

Quest University Canada

Political Economy—Soc 2001

Section: 001—June Semester: Summer 2008
Days and Times: Mondays 1-4 PM Location: Academic Bldg.
Tuesdays-Fridays 9 AM – 12 PM
Instructor: Eric Gorham
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Office hours: Mondays 4-5 PM, Tuesdays-Thursday 12-1 PM and by appointment

3. Course Description.

Political Economy is the foundation course for a deeper understanding of economic life and government's role in it. It introduces students to economics and economic policy-making and explores the fundamental principles of capitalism. The course connects capitalist economic decision-making to both political liberalism and religious and cultural practices. Students learn fundamental economic terms and concepts as they explore the development of modern economies.

This course fulfills a social science requirement within the foundation program.

4. Reading Materials.

There are only two required books for the course:

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*
Diana Hacker, *A Writer's Reference*, Sixth Edition

All other assigned readings can be found in a course pack available for purchase at the front desk. You may be able to find these materials on-line as well.

The [Economist On-line](#) offers a good dictionary of economic terms.

Video Materials:

I will be asking you to view parts of *Commanding Heights*—a six-hour PBS documentary on the world economy. Because this is a streaming video and because technology can fail you, please allow enough time in advance to be able to see all the Episodes and chapters assigned to you. My advice: *do not leave your viewing to the night before the assignment is due.*

Links to *Commanding Heights*, PBS Video

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/commandingheights/lo/index.html>

[Commanding Heights--Episode One](#)

[Commanding Heights--Episode Two](#)

[Commanding Heights--Episode Three](#)

5. Learning Outcomes.

Quest University Canada learning outcomes: evaluate texts, develop arguments, apply quantitative reasoning skills, foster written and oral communication skills, employ available search mechanisms to find data, evaluate sources, analyze and discuss ethical practices, articulate connections between disciplines, and identify civic rights and commitments.

Course learning outcomes: become familiar with basic concepts in economics, understand more deeply the cultural foundations of modern capitalism, recognize the role of government in the modern economy, and become better informed about selected policy issues in economic life.

6. Methods of Assessment.

METHOD OF ASSESSMENT	LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSESSED AND ASSIGNMENTS	DAY DUE	%
Essay I Five pages	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Written communication skills, evaluate texts, develop arguments, articulate connections between disciplines, understand cultural foundations of modern capitalism• A paper on theories of Weber, Locke, or Smith using the Castellanos chapter as an example	5	20
Essay II Five pages	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Written communication skills, evaluate texts, develop arguments• A paper on the role of government in the economy focused on the ideas of Smith and Marx	9	20
Country study Fifteen	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quantitative reasoning skills, use available search mechanisms to find relevant data, evaluate sources, oral communication skills, course learning outcomes• Students prepare a data sheet on key economic	13-14	20

minute oral presentation/ briefing	components of a non-North American country, judge whether or not that country is capitalist and defend that position. They brief others on their findings.		
Policy analysis Five pages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written communication skills, evaluate texts, develop arguments, analyze and discuss ethical practices, articulate connections between disciplines, course learning outcomes • Students identify the most important economic problem of the country they have chosen and suggest a reform policy. They must identify the role of government in such a policy. 	14	20
Participation Includes small presentations made for the course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oral communication skills, quantitative reasoning skills, operate well in teams, identify civic rights and commitments, analyze and discuss ethical practices 	1-14	20

Additional details about all these assignments are provided below on page 8.

7. Course Policies.

a) Assignments. *All papers must be typed and double-spaced in 12 point font and 1” margins. I do not accept papers that do not conform to these requirements. I do not accept papers after the beginning of the class period in which they are due. I will not read any pages that go beyond the page limit required.* I am interested in how well you can write and I grade the form as well as the content of your exams and essays. You will lose marks on all assignments for bad grammar and improper syntax. You will also lose marks for bad spelling and typographical errors on the paper.

All essays in this class require a thesis that you set out to justify: if you a) don't have a thesis, and/or b) do not justify it well or adequately, then you will lose many marks. The best way to prevent the loss of all of the above marks is to outline, write, edit, re-write, and proofread your papers very carefully. If you have difficulty writing essays, see the learning commons and me, and have others go over your drafts with you. For further detail, see the accompanying “guidelines” for writing.

An important part of the course is learning to write well so we will employ the Hacker writing manual very extensively. Please be prepared to bring it to class daily. During the block, if I ask you to read particular sections of that manual to help you with some aspect of your writing, then consider that an additional assignment. Finally, submit all written assignments to the relevant drop-box in Desire2Learn.

ESL: If English is not your native language, then you will not lose points for “ESL” mistakes. Please note that certain aspects of poor writing, such as the absence of a thesis statement or a disorganized essay, are not the result of ESL deficiencies. However, as I do for all students in the class, I

expect all non-native speaking English students to improve their grammar and syntax with each successive paper.

b) Grading Policy. All written work is graded on a letter grade scale. Where group projects are graded, all students in that group will receive the same grade. For those who wish to convert letter grades into numerical ones, my grading scale is as follows:

A	92-100
A-	88-91
B+	85-87
B	82-84
B-	78-81
C+	75-78
C	70-74
C-	67-69
D	55-66
F	54 and under

To see the values I use to calculate your final grade and how your final grade influences your grade point average, see the [Academic Calendar](#), pages 24-25.

c) Completing the course. You must complete all assignments. If you fail to complete all assignments, and have not arranged for an Incomplete, then you will receive an "F" for the course. I strongly discourage arranging Incompletes and will consider them on a case-by-case basis. If you fail to complete the work necessary to remove the incomplete from your record by the appropriate due date, you will receive an "F" for the course.

