



# **Econ 135 Spring 2021: Syllabus**

# **The History of Economic Growth**

**J. Bradford DeLong**

University of California at Berkeley, Economics and Blum Center,  
and WCEG

[delong@econ.berkeley.edu](mailto:delong@econ.berkeley.edu)

<http://delong.typepad.com/>

+1 925 708 0467

Last Edited 2021-01-12

Pages: <>

## Welcome

Welcome to Econ 135. We are very happy to have you here. We hope to help you obtain a first-class educational experience this still plague-ridden spring.

**Acknowledgement:** This course is borrowed & revised from one taught at Harvard by Melissa Dell: Econ 1342. It was her idea to teach a course like this, & her work that broke the ground, & made this course excellent wherever it is excellent. I have appropriated the format & many of the ideas of Professor Melissa Dell of Harvard University as she teaches them in her Econ 1342. Credit for things that work well in this course rightly belong to her.

## Prerequisites & Requirements

This class is open to all undergraduate and graduate students at UC Berkeley, enrollment limits permitting. Econ 1 or equivalent is a required prerequisite (with exceptions made with the permission of the instructor). This course cannot be repeated for credit. This course meets L&S Breadth & Historical Studies requirements.

## What Is This Course?: A Story

Back in 1870 British public intellectual, journalist, civil servant, imperial bureaucrat, moral philosopher, and economist John Stuart Mill wrote that up to that moment economic history had been stagnant—even in his lifetime. He had seen what people rightly called an “Industrial Revolution”, with the coming of steampower, automatic machinery, factories, railroads, and telegraphs. And yet, he wrote:

It is questionable if all the mechanical inventions yet made have lightened the day's toil of any human being. They have enabled a greater population to live the same life of drudgery and imprisonment...

The benefits of invention and innovation had all flowed to the top, and allowed “an increased number of manufacturers and others to make fortunes...” He did, almost as an aside, agree that “they have increased the comforts of the middle classes...”

But, in Mill's eyes, the human economy in 1870 was largely as it had been for the nearly 8000 years since the invention of agriculture: people were desperately poor, with advancing technology barely keeping pace with increased resource scarcity generated from larger populations.

People were so malnourished and disease-ridden that for a couple to have on average two children surviving to reproduce required having three children live through to adulthood, which required that 4.5 children survive to the age of 5, which required 8 pregnancies carried to or near full-term. And humanity was at the demographic limit.

Today is very different.

We look forward to achieving zero population growth in our lifetimes. The average citizen of the world today is 10 times as well-off, at least, as the average citizen of 1870. And we can see the road clear to, in our lifetimes, at least another quadrupling of average human living standards and productivity levels.

Why was life for the typical person as late as the year 1870 so similar to life for the typical person in the year -1130? To what extent do we need to qualify Mill's claim that the working class—even the English working class, the working class in the most technologically advanced and powerful nation the world had ever seen—still “live[d] the same life of drudgery and imprisonment” as had 3000 years ago “another man's *thes*, a

portionless man whose livelihood was small”, in the words Akhilleus uses to Odysseus in Homer’s *Odyssey* to describe the lowest of lives? And what caused all the big changes from then until now? And what have been their consequences? And how have people viewed this process, and the possibilities for progress or the perceived necessity of stagnation?

That is the history of economic growth. That is what we will study this semester.

## Course Description

Thus this course examines, in historical perspective, the idea & the reality of economic growth. It begins in the mists of deep time, rapidly reaches the invention of agriculture, & continues through with forecasts for the 21st century and beyond.

Topics covered include, among others:

- human language & sociability;
- the discovery of agriculture & the domestication of animals;
- the origins & maintenance of gross inequality;
- Malthusian economies;
- the commercial & industrial revolutions;
- modern economic growth;
- international prosperity differentials;
- OECD convergence & East Asian growth miracles;
- the political economy of growth & stagnation;
- & the stubborn persistence of poverty.

What do we, the instructors, hope that you, the students, will learn in this course?

