

Vanderbilt University
Department of Economics
Economics 8400
Introduction to Economic History
Spring 2019

Revised April 12, 2019

Time: TR 8:10–9:25am
Place: Calhoun 413B
Instructor: Ariell Zimran
Office: Calhoun 417
Phone: 615.322.1529
Email: ariell.zimran@vanderbilt.edu
Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description This course provides a graduate-level introductory survey of selected topics in economic history, with an emphasis on microeconomic topics in the United States. The course has five primary goals.

1. Provide a survey of key literatures in economic history.
2. Expose students to recent advances in economic history.
3. Familiarize students with empirical methods commonly used in economics and economic history.
4. Introduce students to research using historical data.
5. Spur students to begin their original research.

This course prepares students for further study towards a dissertation in Economic History (if desired); with a grade of B- or better, it satisfies the Economic History requirement for the PhD in Economics.

Prerequisites ECON 8100 and ECON 8200. The course also assumes familiarity with econometrics at the advanced undergraduate level and a basic familiarity with American and European history.

Course Structure In general, we will spend two classes on each topic. On Tuesdays, I will give a lecture covering background information and the key debates and results in the literature on that week’s topic, with a focus on a few important papers or papers that highlight the themes discussed. On Thursdays, we will focus on two specific papers in that literature. Each paper will be presented and critiqued by one student, and we will then discuss it in detail, focusing on its motivation, contribution, and methodology. The exceptions to this structure are as follows: “Methods” will be entirely lecture-based; the final week of the class will be devoted to presentations of students’ research projects; and the next-to-last week (“Students’ Choice”) will be a lecture on a topic or topics to be chosen in consultation with students.

Seminar Attendance Students thinking of writing a dissertation in empirical microeconomics should attend the Friday VEAM-WIPT talks (schedule posted on Professor Carpenter’s door). All students are encouraged to attend the Economic History seminars, currently scheduled for March 12 and April 9. We are also fortunate to have two other sources of economic history-related visitors this term. Joel Mokyr will give this year’s McGee Lecture on April 23. We are also currently conducting a search for an Assistant Professor in Economic History, which means that there will be a few visiting Economic History speakers in January and perhaps February. All students are encouraged to attend these; dates will be announced soon. Students looking to write a dissertation in economic history are especially encouraged to attend the latter talks, as they will give a sense of what a good job market paper in economic history looks like.

Note Everything on this syllabus is subject to change. For this reason, be sure to check with me if you are planning to read more than a week ahead, to prepare more than a week in advance for a presentation, or

to work on a referee report before I have announced in class that the paper is finalized. Make sure also that you check regularly on Brightspace that you have the most updated version of the syllabus. If you have any questions, concerns, or suggestions, please feel free to discuss them with me. Please also inform me if the schedule of the course conflicts with important dates in the other first year courses, as it may be possible to move some deadlines around. Be aware that at times, I will have to reschedule classes because of travel. We will discuss scheduling in class.

Course Materials The course focuses on journal articles, all of which are available online. Some of the readings will be book chapters, which will be made available on Brightspace. Much background information for the United States comes from the following textbook.

Jeremy Atack and Peter Passell (1994). *A New Economic View of American History from Colonial Times to 1940*. 2nd ed. New York: W W Norton & Co.

This book is not required, but it is helpful to read in order to get an understanding of the background of many of the topics that we discuss in American Economic History. If you think that you might ever teach a course in American Economic History, you should read the whole thing (as I wish I had done when I was in your position). Students are also encouraged to acquire a copy of

Joshua D. Angrist and Jörn-Steffen Pischke (2009). *Mostly Harmless Econometrics: An Empiricist's Companion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press,

which is a useful handbook for empirical applied microeconomists.

Evaluation

- *Class Participation* (20%). As we will spend half of the course discussing papers, it is crucial that all students come to class on Thursdays having thoroughly read the papers to be discussed. Students should also look over the other papers listed on the reading list in advance of Tuesday lectures, and to participate actively in these lectures.
- *Class Presentations* (20%). Each student has been assigned three papers from the reading list to present in class; the initial assignment was random, but Pareto-improving trades are welcome (just let me know at least a week in advance). Presentations should be about 15 minutes in length. In the first 10 minutes, the student should present the paper as though in a conference, and the last 5 should be a critique of the paper as in a discussant's presentation. The presentation should set up the points for discussion by the class. I will circulate additional guidelines for the presentations separately.
- *Referee Reports* (20%). Each student will complete two referee reports, due **Friday, February 1** and **Friday, March 1**. I will circulate guidelines for and examples of referee reports separately, as well as the papers to be reviewed.
- *Research Project* (20%). You will submit a brief (2–3 pages) proposal on **Friday, February 15** for my feedback. Projects will be presented (25 minutes, including about 5 minutes for questions) during the last week of class, and the final write-up should be submitted by **Thursday, April 26**. Develop a research question and prospectus stating and motivating the question, situating it in the existing literature, developing an identification strategy, and exploring data that can be brought to bear on the question. In some cases where the data are already available and the empirical strategy is not too time intensive, it may be possible to submit a preliminary working paper.
 - *Order of Presentations*. A randomly selected order of presentations is as follows. Pareto-improving trades are welcome with a week's advance notice. **April 16: LC, YH, LG. April 18: TS, RI, YM.**

- *Final Examination* (20%). There will be a take-home final examination on **Thursday, April 26**. I will circulate it at 9:00am that day, and it will be due by e-mail at 6:00pm. The exam last year consisted of three parts.

