

# Syllabus

## Northwestern University Econ 324: Western Economic History

W. Walker Hanlon

Fall 2024 – September 13 version

### **Class time and location**

*Location:* 555 Clark St. Room B01

*Time:* Tues/Thurs 2:00-3:20

### **My contact information and office hours**

*Email:* whanlon@northwestern.edu

*Office:* Kellogg Global Hub, Office 3323

*Office hours:* Tuesdays 3:30-5pm

### **Teaching assistant: Nicole Saito**

*Email:* nicolesaito2028@u.northwestern.edu

*TA Office hours:* Wednesday 12-1pm

*TA Office hours location:* KGH 3198

### **Link of questions/comments on readings:**

<https://forms.gle/qtXe5JKxKhzpSNx98>

### **Discussion sections**

There will be no regular required discussion sections for this course. The TA will hold periodic optional discussion sections where he will review the papers or other material covered in class or provide explanations of key econometric concepts used in the papers that we study. Each week, I will announce whether there will be a discussion section.

## **Course overview**

Today, average human beings in the United States and many other parts of the world enjoy living standards that would have been unimaginable just a century or two in the past. These conditions are the product of rapid economic growth and technological progress that began during the Industrial Revolution and have been sustained over the roughly 250 years since. In this course, we will study the economic conditions that pre-dated this take-off into modern economic growth, consider explanations for why this take-off occurred, and examine some of the consequences, both positive and negative, of the changes that accompanied the onset of modern economic growth.

This course will cover a long time span, but most attention will be focused on the period just before and after the Industrial Revolution. Geographically, the course will be largely focused on Western Europe, and Britain in particular, because this is where modern economic growth first emerged. However, we will also spend some time considering the relationship between this region and the rest of the world, and how it changed after Western Europe began experiencing modern economic growth (i.e., the “Great Divergence”).

## **Goals of the course**

The first goal of this course is to provide you with a broad understanding of western economic history. Developing this knowledge base is valuable because it provides context and perspective that will allow you to better understand the world that we live in today, and for thinking about what the world might look like in the future.

The second goal of this course is for you to gain experience in applying the economic tools you have learned. No doubt, much of your economics training has been focused on mastering theoretical and econometric tools. In this course, you will be asked to apply those tools to understand events in the past. This requires making choices, such as identifying the critical features of the events we are considering, determining the right set of economic tools to apply, and struggling with the mapping from the real world to economic theory.

The third goal of this course is to help you gain experience in writing about economic topics using economic tools. Developing the ability to clearly and concisely express economic ideas in writing is critical to being able to take full advantage of the economic tools you are learning. The assignments in the class will push you to practice, and improve, these skills.

Finally, this course aims to provide students with exposure to cutting-edge economic research. Reading and analyzing recent research economic history research papers will be an important part of the course.

## **Prerequisites**

This course assumes that students have a functional knowledge of intermediate economics. The prerequisites for this course are EC 281, EC 310-1, and EC 311-0.

## Evaluation

Grading in this course will be based on three written assignments, class participation, and two midterm exams. The course grade breakdown is as follows:

Written assignments (3):	15% each
Midterms	20% each
Class participation:	15%

*Written assignments:* There will be three written assignments due during the term (see schedule below for due dates). Written assignments will be due by MIDNIGHT on the due date. These assignments will be turned in via the Assignments tab on Canvas.

Briefly, these assignments will be based on questions that I will provide related to the material covered in the lectures and course readings. You will typically have a choice between two topics. I will provide you with more guidance on exactly what I am looking for in the assignments and how they will be evaluated. You will be free to use any course materials that you want on the assignments, or to look up additional resources.

Written assignments should be no more than two pages long, with 1.5 spacing, no smaller than 11pt font, and page margins of at least one inch on standard sized paper. You should include references for any resources used, which do not count against the two-page length limit. You can also include 1-2 pages of additional tables and figures. It is very important that you reference any sources used, and that any direct quotes are presented as such. If you make a factual claim, there should be either a reference to support that claim, or table or figure backing up the claim.

The written assignments will be very similar to the long-answer questions you will encounter on the midterms. So, one purpose of these assignments is to provide practice that will help you prepare for the exams. For this reason, I have scheduled two of the assignments before the first midterm, to provide you with extra practice before that exam.

*Class participation:* For most classes I will assign 1-2 readings. You will need to submit 1-2 comments or questions related to each of the class readings (so, when there are two readings assigned, you need to submit questions or comments for both readings). There will be 19 readings in this course. I will count 15 of those toward your grade, so you can skip sending in comments for up to 3 of the readings. These “freebies” are meant to allow you to skip readings for reasons such as feeling ill, having a busy schedule in a particular week, etc. You do not need to provide excuses for these, but use them carefully so that you don’t run out.

Submission will be through an online Google form. You can find the link to the form near the top of the syllabus, just under the TA’s contact information. The class participation grade will be based on (1) submitting the questions every week, (2) asking your question in

class if I call on you, and (3) regular class attendance. Naturally, to get points for asking your question in class, you need to be in class on the day when we discuss the reading that your question relates to.

*Midterm Exams:* The midterm exams will consist of a mix of knowledge questions based on information from the lectures and readings, and a long-answer question similar to the written assignments. So, the written assignments are good practice for the exams, which is why I have scheduled two of them before the midterm. The midterms will be in class on the dates listed in the schedule below. These exams will be closed-book and closed-note.

It is not possible for me to provide make-up exams. If you have to miss the midterm with a valid documented excuse, you may, at the professor's discretion, be able to make it up by providing an additional written assignment based on prompts that I will provide. The grades on those assignments will be normalized relative to the midterm scores too ensure that this alternative does not provide an advantage over those students who take the midterm exam.