We hope that you will learn:

- about the broad sweep of the realities of economic growth from before the invention of agriculture to today
- to survey what the currently live perspectives are on why some countries are so rich and other countries are so poor
- to explain what the currently live perspectives are on why the world today is so rich relative to the world in past eras
- to assess the currently live perspectives on why today some countries are so rich and other countries are so poor
- to decide on what additional pieces of information we need to be able to settle on which is the right one of the currently live perspectives on why today some countries are so rich and other countries are so poor
- to decide on what additional pieces of information we need to be able to settle on which is the right one of the currently live perspectives on why the world today is so rich relative to the world in past eras
- to make coherent forecasts of the future of economic growth—for individual countries, and for the world as a whole
- about some data science data manipulation, calculation, & analysis tools
- about simple versions of the models that economists use to account for and forecast economic growth
- to evaluate the advice given to governments seeking to manage the process of economic growth,
- about how economists and others have thought about economic growth, both as a concept and a goal.

## **Orienting Yourself**

The person in charge of the course is J. Bradford DeLong  
<delong@econ.berkeley.edu>. he is a professor in the Economics

Department & director for economics at the Blum Center for Developing Economies here at Berkeley; a weblogger for the Washington Center for Equitable Growth; and was a deputy assistant secretary of the U.S. Treasury during the Clinton administration.

**Brad DeLong** [delong@econ.berkeley.edu](mailto:delong@econ.berkeley.edu) :: office hours: Th 09:30 P[S|D]T <<https://padlet.com/braddelong/dbompw5w7ud3eb3z>>

## Course Requirements & Policies

### Class Attendance

During Spring 2021, Econ 135 will be held fully online with both synchronous and asynchronous components. Class will meet synchronously via Zoom Tu 09:30 P[S|D]T, with additional sections. Students are expected to do readings, watch pre-recorded videos and lectures, take quizzes and do online problem sets in python jupyter notebooks, participate in asynchronous online discussions, provide feedback, watch and contribute to synchronous zoom calls, think about the material of the course, and help educate their peers as well. Learning works well only if it becomes a broad-based learning community with large components both in and outside of formal classes and class-related activities.

### Discussion Sections

Students are expected to attend and participate in weekly discussion sections led by GSIs, and are encouraged to have videos on if possible—it really, really goes much better if we can see your faces.

## Accommodations

Please inform us as soon as possible if you need particular accommodations, and we will work out the necessary arrangements.

## Academic Integrity

We encourage you to study in groups. But all written work must be your own. And no copying-and-pasting! Every keystroke should be from the tips of your fingers! Please familiarize yourself with the university's Code of Conduct <[https://sa.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/Code%20of%20Conduct\\_January%202016.pdf](https://sa.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/Code%20of%20Conduct_January%202016.pdf)> and Honor Code <<https://teaching.berkeley.edu/berkeley-honor-code>>.

## Plague Statement

This class is occurring in the middle of the first global plague in a century—fortunately a fairly mild one, as these things go. This has introduced layers of uncertainty to both our classroom and the world around us. We are committed to providing clear communication and consistent course instruction, and maintaining an online classroom that is conducive to intellectual pursuit and critical inquiry.

We are not at all sure which parts of this socially-distanced semi-distance learning course as we have planned it will work and will resonate, and which parts will turn out, in retrospect, to have been largely a waste of your time. So be prepared to be flexible: we may well rejigger and reorganize pieces of this course on-the-fly, as we determine what is succeeding and attempt to reinforce it.

If, during the term, you contract COVID or begin caring for someone who has, please let us know ASAP.

## **Ray Hawkins's 15-Minute Rule**

Broadcast technology can fail: wifi failure, rolling blackouts, Zoom crashing, etc.), the 15- minute rule applies. If the synchronous session has not begun more than 15 minutes past the hour or the half-hour, please conclude that there has been a failure somewhere in the technology link, and that the session will be rescheduled.

Similarly, if any 'cast drops in the middle and does not resume within 10 minutes, consider the synchronous version to be finished for the day.

## **Dropping & Adding**

The fall 2020 undergraduate student deadline to add, drop, swap, and change class units is We 2020-09-16. If you are going to drop the course, please drop it as soon as possible, so that those who want to get in off the waiting list can have certainty as soon as possible. The instructors have no control over enrollment: contact the Economics Department undergraduate office.

## **Grading**

We expect there to be about 2250 points: 150 for quizzes, 450 for contributions to readings-focused asynchronous discussions, 150 for zoom session attendance and participation, 150 for section attendance and participation, 600 for problem sets, 450 for presentations, and 150 for feedback. In order to diminish start-up anxiety, we will be happy to give everybody full credit for points due before Fr 2020-09-18.



