

Syllabus

Northwestern University Econ 324: Western Economic History

W. Walker Hanlon

Spring 2024 – March 28 version

Class time and location

Location: University Hall 102

Time: Tues/Thurs 12:30-1:50

My contact information and office hours

Email: whanlon@northwestern.edu

Office: Kellogg Global Hub, Office 3323

Office hours: Thursday 2:30-4:00pm

Teaching assistant: Chris Sims

Email: christophersims2026@u.northwestern.edu

Office hours: Monday 11am-12pm

Office hours location: Kellogg Global Hub, Room 3198

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.

Link of questions/comments on readings:

<https://forms.gle/zmuTsh5V6aQMjdYs9>

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 18 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.

Here are details on the University academic integrity policies: Students in this course are required to comply with the policies found in the booklet, "Academic Integrity at Northwestern University: A Basic Guide". All papers submitted for credit in this course must be submitted electronically unless otherwise instructed by the professor. Your written work may be tested for plagiarized content. For details regarding academic integrity at Northwestern or to download the guide, visit:

<https://www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies/academic-integrity/index.html>

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; p: 847-467-5530). If you already have established accommodations 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.

Religious Observance

Northwestern is committed to fostering an academic community respectful and welcoming of persons from all backgrounds. To that end, the policy on academic accommodations for religious holidays stipulates that students will not be penalized for class absences to observe religious holidays. If you will observe a religious holiday during a class meeting, scheduled exam, or assignment deadline, please let me know as soon as possible, preferably within the first two week of class. If exams or assignment deadlines on the syllabus fall on religious holidays you observe, please reach out so that we can discuss that coursework.

Exceptions to Class Modality

Class sessions for this course will occur in person. Individual students will not be granted permission to attend remotely except as the result of an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accommodation as determined by AccessibleNU or in accordance with other NU policies.

Class Recordings

Portions of this class may be recorded by the instructor for educational purpose and available to the class during the quarter. You will be able to access the recordings through Canvas. Portions of the course that contain images, questions or commentary/discussion by students will be edited out of any recordings that are saved beyond the current term.

Northwestern Policy Regarding Recording of Class Sessions

Unauthorized student recording of classroom or other academic activities (including advising sessions or office hours) is prohibited. Unauthorized recording is unethical and may also be a violation of University policy and state law. Students requesting the use of assistive technology as an accommodation should contact AccessibleNU. Unauthorized use

of classroom recordings - including distributing or posting them - is also prohibited. Under the University's Copyright Policy, faculty own the copyright to instructional materials - including those resources created specifically for the purposes of instruction, such as syllabi, lectures and lecture notes, and presentations. Students cannot copy, reproduce, display, or distribute these materials. Students who engage in unauthorized recording, unauthorized use of a recording, or unauthorized distribution of instructional materials will be referred to the appropriate University office for follow-up.

Mobile phones

Mobile Communications Policy: Mobile phones should have the ringer turned off and be placed in pockets or backpacks. Students may not make or receive phone calls, surf the web, or send or receive text messages during class.

Academic and other support

NUHelp: Students can find useful resources for safety and security, academic support, and mental and physical health and well-being at the NUhelp website and app: <https://www.northwestern.edu/nuhelp/>

Northwestern University is committed to supporting the wellness of our students. Student Affairs has multiple resources to support student wellness and mental health. If you are feeling distressed or overwhelmed, please reach out for help. Students can access confidential resources through the Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), Religious and Spiritual Life (RSL) and the Center for Awareness, Response and Education (CARE). Additional information on all of the resources mentioned above can be found here:

- <https://www.northwestern.edu/counseling/>
- <https://www.northwestern.edu/religious-life/>
- <https://www.northwestern.edu/care/>

Absences

Students who are absent due to sickness or a positive Covid-19 test should do their best to continue to follow the course through the available course recordings and posted lecture slides. Absences due to illness should be documented. Students will be excused from in-class participation but should do their best to still send in comments about the readings. If you are unable to complete an assignment on time because of an illness, you should discuss with the instructor whether it is possible to get a short extension or whether you can be excused from the assignment with the grade weight distributed to other class elements.

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

Note: Tuesday, March 26 is the first day of the term, but Monday classes meet that day, so our first day will be Thursday, March 28

March 28	First class
April 18	First written assignment due by Midnight
May 2	Second written assignment due by Midnight
May 9	First Midterm
May 23	Third written assignment due by Midnight and last day of class
May 28	Second Midterm (Last day of class)

List of topics, dates, and readings

March 28 Introduction: Why study economic history?

April 2 *Class cancelled*

April 4 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”

April 9 Why Europe? States, Geography, and Resources

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

April 11 Ancient Economies

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

April 16 Institutions

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

April 18 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”

April 23 Early Modern Europe and the Commercial Revolution

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

April 25 Colonialism

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

April 30 Introduction to the Industrial Revolution

- Reading: Hanlon (2021) “The Rise of the Engineer”

May 2 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”

May 7 Education and the Second Industrial Revolution

- Reading: No reading – midterm studying

May 9 First Midterm

May 14 Urbanization, Health, and Pollution

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

May 16 The Demographic Transition Part I

- Reading 1: Guinnane (2011), “The Historical Fertility Transition: A Guide for Economists”
- Reading 2: Blanc (2022), “The Cultural Origins of the Demographic Transition in France”

May 21 The Demographic Transition Part II

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

May 23 The Great Divergence and the Great Convergence

- **Assignment 3 Due by Midnight**
- Reading: Pascali (2017) “The Winds of Change”

May 28 Second Midterm