1. A few “identifications” in which I present a table, figure, or equation from a paper that we have encountered, asking you to explain or interpret it and its relevance to the paper (and the paper’s relevance to the literature). These “identifications” will focus on, but not be limited to, the papers’ identification strategies.
2. A critical survey of a debate or theme covered in class, bringing together insights from several papers that we have discussed.
3. A referee report on a working paper.

I am likely to create a similar exam this year. You will be permitted to consult any source you wish (including the papers that are asked about) in the course of the exam, but are not permitted to consult any other person.

Schedule of Meetings and Topics Readings listed below are those that form the basis for the Tuesday lectures, or are those that will be presented by students and discussed in class on Thursdays. The latter are italicized and marked by the initials of the student assigned to present them. You are expected to have skimmed the papers in roman text (and to have attended the lecture reviewing them, so that you know the research question, position in the literature, setting, data, empirical approach, main results, etc.), and to be deeply familiar with the papers in italics, whether you are presenting them or not. You will also note that some readings are marked with * or †; this is for my organizational purposes only and has no bearing on your preparation.

Dates	Topic	Readings	Notable Events
Jan. 8	Course Overview	McCloskey (1976) Abramitzky (2015)	
Jan. 8–10	Methods	Angrist and Pischke (2009) Bailey et al. (2017)	
Jan. 15–17	Persistence	Nunn (2009) Libecap and Lueck (2011) †Bleakley and Lin (2012) Voigtländer and Voth (2012) <i>Dell and Olken (2018)</i> ^{TS} <i>Testa (2018)</i> ^{CM}	
Jan. 22–24	Health & the Human Body	Zimran (2019) Clay et al. (2014) *Beach et al. (2016) <i>Alsan and Goldin (2016)</i> ^{LG} <i>Hanlon (2018)</i> ^{RI}	
Jan. 29–31	Transportation	Fogel (1962) Atack et al. (2010) †Donaldson (2018) <i>Donaldson and Hornbeck (2016)</i> ^{AZ} <i>Hornung (2015)</i> ^{LC}	RR 1 Due 2/1

Feb. 5–7	Slavery & Agriculture	Steckel (1979, 1986) Fogel and Engerman (1977, 1980) David and Temin (1979) Olmstead and Rhode (2008) <i>Calomiris and Pritchett (2016)</i> ^{LG} <i>Lange et al. (2009)</i> ^{YM}	
Feb. 12–14	Immigration	Abramitzky and Boustan (2016) *Hatton and Williamson (1998, ch. 3) *Spitzer and Zimran (2019) *Abramitzky et al. (2012) Abramitzky et al. (2014) <i>Karadja and Prawitz (2019)</i> ^{LC} <i>Tabellini (2018)</i> ^{YH}	Prop. Due 2/15
Feb. 19–21	Banking and Finance	Gorton (1996) Jaremski (2010) Calomiris and Carlson (2015) <i>Xu (2018)</i> ^{LG} <i>Koudijs (2016)</i> ^{YM}	
Feb. 26–28	The Great Depression	Bernanke (1995) Calomiris and Mason (2003) Eichengreen (1992, ch. 1) *Richardson and Troost (2009) <i>Quincy (2018)</i> ^{TS} <i>Hausman (2016)</i> ^{YH}	RR 2 Due 3/1
Mar. 12–14	The Industrial Revolution	Allen (2009, chs. 2, 4, 6) Mokyr (2009, chs. 3, 5, 6) Crafts (2011) *North and Weingast (1989) <i>Squicciarini and Voigtländer (2015)</i> ^{RI} <i>Hanlon (2015)</i> ^{LC}	
Mar. 19–21	Human Capital and Growth	Becker and Woessmann (2009) Squicciarini (2018) *Becker et al. (2010) <i>Dittmar (2011)</i> ^{TS} <i>Becker et al. (2011)</i> ^{YH}	
Mar. 26–28	Asia and Africa	Shiue and Keller (2007) Alsan (2015) *Lowe and Montero (2018) <i>Meng et al. (2015)</i> ^{AZ} <i>Ou and Xiong (2018)</i> ^{YM}	Extra Class 3/28
Apr. 2–4	Theorists Can Be Historians, Too	Galor (2011, ch. 5) Greif (1993) *de la Croix et al. (2018) <i>Saleh and Tirole (2018)</i> ^{RI} <i>Galor and Moav (2006)</i> ^{AZ}	No Class 4/2 or 4/4

Apr. 9–11	Students' Choice	Piketty and Saez (2003) Goldin and Margo (1992) Goldin and Katz (2007) Long and Ferrie (2013) Pérez (2019) Tan (2018) Bleakley and Ferrie (2016) Feigenbaum (2015)	Extra Class 4/11
Apr. 16–18	Project Presentations		
April 26	Final Examination		Project Due

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