How those points will map onto grades is not yet set in stone. We will feel our way.

My guess is that the course will shake out with 20% A's, 50% A's, 15% B's, 10% B's, and 5% B-'s and below. But if you impress me it will be higher. And if the class is disappointing it will be lower.

The underlying philosophy for grading in a time of plague, and thus of socially-distanced learning, is this: We do not want to make the stakes especially high, because in the online world our ability to make fine or even gross distinctions between students' efforts and accomplishments is limited, and we do not want to provide strong incentives for academic dishonesty. Creating and allowing such an environment is very destructive and is in fact unprofessional on our part: it teaches those who cheat that they can probably get away with it, and that is true in the university but it is not true in life outside and after.

I have been told that back in The Day the grading rubric was more-or-less as follows:

- Students who truly impressed their teachers got A's.
- Students who mastered (in the sense of a skilled craftsman, a magister or magistra, one who produces a masterpiece, and not one who dominates, a dominus or domina) the material got B's.
- Students whose mastery of the material fell short—or who were clearly slacking off because they were more interested in other things, whether the student newspaper, political action, or the preparation of alcoholic drinks—got C's, sometimes gentlemen's C's.
- Students who were in trouble and needed a change of some sort got D's.

I think we can make these distinctions between these four groups fairly and accurately. Hence think of the grading thus: to get an A, impress us; to get an A-, master the material; if your mastery has gaps you will get B+'s or B's. And if we think something has gone wrong and needs to be changed—that you are not getting out of Berkeley what you should be getting out of it and what it is our job to see that you do get out of it—you will get B-'s and below.

The workload, especially the reading load, in this course will be heavy; but perhaps more-than-usual workload will be fully rewarded with higher grades

## **Course Flow**

### **Within the Week**

For each module/week, we will typically ask you to:

1. Watch the module introductory video (complete before Tu 09:30 P[DIS]T zoom lecture-&-q&a)
2. Read the readings note → Read the readings (complete before Tu 09:30 P[DIS]T zoom lecture-&-q&a)
3. Read & listen to the powerpoint slide lectures (complete before Tu 09:30 P[DIS]T zoom lecture-&-q&a)
4. Attend & ask questions (& provide answers) in the Tu 09:30 P[DIS]T zoom lecture-&-q&a
5. If randomly selected, make your presentation on one of the questions of the week (on Th or Fr)
6. Take the quiz (complete by Fr)
7. Do the problem set/essay (complete by Fr)
8. Provide feedback to us on the module (complete by the following Fr)

The midterm and the final will be different...

## Week-by-Week

- 0.0. Intro: Course Overview (2021-01-19):
- 0.1. Intro: Humans & Their Economics (2021-01-26):
  - 1. Growth Theory (2021-02-02)
  - 2. Malthusian Economies (2021-02-09)
  - 3. Breaking Out (2021-02-16)
- 4.1. Modern Economic Growth (2021-02-23)

### MIDTERM PROJECT WEEK (2021-03-02)

- 4.2. MEG: Hegemons & Plutocrats (2021-03-09)
- 4.3. MEG: Globalization, Convergence, & Underdevelopment (2021-03-16)
  - 5.1. Touring: Western Europe & the Americas (2021-03-39)
  - 5.2. Touring: Behind the Iron Curtain (2021-04-06)
  - 5.3. Touring: East Asian Miracles (2021-04-13)
  - 5.4. Touring: The Global South (2021-04-20)
- 6. Policy Issues (2021-04-27)
- 7. R&R WEEK REVIEW: Past, Present, & Future (2021-05-03)

### TAKEHOME FINAL WEEK (2021-05-10)

## Pre-Midterm Readings

*Course administration & syllabus docs* <<https://bcourses.berkeley.edu/courses/1500754/assignments/syllabus>> <<https://bcourses.berkeley.edu/courses/1500754/pages/home>> <<https://classes.berkeley.edu/content/2021-spring-econ-135-001-lec-00>>

**Andy Matuschak:** *Why Books Don't Work* <<https://github.com/braddelong/public-files/blob/master/readings/article-matuschak-books.pdf>>

**Partha Dasgupta** (2007): *Economics: A VSI* Preface, Prologue, chs 1-4, & Epilogue <<https://delong.typepad.com/files/dasgupta-economics.pdf>>