### **Assignment guidelines and academic integrity**

Academic integrity is very important in this class. Here are some basic guidelines specific for the course: On written assignments completed outside of class, you are allowed to use class notes and other resources. You can also discuss your paper with your classmates, and you can even have classmates read your paper and provide you with feedback, **but you must do your own work!** You are not allowed to seek help or advice from individuals other than your classmates or other Northwestern students. Your responses should be your own and should not be substantially similar to other student's work. You must cite any references used in the paper, even those not directly quoted. Your paper will be run through standard plagiarism-checking software.

Using AI: you should not use ChatGPT or another similar AI to write your essay for you. However, you can use it as a tool to help you improve your essay once you have already drafted it, or as a means of finding sources. *Remember, that the purpose of the essays is to prepare you for the exams, and you will not have ChatGPT to help you on those.*

On the midterms, you are not allowed to discuss the assignment with other students or to seek help from any other individuals, nor are you allowed to consult your notes, the lecture slides, the internet, ChatGPT or other similar programs, or any other resources.

### **Accommodations**

Northwestern University, and this professor, are committed to providing the most accessible learning environment as possible for students with disabilities. Should you anticipate or experience disability-related barriers in the academic setting, please contact AccessibleNU to move forward with the university's established accommodation process (e: [accessiblenu@northwestern.edu](mailto:accessiblenu@northwestern.edu); p: 847-467-5530). If you already have established accom-

modations with AccessibleNU, please let me know as soon as possible, preferably within the first two weeks of the term, so we can work together to implement your disability accommodations. Disability information, including academic accommodations, is confidential under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

### **Northwestern University Syllabus Standards**

This course follows the Northwestern University Syllabus Standards. Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with this information, which can be found here:

<https://www.registrar.northwestern.edu/registration-graduation/northwestern-university-syllabus-standards.html>

### **Readings**

Each week I will assign one or two readings related to the lectures. These will be available on the course webpage. Readings will typically be academic papers or review articles. **There is a reading guide, available on Canvas, which can be a useful resource for helping you structure your reading time.**

An important note about the readings: we are going to read some academic papers, which can be complex and may include theoretical or econometric tools that you are not familiar with. Your goal in the readings should be to gain an understanding of what question the papers is trying to answer, why that question is important, the approach that the authors use, some intuitive understanding of why that approach makes sense, and the conclusions that we can ultimately draw from the results. You should also keep an eye out for key assumptions or limitations that need to be kept in mind when evaluating the results. You are not required to try to understand the more technical aspects of the theories or econometrics in the papers. As we go through the first few readings, exactly what level of insight you should gain from the readings should become clearer.

### **Key dates**

September 24	First class
October 10	First written assignment due by Midnight
October 24	Second written assignment due by Midnight
October 31	Midterm
November 21	Third written assignment due by Midnight
November 26	Last day of class
Dec. 2-6	Reading week
Dec. 9-13	Finals week (exact day/time TBD)

## List of topics, dates, and readings

**September 24** Introduction: “Why study economic history?”, Malthus

**September 26** Malthusian epoch: theory and empirics

- Reading 1: Malthus (1798) “An Essay on the Principle of Population”, Chapters 1 and 2
- Reading 2: Ashraf & Galor (2011) “Dynamics and Stagnation in the Malthusian Epoch”

**October 1** Why Europe? States, Geography, and Resources

- Reading: Fernandez-Villaverde et al (2020) “The Fractured-Land Hypothesis”

**October 3** Ancient Economies

- Reading 1: Temin (2006) “The Economy of Early Roman Empire”
- Reading 2: Michaels and Rauch (2016) “Resetting the Urban Network”

**October 8** Institutions

- Reading 1: North (1991) “Institutions”
- Reading 2: North & Weingast (1989) “Constitutions and Commitment”

**October 10** Culture and Religion: Enlightenment and Reformation

- **Assignment 1 Due by Midnight**
- Reading: Becker & Woessman (2009) “Was Weber Wrong? A Human Capital Theory of Protestant Economic History”

**October 15** Early Modern Europe and the Commercial Revolution

- Reading: Acemoglu, Johnson, & Robinson (2005) “The Rise of Europe: Atlantic Trade, Institutional Change, and Economic Growth”

**October 17** Colonialism

- Reading: Heblich, Redding and Voth (2023) “Slavery and the British Industrial Revolution”

**October 22** Introduction to the Industrial Revolution

- Reading: Kelly, Mokyr, and O’Grada “The Mechanics of the Industrial Revolution”

**October 24** The Industrious Revolution

- **Assignment 2 Due by Midnight**
- Reading 1: DeVries (1994) “The Industrial Revolution and the Industrious Revolution”
- Reading 2: Voth (1998) “Time and Work in London”

**October 29** Education and the Second Industrial Revolution

- Reading: Squicciarini, “Devotion and Development: Religiosity, Education, and Economic Progress in 19th-Century France”

**October 31** Midterm

**November 5** Urbanization, Health, and Pollution

- Reading: Heblich, Trew and Zylberberg (2021) “East-Side Story” (Sections IV and V are optional)

**November 7** The Demographic Transition I

- Reading: Guinnane (2011), “The Historical Fertility Transition: A Guide for Economists”

**November 12** The Demographic Transition (continued)

- Reading: Beach and Hanlon (2021), “Culture and the Historical Fertility Transition”

**November 14** Trade and Globalization

- Reading: Pascali (2017) “The Winds of Change”

**November 19** Democracy and Nationalism

- Reading: Hanlon, “Suffrage”

**November 21** – No class

- **Assignment 3 Due by Midnight**

**November 26** The Great Divergence and the Great Convergence

- No Reading