

Economics 450  
Seminar in Quantitative Economic History

Spring 2012  
Mr. Easton

This course is a seminar in economic history. Students prepare a paper based on a set of topics available in class, or will choose their own topic in consultation with the instructor.

Papers will be presented in class and will be discussed by fellow students. The paper is to be sent to the instructor 1 week before the date of presentation. The instructor will forward the paper to all participants in the seminar.

These are research papers. Almost all will include data and theory in the write-up. Students are encouraged to think broadly about the issues they wish to explore. You are expected to consult with fellow students and the instructor, but you may consult more widely. You are expected to use proper footnoting with references in the text (e.g. Jones, p.25), and a bibliography.

Presentations will begin on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February. The first papers are (likely) to be distributed on February 20. (This is the first day after the reading week.) The order of presentation will be determined by a draw and renegotiation among the participants. The exact dates will be decided once the number of students giving papers is known. Normally there is no final exam.

Presentations: Since the participants will all have read the paper in advance, the paper presenter will give a 5 minute introduction to the paper. The discussants each have up to 20 minutes to make their points. A written copy of their comments goes to the paper writer and the instructor. Each non-discussant will prepare two copies of comments. One set of comments go to the presenter. One set to the instructor. Attendance, however, is required. Students are assumed to have had intermediate economic theory and BUEC333 at a minimum.

After the presentation, the author is expected to revise the paper in light of the comments made during the discussion or in the written commentary. A final copy of the paper is to be turned in at the end of classes. Those students whose paper is discussed in the final week will have an additional week to complete revisions.

No textbook is assigned

Should you miss any part of anyone's presentation, you will take the final. It would be worth 25% of the final mark. Normal grading includes 25% for in class presentations, and 75% for the final paper.

A few of the topics that have been pursued in the past include:

**Tariffs:**

Explain the pattern of Canadian tariffs. Why did Canadian tariff levels vary the way they did between 1870 and today?

**Economic Growth:**

What factors account for Canadian economic growth?

What role does export-led growth play in explaining Canada's growth path?

What role has the United States played in Canadian growth?

**The Gold Standard**

Was capital mobility more perfect (!) in the 19th century (through 1914) than during the 20th century?

Purchasing power parity plays an important role in international economics theories.

Was the 19th century a better place to find PPP than the present day?

Was the transfer fully effected; a) France's indemnity after the Franco-Prussian War, or b) Germany's reparations after World War I.?

**Immigration/Emigration**

What is the cost-benefit calculation of immigration in Canada or elsewhere?

Where do people come from? Is Canada a stopover point to the US or an immigration destination in its own right?

People often leave Canada for other countries. What explains the rate of emigration?

**Schooling**

What factors influence the growth in elementary, secondary, post-secondary or university schooling in Canada?

What role does schooling play in the historical growth of nations?

Explain the time pattern of Canadian post secondary school attendance.

**Crime and Punishment**

Explain the time pattern of the Canadian crime rate. What factors account for the pattern of crime in Canada from 1870 to the present?

Does Canada have a history of punishment that is different from that in the US?

Explain the growth of legal aid in Canada.

**Prohibition**

Was prohibition an important source of crime in Canada or the US in the early 20th century?

What was the impact of alcoholism on health?

**Other Topics**

Was Malthus right? Do we tend to live at a subsistence wage?

In the UK did the "good harvest" inspire industrial development?

Did the Poor Law affect British wages?

Why did Britain move to free trade in the 1850s when it was the world's most developed country?

Why did British growth slow at the end of the 19th century?

Was Britain technologically inept at the end of the 19th century?

Did British investment abroad in the 19th century reduce growth at home?

Did British emigration reduce income at home?

Are business cycles systematically related in the 19th century?

What caused the Great Depression?

Did Britain gain from the revaluation of gold in 1925?

Has international debt been dangerous to creditors or debtors?

What is the impact of major illnesses on population growth?

*These topics are illustrative. They are meant to stimulate your imagination.*

Social Savings and the productivity of railroads in the US or Canada

Productivity of ocean shipping

Social saving and the rise of canals: US or UK

The Hoffman thesis of industrialization

Rostow's thesis of industrialization

Examine the relationship between services and income

The growth of the iron and steel industry in the US

The growth of the cotton textile industry in the US

The diffusion of innovation

What factors led to 19th century urbanization

Analyze the welfare effects of British colonial restrictions