

Monday, July 24, 2023

Syllabus for American Economic History

It is a good idea to save the syllabus and other course materials on your computer and a thumb drive in case your internet connection or the Rutgers Computer System is down when you need the materials; for example to study for an exam.

However, I may update the syllabus and other materials from time to time. Always go to Canvas, if you are able, and check the number of the syllabus (version 1, 2, etc.) to make sure you are reading the current version.

Professor Rockoff

Economics 305:01, Spring 2023

Tuesday – Thursday, 3:50 PM - 5:10 PM, Scott 220

Prerequisites: 220:102 and 103, or 200. You should be able to use supply and demand diagrams to analyze the effect of a tax on price and quantity. You should have an understanding of producers and consumers surplus, the basic Keynesian model, and the quantity theory of money. Moreover, you should have a basic understanding of financial instruments such as stocks and bonds.

Office Hours: Zoom by appointment. Department policy is to do most office hours by zoom to minimize crowding in the economics department. If it is absolutely, positively, necessary to have an in-person meeting, we can arrange one.

Is this a hard course or an easy course?

Whether you find this course hard or easy will depend on your strengths and weaknesses. This course draws more on your verbal skills and less on your math skills than many of the other economics courses. So, if you are the kind of student who liked Shakespeare but hated calculus, you may find this course easier compared with the other economics courses you have taken. If you hated Shakespeare and did well in calculus this course may prove harder for you.

There is also a lot to remember: easy for some, hard for others. For example, you will have to remember whether the North won or lost the Civil War. Normally, I will not ask you to remember particular dates – if I do want you to remember a date I will say “remember this date” several times – but you will have to remember a lot about American Economic History to do well on the exams.

What hurdles will you have to jump to pass the course?

- (1) You will need to attend each lecture. I take attendance and that counts toward your final grade.
- (2) There will be two multiple-choice and short answer exams during the semester. They will not be cumulative.
- (3) There will be a multiple-choice and short answer final exam. It will be cumulative, although it will focus on the last third of the course.

Time when the class meets and where.	Tuesday – Thursday, 3:50 PM - 5:10 PM, Scott 220
Final Exam	Thursday, December 22, 12:00pm-3:00pm
Professor	Hugh Rockoff
Office	NJ Hall 209C
Office Hours	There are no formal office hours. If you have a question, email me first. Many questions can be handled by email. If you have an issue that is better discussed in person, let me know, and we will arrange some office hours.
Canvas	Syllabus, announcements, etc.
E-mail	Rockoff@economics.rutgers.edu

The Best way communicate with me is to email

rockoff@economics.rutgers.edu. I often forget to look at the messages on my office phone, so calling me at the office and leaving a message is a bad idea. The Canvas email system works most of the time, although occasionally there are glitches.

Learning Goals: This course surveys the economic history of the United States from colonial times to the present. The text provides a broad outline of general trends and key developments; the class lectures provide a deeper analysis of some of the key events, emphasizing the application of economic analysis. Topics that are important for understanding contemporary economic problems – the impact of technological change, war, financial crises, and the roles of immigration and race among others – will be stressed.

The goal of the course is to increase your knowledge of American economic history and to improve your ability to think critically about the "lessons of history." Most of the lessons concern public policy. For example, how do we evaluate the claim the United States should go back to the gold standard because (it is claimed) the world's monetary system worked well from 1897 to 1914, the heyday of the gold standard?

Learning to think critically about historical evidence, moreover, is fundamental in many occupations that you may pursue after graduation: a stockbroker picking a stock, a marketing executive planning a campaign, a physician determining a diagnosis – all have to think about the "lessons of history."

Text: The text is Gary M. Walton and Hugh Rockoff: *History of the American Economy*, Thirteenth Edition. Cengage. ISBN-13: 978-1337104609.

I think the 13th edition (on which I worked very hard!) is a significant improvement over previous editions and this is the one you should use. There are a many changes from earlier editions. However, I do not have an official list of changes. If you look at the topic of the lecture, you will be able to find the corresponding discussion in previous editions.

The decision on which edition to buy is up to you. Much depends on your learning style. If you find that having a text that you can read over slowly is a big help, then it is worthwhile for you to invest in the latest edition. If you seldom read the text anyway, then having the latest edition may not make a difference. If you strive for an A in every course, the latest edition is probably a worthwhile investment.