**Aristotle**: *Politics*, Book I <<https://delong.typepad.com/files/aristotle-politics-book-i.pdf>>

**Gregory Clark** (2005): *The Condition of the Working Class in England* <<https://delong.typepad.com/files/clark-condition.pdf>>

**Lant Pritchett** (1997): *Divergence, Big Time* <<https://pubs.aeaweb.org/doi/pdfplus/10.1257/jep.11.3.3>>

**J. Bradford DeLong**: *Lecture Notes: The Solow Growth Model* <<https://tinyurl.com/dl-2020-01-18f>>; *Lecture Notes: Malthusian Economies* <<https://tinyurl.com/dl-2020-01-18g>>; *Lecture Notes: Determinants of "Technological" Progress* <<https://nbviewer.jupyter.org/github/braddelong/long-form-drafts/blob/master/solow-model-6-innovation.ipynb>>

**Gregory Clark**: *A Farewell to Alms*, selections <<https://delong.typepad.com/files/clark-als-selections.pdf>>

**Jared Diamond**: *The Worst Mistake in the History of the Human Race* <<https://www.discovermagazine.com/planet-earth/the-worst-mistake-in-the-history-of-the-human-race>>

**William Jongman** (2007): *Gibbon was Right: The Decline and Fall of the Roman Economy* <<https://delong.typepad.com/jongman-gibbon-was-right.pdf>>

**Peter Temin** *The Roman Market Economy, Roman Growth* <<https://delong.typepad.com/files/temin-roman-growth.pdf>>

**Josiah Ober** (2019): *Agamemnon's Cluelessness*, selections <<https://delong.typepad.com/files/ober-agamemnon-selections.pdf>>

**Moses Finley**: *Technical Innovation and Economic Progress in the Ancient World* <<https://delong.typepad.com/finley-technical.pdf>>

**Christopher Berry** (2018): *Adam Smith: A Very Short Introduction*, chs 1, 4-6 <<https://delong.typepad.com/files/berry-smith.pdf>>

**Robert Allen** (2017): *The Industrial Revolution: A Very Short Introduction*, chs 3, 5-6 <<https://delong.typepad.com/files/allen-industrial.pdf>>

**Joel Mokyr** (1990): *Lever of Riches*, ch 5 The Years of Miracles <<https://delong.typepad.com/files/mokyr-lever-revolution.pdf>>

**Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels** (1848): *The Communist Manifesto* <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf>>

**David Landes** (2006): *Why Europe and the West? Why Not China?* <<https://pubs.aeaweb.org/doi/pdfplus/10.1257/jep.20.2.3>>

J. Bradford DeLong: *Slouching Towards Utopia?: An Economic History of the Long Twentieth Century DRAFT*, chs 1-5 <<https://delong.typepad.com/files/slouching-towards-utopia-fall-2019.zip>>

## Optional:

*The Man Who Saw the Deep (Gilgamesh)* <<https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/01/anonymous-the-man-who-saw-the-deep>>

[gilgamesh\\_-surpassing-all-kings-powerful-and-tall-beyond-all-others-violent.html](#)>

**David W. Anthony** (2007): *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language: How Bronze-Age Riders from the Eurasian Steppes Shaped the Modern World* <<https://delong.typepad.com/files/anthony-horse.pdf>>

**Robert Solow** (1956): *Contribution to the Theory of Economic Growth* <<http://piketty.pse.ens.fr/files/Solow1956.pdf>>; (1987): *Growth Theory and After* <<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/economic-sciences/1987/solow/lecture/>>

**Ian Morris** (2010): *Why the West Rules—For Now*, chapter 3: Taking the Measure of the Past <<https://delong.typepad.com/files/morris-rules-3.pdf>>

**Patricia Crone**: *Pre-Industrial Societies*, selections <<https://delong.typepad.com/files/crone-pre-selections.pdf>>

**Peter Temin**: *Land Tenure and Exploitation from the Roman Empire to Lord Peter Wimsey* <<https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/02/weekend-reading-peter-temin-land-tenure-and-exploitation-from-the-roman-empire-to-lord-peter-wimsey.html>>

**William Baumol**: *Entrepreneurship: Productive, Unproductive, Destructive* <<https://github.com/braddelong/public-files/blob/master/readings/article-baumol-entrepreneurship.pdf>>