchin, P. 2007. War and Peace and War: the rise and fall of empires. 416 p.
- von Glahn, R. 2016. The Economic History of China: from antiquity to the nineteenth century. 480 p.

### 3 Grades

Your final grade will consist of the following elements:

#### 3.1 Term Paper (40%)

ECON 365 is Writing Intensive. To fulfill this requirement, the plurality of your grade will come from a term paper, due the final week of class. This paper will be a synthesis review of your assigned book along with the material discussed in class. Details to be distributed later.

#### 3.2 Presentation (20%)

Along with the paper comes a presentation in which you will communicate the main themes of term paper to the class. Details to be distributed later.

#### 3.3 Midterm (20%)

There will be a midterm exam around Week 8 covering the first two books, as well as any other material discussed in class. This is to ensure you have a sufficient grasp of the foundational material to craft a good term paper.

#### 3.4 Reading Notes (10%)

In preparation for class, you will turn in your notes for weeks with assigned readings via Blackboard. While you are free to collaborate, every student must turn in a unique set of notes. These will be due by noon the day before each discussion.

#### 3.5 Other Homework (10%)

Occasionally additional readings, videos, or podcasts will be assigned. These may be accompanied by a short quiz or writing assignment.

#### 3.6 Discussion

Participation in class is highly encouraged but will not be factor in your grade beyond adding half a grade point to your final grade for exemplary participation. (Eg, if your final grade would have been a B+, participation would bump you up to an A-.) In the event that the university moves to all online courses later in the semester, we will continue to have weekly discussions in some format.

### 3.7 Grading Scale

100-93 A; 92-90 A-; 89-87 B+; 86-83 B; 82-80 B-; 79-77 C+; 76-73 C; 72-70 C-; 69-60 D; 59 and below F.

## 4 Tentative Schedule

This schedule is subject to change with notice.

Week 1: Introduction  
Week 2: Review of Economic Concepts  
Week 3: North 1-8  
Week 4: North 9-14  
Week 5: NWW 1-2  
Week 6: NWW 3-4  
Week 7: NWW 5-7  
Week 8: Midterm  
Week 9: JK 1-3  
Week 10: JK 4-6  
Week 11: JK 7-10  
Week 12: JK 11-13  
Week 13: JK 14-16  
Week 14: Presentations  
Week 15: Presentations

## 5 University Policies

### 5.1 Academic Integrity

The integrity of the University community is affected by the individual choices made by each of us. Mason has an Honor Code with clear guidelines regarding academic integrity. Three fundamental and rather simple principles to follow at all times are that: (1) all work submitted be your own; (2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and (3) if you are uncertain about the ground rules on a particular assignment, ask for clarification. No grade is important enough to justify academic misconduct. Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another person without giving the person credit. Writers give credit through accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes. Paraphrased material must also be cited, using the appropriate format for this class. A simple listing of books or articles is not sufficient. Plagiarism is the equivalent of intellectual robbery and cannot be tolerated in the academic setting. If you have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism, please see me.

## 5.2 Disability Accommodations

Disability Services at George Mason University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students by upholding the laws that ensure equal treatment of people with disabilities. If you are seeking accommodations for this class, please first visit <http://ds.gmu.edu/> for detailed information about the Disability Services registration process. Then please discuss your approved accommodations with me. Disability Services is located in Student Union Building I (SUB I), Suite 2500. Email: [ods@gmu.edu](mailto:ods@gmu.edu) | Phone: (703) 993-2474

## 5.3 Safe Return to Campus

All students taking courses with a face-to-face component are required to take Safe Return to Campus Training prior to visiting campus. Training is available in Blackboard (<https://mymason.gmu.edu>). Students are required to follow the university's public health and safety precautions and procedures outlined on the university Safe Return to Campus webpage ([www2.gmu.edu/safe-return-plan](http://www2.gmu.edu/safe-return-plan)). Similarly, all students in face to face and hybrid courses must also complete the Mason COVID Health Check daily, seven days a week. The COVID Health Check system uses a color code system and students will receive either a Green, Yellow, or Red email response. Only students who receive a "green" notification are permitted to attend courses with a face-to-face component. If you suspect that you are sick or have been directed to self-isolate, please quarantine or get testing. Faculty are allowed to ask you to show them that you have received a Green email and are thereby permitted to be in class.