

## **Economic History of the Western Community Guidelines on Group Research and Presentation**

Groups of between 4 and 6 students will research and present a topic related to economic history. The nine presentations take place the last three days of class prior to the final exam.

Groups can choose their own topic (upon approval by the instructor, please send an email or use office hours to propose a topic) or can use a suggested topic below. Groups can self-select members and topics prior to the due-date listed on the syllabus. Students not self-selected into a group and/or groups without a topic will be assigned by the instructor, there is no penalty for not signing-up in advance. No topic can be repeated so it might be wise to sign-up for a topic in which you have a special interest.

Presentations will be between 10 and 20 minutes, with a 5-minute group-led Q&A session after each presentation. Posing questions of the groups is an additional way to get credit for class participation. Presentations can use any media including PowerPoint, Youtube (both original and found content) and/or “chalk and talk”. Groups should tie-in any class discussions related to their research topic along with original research. Each presentation should include a list of resources used, there needs to be scholarly resources, not just wiki. The Cameron and Neal text is of course acceptable as one reference; this book also contains an excellent annotated bibliography which can be used by students interested in a topic found in the text. Each group research should use at least three scholarly references. The instructor is available at office hours to give research suggestions.

Half the grade for each group will come from student peer-reviews, half from the instructor. The instructor will make peer-review grading sheets available prior to the presentations.

These are additional requirements for the presentations,

- a) State why you think your topic relevant to the study of economic history.
- b) If you are addressing an issue of economic policy, you should give the differing opinions on the policy approach, describe your views as to which policy approach is better and why, and back-up your analysis using the economic logic we discuss in class and also use external sources as appropriate.

- c) You should mention your sources and why you chose them.
- d) The group should rehearse their presentation to make sure that, i) the presentation is within the time requirements, ii) that the presentation does not contradict itself, in other words that the group “speaks as one”, and iii) that material is not repeated during the presentation, there should be no redundancy.

Here are some **potential topic ideas**, however you are able to choose something of your own as long as you meet the above requirements.

- Pick one person (e.g. Carlyle’s ‘Great man or woman’) in economic history and describe their effect on the economic history of their time and place. What challenges did they face in achieving their aims, who were their allies, who were their oppositions, why? An example **(1.)** is Sir Robert Peel who was instrumental in overturning the English Corn Laws in 1846 which then lead through cumulative causation to free trade in the western economy, or, the Rothchilds in pre-Napoleonic Europe, and later Napoleonic France, and how the family influenced European banking over time. Another good topic here would be **(2.)** J.P. Morgan’s influence on American and international banking prior to the establishment of the Federal Reserve System. Or, you can use a person and consequence of your own choosing.
- Discuss an example of when in history the necessary economic conditions we have discussed in class (sound monetary policy, fiscal policy and rule of law) have been violated and the economic and social repercussions this had.
  - a) An example would be **(3.)** the unsustainable industrialization of the Soviet Union based on a depreciating (or untradeable) Ruble currency and how and why this lead to the collapse of the USSR in 1989-1991. Why did the central planning of the USSR not work? If economically untenable, why did the USSR last so long?
  - b) How and why **(4.)** did the hyper-inflation in Germany after World War I come about and why did this lead to an authoritarian government. Or, **(5.)** some economists believe that hyper-inflation led to the Communist Revolution in China, describe what happened and why, and state whether you agree or disagree with this assertion.
  - c) Another example here is the recent case of Greece... **(6.)** why did Greece need bailouts? Who bailed-out Greece and under what conditions

imposed upon the Greek government? Does this example perpetuate the moral hazard created by the IMF? Again, you may choose your own historical example showing why and how when “sound” policies are violated crisis occurs.

