

**Economics 491: Issues in Political Economy**  
**Western Washington University**

**Professor**

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**Office Hours:** Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:30-11am (or by appointment)

**Course Description and Prerequisites**

Prereq: senior status in the economics/political science combined major, or an economics major and political science minor, or permission of instructor. Discussion and analysis of selected issues of significant economic and political content. Also offered as PLSC 491.

The course is designated WP1/CF - writing proficiency and communication focus

This is a capstone course for our Economics/Political Science combined majors. The biggest difference you may notice will be the contrast with a standard classroom lecture format. Aside from a few occasions, especially toward the beginning of the quarter, I will not present lectures to the group; instead, we will devote each class to an in-depth discussion of an assigned reading (or set of readings). Class time is thus spent going over in more detail what *everyone has already read*. Note what this *requires* - *reading the material carefully prior to class and showing up prepared to discuss it*. The only way to do well in this format is to not only read the assignment for each day but to have thought about it, and to have prepared comments on it. The idea is to force all of us to think in a disciplined and intellectually rigorous manner to create self-understanding of the content and encourage critical thinking.

**Textbook**

Most of our readings will be taken from journal articles that are available through the WWU library, but we will use the following required book throughout the quarter:

*Economic Behavior and Institutions* by Thrainn Eggertsson (ISBN: 0521348919)

We will also use quite a lot of the following book, so I would strongly recommend that you obtain a copy:

*The Rise of the Western World* by Douglass North and Robert Paul Thomas (ISBN: 0521290996)

## Grading

Presentation/Seminar Chair = 15%

Response to Readings = 15%

Participation = 15%

Research Paper Topic Proposal = 5%

Research Paper Draft (including presentation) = 15%

Research Paper Final = 20%

Critique of Drafts = 15%

Final course grades will be assigned using the following scale:

92.5 to 100	=	A	76.5 to 79.49	=	C+	59.5 to 62.49	=	D-
89.5 to 92.49	=	A-	72.5 to 76.49	=	C	59.49 or less	=	F
86.5 to 89.49	=	B+	69.5 to 72.49	=	C-			
82.5 to 86.49	=	B	66.5 to 69.49	=	D+			
79.5 to 82.49	=	B-	62.5 to 66.49	=	D			

### Oral Presentation/Seminar Chair (15%)

Each student will be responsible for leading our discussion of one assigned reading during the quarter. The brief presentations (you should aim for 20 minutes) will consist of descriptive overviews of one of the assigned readings for the class. Those responsible for chairing the seminar will summarize the main theoretical points of the readings, and will offer a series of questions/topics for discussion for the day (**please provide handouts to your fellow classmates**).

The oral presentations will be graded on three primary criteria:

- 1) Grasp of the reading materials as evidenced by the class handouts. Ability to identify the relevant model and/or variables, the thesis statement, the main argument, and the author's key points.
- 2) Ability to present this material to the class—do **NOT** read your handouts.
- 3) Quality of questions for discussion, and overall familiarity with all materials for the week.

### **Response to Readings (15%)**

You must choose one reading during the quarter for a 5-7 page analysis of the readings. You may choose from any of the papers in the reading list that are designated with \*\*. I expect more than a simple summary of the readings (the summary may not exceed 1 page of your response paper). You must try to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the paper and offer comments on it. How does it contribute to our understanding of the issues with which are dealing? This is to be a serious critical essay - a response, as it were, to the author. I would recommend that you try to align this response with the topic you choose for your class research paper.

### **Participation (15%)**

I expect you to come to class having completed the readings and with something substantive to offer **every day**. Other things being equal, regular attendance and occasional questions/comments related to course reading will merit a grade in the C range. Participation characterized by regular attendance and specific comments or questions *about the reading* that lead to clarification of concepts and arguments presented by the authors will generally merit a grade of B. Students who go beyond this level to extend particular ideas from the reading to grapple with broader issues in institutional political economy and/or economic history will merit grades in the A range. Participation on topics not related to political economy does not count as constructive engagement with course ideas. **Remember it is the quantity and the quality of participation that matters.**

### **Research Paper (total of three parts is 40%)**

There are three components to your class research paper, each of which is graded separately.

**TOPIC PROPOSAL (5%) - Paper topics are required by THURSDAY, APRIL 25.** You must turn in a one-page summary of your research design, including a thesis statement and the direction of your argument. You must also turn in a 1-page bibliography with at least 5 sources. Late proposals will be penalized at the rate of one letter grade per day.

**DRAFT PAPER AND PRESENTATION TO CLASS (15%) -You will submit a draft research proposal on TUESDAY, MAY 21.** The draft must include an introduction, theory, literature review, evidence, and preliminary conclusions.

You will be required to present a summary of your research to the class. Presentation dates will be assigned and will likely take place over the course of 2 separate class periods. You will be required to circulate your draft to all members of the seminar via email no less than 24 hours before your presentation. **Seminar members will then write a brief (1 page or so) critique of your draft to be provided to you (these critiques will be graded and will constitute 15% of your**

**course grade in total).** The instructor will distribute critiques to the presenter, so you will email them directly to the instructor.

**FINAL PAPER (20%)** - The final paper must be 15 pages, excluding bibliography (no cover page is required). It must include a bibliography, and properly formatted (either APA or Chicago style) citations. It must have a thesis, an argument, and engage with the literature we read and discussed during the class. It must also demonstrate attention to the revisions suggested from the draft paper and in the critiques you received. **The final paper is due by noon on TUESDAY, JUNE 11.**

The 2010-2011 Western Washington University Catalog (Appendix D) describes the academic integrity policy followed in the class. According to the catalog, “Western Washington University students have an obligation to fulfill the responsibilities of their particular roles as members of an academic community. Honesty is essential to learning. Without it, fair evaluation for all is impossible. Academic integrity is demanded, and academic dishonesty at Western Washington University is a serious infraction dealt with severely. Students shall not claim as their own the achievements, work or arguments of others, nor shall they be a party to such claims.” Any student found in violation of this policy will receive an F in the class and may be subject to disciplinary action from the university.