Although you can buy a hard copy of the text, there are also various ebook and rental options available that you can check out on Amazon or the Cengage website. Just type in the name of the text or my name and that of my coauthor Gary Walton. I will not be using the Cengage Mindtap.

Students are sometimes under the impression that textbooks are expensive because the authors receive big advances from the publishers because the publisher can make supernormal profits by exploiting students. This may be true for a few books by celebrity authors. However, I can assure you that my earnings from writing the text amount to less than a dollar an hour and I can tell you that the publisher has gone through bankruptcy. Moreover, any profits I make on sales to students at Rutgers I donate to the university. My motives for writing and updating the book were nonpecuniary.

I will be distributing some questions for each lecture based on the text, and you will want to find the answers to those questions because some of them, or close relatives, will be on the exams. I will not tell whether you have found the right answer before the exam because that leads to a lot attempted deception and waste of time by students. I will not expect to be able to answer questions about material in the text that I did not cover in the class lectures or point you toward with a reading question.

Attendance. Students are expected to attend all classes.

If you have to miss a class, please use the university absence-reporting website <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/> to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email is automatically sent to me. These are unusual times, and I understand that students may have difficulties making it to every class.

Exams and Grading Procedures.

What kinds of stuff is on the exams?

Anything I talk about in class – including songs and movie clips I play for you and discussions of the historical roots of current events – may turn up on the exams. Material in the text that I have also discussed in class or pointed to with a reading question might also be on exams. Material in the text that I have not discussed in class or pointed to with a reading question will not be tested on the exams.

Here is how I will calculate your final average.

Attendance 9%
First Midterm 28%
Second Midterm 28%
Final 35%

The grading scale will be the usual Rutgers Scale: 90%-100% = A, 85%-89% = B+, 80%-84% = B, 75-79% = C+, 70-74% = C, 60%-69% = D, below 60% = F.

The final grades on the exams will be “curved” by adding a few “fudge points” to everyone’s score, if the standard curve proves to be too tough.

The weight on attendance may seem small, but it can make a difference in your final grade.

What happens if you miss or screw up one of the two in-term exams?

For every student, I will also compute an average by shifting the weight from the lower in-term to the higher in-term and the final. If that average is higher, that will be the average on which I base your grade. In that case, the weighting will be as follows.

Attendance 9%
Higher In-term 38%
Lower In-term 0%
Final 53%

What happens if you miss the second in-term after you missed the first in-term?

In that case, you must make up the second exam. Only students who miss the second in-term after missing the first in-term exam for medical reasons or similar misfortunes (struck by lightning, run over by a train, etc.) will be allowed to take a makeup without penalty. Students without a valid excuse will be subject to a 9-percentage-point penalty (92 percent on the exam, an A, becomes 83 percent, a B).

What happens if you miss the final exam?

You must make up the final if you miss it. Again, students without a valid excuse for missing the final will be subject to a 9-percentage-point penalty.


The final is cumulative so it will include some questions from the material covered on an exam that you missed or screwed up, although the final will emphasize the last part of the course.

The following table lists the class meetings, lecture topics, and readings. It will

probably be revised from time to time. If you have a question that requires looking at the syllabus, be sure to go to Canvas and look at the latest version of the syllabus. Do not rely on a version from an earlier date.

Date of the Class	Topic of the Lecture	Reading
1. Tuesday, January 17	Salient features of American economic history, and a general overview of the course.	1: Skim this chapter to get a general sense of the long-term growth of the economy. It is not necessary to memorize numbers.
2. Thursday, January 19	Mercantilism. (The economic theory that guided relations between the British colonies and North America)	4 It is not necessary to memorize actual trade figures. Rather, aim for a general understanding of the trade patterns.
3. Tuesday, January 24	The Revolutionary War ♪ Yankee Doodle Dandy	6
4. Thursday, January 26	Opening the West	8