- **(7.)** The United States government oftentimes accuses the central bank of China of suppressing the value of the Yuan ( 元 ). Why would the US government be concerned about this? Is this true, is the Yuan under-valued at the time of your research, why or why not? (and show the historical development of the Chinese Yuan policy over the last several decades and most recently). Is this Chinese policy a form of mercantilism, why or why not? Does the Chinese government have an espoused rationale for controlling the Yuan in international foreign exchange (ForEx)? How is any Yuan value manipulation accomplished by the People’s Bank of China (PBC)? Who is harmed and who is helped by the PBC’s monetary policy? Is this a sustainable policy, why or why not? Is China’s current monetary policy leading towards the Yuan as an international reserve currency? What is China’s relationship with the IMF and the World Bank?
- **(8.)** Karl Marx and John Locke had differing views on the ‘enclosures’ of common land in the late medieval period. What are these differing views and why are they opposed? Who do you think was more correct and why? Do you think that each of these writers’ ideology influenced their analysis of the development of enclosures, why or why not? How do Locke’s and Marx’ views relate to those of the Cameron and Neal text on the enclosure movement?
- **(9.)** Why was US government debt down-graded by a credit rating agency in 2011? How did the international bond market react to this downgrade? What was the US government’s reaction to the down-grade? What is the official risk-status of US debt today and has the US\$ as dominance as the international reserve currency been affected by the down-grade? What is the US government doing to improve its risk-rating?
- **(10.)** In class we discuss Carl Menger’s (1892) evolutionary theory of money as emerged through the market and trade. There are also those who share the view that money was created by the state for use by the state (see the Chartalism for example). What are some of these theories? How do they differ from Menger’s explanation of the emergence of money in trade?

- **(11.)** Some writers believe that Arthur Burns, who was the chair of the Federal Reserve Bank under President Richard Nixon, used monetary easing to help re-elect the President in 1972. There are others who disagree. Research and present scholarly research into both of these points of view and describe the evidence for these divergent views. Which point of view do you agree with and why? Did this policy lead to the high-inflation, high-unemployment 1970s? If not this policy then what caused the “stagflation” of the 1970s?
- **(12.)** What caused Brexit? Present differing views on why the British referendum lead to “leave”? Who benefitted from UK membership in the European Union, and who stands to lose from Brexit? Is England planning to have free trade in goods, or, under which regime will the UK trade internationally? Which special interests were behind “stay” and which special interests behind “leave”?
- **(13.)** President Trump has stated that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is “unfair” and costs American “jobs”. Do you believe after research that this is true? Was or is NAFTA actually “free trade”? Why or why not? What specifically is the status of re-negotiating NAFTA today? What are the points of re-negotiation? Who are the major players in re-negotiation? Who have been or who do you think will be the biggest “winners” and biggest “losers” with any NAFTA re-negotiation? Is there any relationship between those industries who will be protected under a renegotiated NAFTA and the *Economist Magazine* cronyism index?
- **(14.)** It is not well-known that the US Federal Reserve Bank is privately-owned. Research the founding of the US central bank, describe its ownership and mandate. Do you agree with George Selgin (see YouTube video listed in syllabus) that the first 100 years of the Fed have been a failure? If so, why does it continue to exist? Who “wins” and who “loses” from an activist monetary policy?

- **(15.)** How did European Enlightenment thought affect the signers of the US Declaration of Independence (give specific examples) and lead to the end of British colonialism in North America? Who were some of the most predominant Enlightenment thinkers who effected the American founding?
- **(16.)** Further to US history, why were the Federalists successful in overturning the Articles of Confederation (under which the revolutionary war was won) and in creating a dominant federal state with the US Constitution against the Anti-Federalists? What are the main differences between the US Constitution and the Articles of Confederation relating to trade policy, monetary policy and taxation policy and what were the Federalist and Anti-Federalists views on these differences?
- **(17.)** Read Edmund Phelps's article on "What is Wrong with the West's Economies?" in the *New York Review of Books* (available through the Instructor's website). Also, read a book review or two of Phelps's *Mass Flourishing: How Grassroots Innovation Created Jobs, Challenge, and Change*. Summarize and explain why Phelps believes there is a problem with the "West's economies" and use his ideas to propose solutions to his critiques.