Economics 2325  
Comparative Historical Economic Development  
Fall 2012  
Syllabus

Time: Mondays and Wednesdays: 1:00-2:30pm
Location: Harvard Hall 103
Instructors: Nathan Nunn and James A. Robinson
Offices: Littauer M-29 and Littauer TBD
Emails: nnunn@fas.harvard.edu and jrobinson@gov.harvard.edu

Course Description

This course focuses on using a historical and comparative approach to understanding the evolution and development of societies. While the material covered in the course is grounded in the field of economic history, there is a natural overlap with other fields in economics, particularly development economics, as well as overlap with other disciplines, such as history, anthropology, archaeology, geography, and psychology.

Given the goal of the course – to understand comparative development from a historical perspective – the geographic coverage of the material, particularly in the first half of the semester, is focused on the regions of the World other than United States and Europe, which are regions that typically receive the most focus in economic history. Instead, the emphasis is on the historical experience and long-term development of Latin America, Africa and Asia.

This course is targeted to second-year Ph.D. students in economics. The course fulfills the distribution requirement.

Requirements

If you are registered for this course, you will need to complete the following assignments:

1. Each week students are required to write a short summary of one of the required readings and email the summary to us (nnunn@fas.harvard.edu and jrobinson@gov.harvard.edu) at least 2 hours before the beginning of each class. The presentation should cover the following: (i) Why is the paper important (or why not)? (ii) An overview of the core contributions of the paper. (iii) What you liked – or did not like – about the paper. (iv) How the paper is connected to other studies in the course.
2. Students are required to choose one working paper in the field of economic history and write a “referee report” discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the paper, and suggestions for improvement. This will be due around the 9th week of the semester.

3. Students are required to complete one GIS assignment, which will facilitate an introduction to the software and help students learn its most useful functions and capabilities. The data needed for the assignment will be provided. This will be due around the 6th week of the semester.

4. Students are required to prepare a brief 15–20 minute presentation on a new project related to the topics in the course. You are not expected to present a finished draft, but rather an idea and an outline of how that idea could be worked out. Presentations will take place during the last three classes of the semester. Following the presentation you will have three weeks to write up a 10–20 page draft of the proposal.

5. Finally, and most importantly, everyone is expected to participate in class discussion.

Software

ArcGIS software is available to Harvard students for download. See http://gis.harvard.edu. I will spend time in class providing students with a basic overview of ArcMap and ArcCatalogue and the tasks they can perform.

Grades

Finally, class participation, discussion, and the email summaries together account for 30% of your grade. The GIS assignment will account for 10% of the grade. The referee report accounts for 20%. The written proposal and presentation for the potential project account for 40% of the grade.
Reading List

- Starred (*) articles are required reading.

1 Introduction and overview (Sept 5) (Nunn/Robinson)


2 How Rich Countries got Rich I (Sept 10) (Robinson)

Europe: Internal Dynamics of Institutions


3 How Rich Countries got Rich II (Sept 12) (Robinson)

Europe: The External Context


4 How Rich Countries got Rich III (Sept 17) (Nunn)

Europe: The Role of Culture


5  How Rich Countries got Rich IV (Sept 19) (Nunn)

Europe: The Interplay of Culture and Institutions


6  How Rich Countries got Rich IV (Sept 24) (Nunn)

Europe: Genetics and other Vertically Transmitted Traits


7 Drivers of Persistence (Sep 26) (Nunn)

Multiple Equilibria and Path Dependence


8 Drivers of Change I (Oct 1) (Robinson)


9 Drivers of Change II (Oct 3) (Robinson)


Columbus Day (Oct 8) - No class

10 The Development of the State (Oct 10) (Robinson)


- de Waal, Alex. 2010. “Fixing the Political Marketplace: How can we Make Peace without Functioning State Institutions?,” Fifteenth Christen Michelsen Lecture.
  http://www.cmi.no/file/?877


11 Why Other Places are Different: Africa I (Oct 15) (Nunn)

Slave Trades


12 Africa II (Oct 17) (Nunn)

Other Explanations


### 13 Africa III (Oct 22) (Robinson)

**Political Centralization, Causes and Consequences**


### 14 Latin America I (Oct 24) (Robinson)

**The Emergence of Inequality**


15 Latin America II (Oct 29) (Nunn)

Culture, Institutions and Development in the New World


16 India (Oct 31) (Nunn)

Medieval Trade and British Colonial Rule


17 The Middle East (Nov 5) (Robinson)


18 The Very Long-Run (Nov 7) (Nunn)

Persistence and Reversals


19 Geography and Historical Development (Nov 12) (Nunn)

The Historical Impacts of Geography


• (*) Chaney, Eric. 2010. “Sultans, the Shari’a and Seven Empty Ears: Economic Catastrophes, Church and State,” Mimeo, Harvard University.


20 Western Centrism (Nov 14) (Robinson)


21 Eduring Impacts of Conflict (Nov 19) (Robinson)


22 Thanksgiving Holiday (Nov 21) - No class

23 Student Presentations (Nov 26, 28, Dec 3)