5. Tuesday, January 31	Financial History, 1791-1830 (Alexander Hamilton and the Federalist Financial Revolution) 🎵 Cabinet Meeting1	12
6. Thursday, February 2	Financial History, 1831-1860 (Andrew Jackson, Opium, Wildcat Banking, and Gold)	Continue reading chapter 12
7. Tuesday, February 7	Slavery and the Civil War I 🎵 The Star Spangled Banner 🎵 Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen -- Louis Armstrong	13
8. Thursday, February 9	Slavery and the Civil War II 🎵 "My Old Kentucky Home" -- University of Louisville marching band	Continue reading chapter 13
9. Tuesday, February 14	FIRST EXAM Multiple-choice and short answer	
10. Thursday, February 16	The South After the Civil War (Sharecropping) 🎵 "Penny's Farm" – Pete Seeger	Latter part of chapter 14
11. Tuesday, February 21	The South After the Civil War (Debt Peonage) 🎵 "Penny's Farm" - Pete Seeger	Continue Reading Chapter 14
12. Thursday, February 21	The Birth of Populism Speech: William Jennings Bryan – "The Cross of Gold"	15

13. Tuesday, February 28	The Transcontinental RRs (land grants) ♪ The Wabash Cannonball – Pete Seeger	16
14. Thursday, March 2	Transcontinental RRs (“social savings”) ♪ I’ve been working on the Railroad – Pete Seeger	Continue Reading Chapter 16
15. Tuesday, March 7	Industrial Expansion and the “Robber Barons” Poem: “Chicago”— Carl Sandburg	17
16. Thursday, March 9	The Gold Standard Movie Clip: Charlie Chaplin Eating his Shoe	19
March 11-19	Spring Break	
17. Tuesday, March 21	No Class	
18. Thursday, March 23	Banking Panics and the Federal Reserve System Movie clip. Mary Poppins: “the Bank Run”	Continue Reading Chapter 19
19. Tuesday, March 28	World War I (Mobilization) ♪ “Over There”	21

20. Thursday, March 30	<p>SECOND EXAM</p> <p>Multiple-choice and short answer. This exam will cover only the lectures and readings after the first exam.</p>	
21. Tuesday, April 4	<p>World War I (The Home Front)</p> <p>♪ “How Ya Gonna Keep 'Em Down On The Farm (After They've Seen Pree)”</p>	Continue reading chapter 21
22. Thursday, April 6	<p>The Roaring Twenties: Prohibition</p> <p>♪ “When the Moon Shines on the Moonshine” – Bert Williams (1919)</p>	22
23. Tuesday, April 11	<p>The Bull Market and the Crash of 1929</p> <p>♪ Frank Crumit (1929) – “A Tale Of The Ticker”</p>	Continue Reading Chapter 22
24. Thursday, April 13	<p>The Great Contraction: One Darned Thing after Another</p> <p>Movie Clip. “It’s a Wonderful Life, Bank Run.”</p> <p>♪ Pete Seeger – “Seven Cent Cotton and Forty Cent Meat”</p> <p>♪ Annette Hanshaw (1930) – “Happy Days are Here Again”</p>	23

<p>25. Tuesday, April 18</p>	<p>The New Deal</p> <p>♪ New Lost City Ramblers – “Death of the Blue Eagle”</p> <p>♪ Woodie Guthrie (1941?) – “Better Go Down and Join the Union”</p>	<p>24</p>
<p>26. Thursday, April 20</p>	<p>The Economists and the Great Depression</p> <p>♪ Bing Crosby (1932) – “Brother, Can You Spare a Dime”</p>	<p>Continue Reading Chapter 24</p>
<p>27. Tuesday, April 25</p>	<p>World War II (Home Front)</p> <p>♪ “Rosie the Riveter” - The Smoothies (1943)</p>	<p>25</p>
<p>28. Thursday, April 27</p>	<p>World War II (Military Front)</p> <p>♪ “Comin in on a Wing and a Prayer”</p>	<p>Continue Reading Chapter 25</p>
<p>29. Friday, May 5 12 PM to 3 PM</p>	<p>Final Exam</p> <p>The final exam will be multiple-choice and short answer. It will cover the entire semester, but the focus will be on the lectures and readings after the second exam.</p> <p>The exam will probably be in our regular classroom. I will let you know if there is a change.</p> <p>♪ “Bright College days” – Tom Lehrer</p> <p>♪ “Nobody Ever Died for Dear Old Rutgers” - Phil Silvers</p>	

Good luck. You are about to study American Economic History, the most exciting and the most important intellectual discipline in the entire university.