d) Academic Integrity. Anyone caught cheating on exams or plagiarizing papers will receive an "F" for the course. *Presenting material as your own from books, newspapers, magazines, others' emails, or (especially) the Internet is plagiarism/cheating.* If you are uncertain about this definition, see me and we will discuss it. For more details, please see the Quest [honour constitution](#) and Diana Hacker, *A Writer's Reference*, pages 341-347 and 358-361. I know how to research and uncover plagiarized essays via the Internet.

e) Participation. A significant part of the course is **class participation**, because we will deliberate about the issues these authors raise. Come to class every day and be prepared to discuss the material with your fellow students. Please be aware of everything on the course management site as well. I reserve the right to hold unannounced quizzes or exams if I feel that members of the class are not preparing adequately for the class.

f) Attendance. There is no required attendance policy for your course. You will have to make up your own mind whether or not it is in your best interest to attend every day. I humbly suggest that it is.

g) University Calendar Dates. It is your responsibility to be aware of all add/drop and withdrawal dates for the block. Please see the academic calendar and timetable for this information.

h) Classroom Computer Policy. Students may use computers in class for the following purposes: note-taking, exam-writing, in-class essay writing, and in-class research for topics directly relevant to course topics. *Students are expected never to view screens irrelevant to the course during class (I will be the judge of what is irrelevant). I reserve the right to confiscate for the class period the laptop computers of any students who violate this principle. I also reserve the right to forbid any student from bringing laptops to the classroom if this rule is violated repeatedly (I am the judge of what “repeatedly” may mean).* I also reserve the right to forbid the use of computers in class if I feel that they are detrimental to class discussion.

i) Grammatical E-mails. Whenever you email me you must use proper forms of address, punctuation, grammar, and syntax. Good writing begins with everyday practices, and I will be judging your writing abilities in the emails that you send me.

j) Video Projector. If you are giving a presentation in class and need to use the video projector you are responsible for learning how to connect it to your computer. I can secure the projector for you but I cannot provide technical assistance to you. Please note this well in advance of your presentation.

k) Re-writes. I will be pleased to review any papers you wish to re-write in this class at any time. I will not, however, change the grade I gave you originally as a result of this review. I adhere to this policy to encourage you to improve your writing for its own sake, rather than as a means to another end (e.g., a higher grade).

8. Tentative Block Schedule.

Day	Date	Topic/Questions	Reading Assignment/Activity	Assessment
1	June 17	What is the Role of Government and Culture in Economic Life?	Cereal/Juice Box Activity	
2	June 18	The Cultural Origins of Capitalism I: What are the religious origins of the capitalist system?	Weber, <i>The Protestant Ethic</i> , chapters 2 and 5; <i>The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin</i> , excerpts.	
3	June 19	The Cultural Origins of Capitalism II: What is the significance of private property and property rights?	Locke, Chapter V, <i>The Second Treatise</i> ; Rosario Castellanos, <i>The Book of Lamentations</i> , Chapter XII.	
4	June 20	The Theory of Capitalism I: What are the component parts of the market system?	Smith, <i>The Wealth of Nations</i> , Book I, Chapters 1-2;	

			Diana Hacker, <i>A Writer's Reference</i> , pp. 37-43 (formatting an academic text).	
5	June 23	The Theory of Capitalism II: What is the role of government in the structuring of a market system?	Smith, <i>The Wealth of Nations</i> , Book V, Chapter 1; Marketing workshop	Essay I Due
6	June 24	Challenges to Industrial Capitalism: How had early capitalism failed to live up to its promise and which sorts of remedies were suggested?		Marketing presentation
7	June 25	What are the roles of utility calculations and consumer preferences in a capitalist system? Visit to Health Food Heaven	Diana Hacker, <i>A Writer's Reference</i> , pp. 318-332 (developing a research strategy). Overview of library resources for country study and economic policy paper— Librarian presentation	
8	June 26	What are the nature of surplus value and the role of commodities in a capitalist economy? Visit to Canadian Tire	Marx, <i>Capital</i> , Chapter 1, Sections 1, 2, 4. Workshop on reading economic analyses and statistics	
9	June 27	What would a socialist economy look like?	Marx and Engels, <i>The Communist Manifesto</i> ; Group work for country study	Essay II due
10	June 30	How do governments stimulate demand in a capitalist economy?	<i>Commanding Heights (CH)</i> —Episode One, Chapters 2-5; Group work for country study	
11	July 1	What do economic freedom and equality mean and what are the criteria for political legitimacy under capitalism?	Milton Friedman, <i>Capitalism and Freedom</i> , Chapters 1 and 2; R. H. Tawney, <i>Equality</i> , chapters V and VII (section iii)	
12	July 2	What were the economic	<i>CH</i> —Episode One,	

		promises of western governments after World War II?	Chapters 11-16; Diana Hacker, <i>A Writer's Reference</i> , pages 137-143 (wordy sentences/active verbs) and 210-215 (run-on sentences)	
13	July 3	What should the role of government be in the contemporary economy?—cases for more and less intervention	Class briefing	Country study
14	July 4	Which international economic issues concern governments today?: cartels, free trade/fair trade, energy supplies, international economic regimes. Primary example: Latin America	Class briefing <i>CH</i> —Episode Two, Chapters 5, 6, 7, 10, 11; Episode Three, Chapters 1-3	Country study Economic policy paper due

- *The course schedule is tentative and subject to change.*
- *Most assignments can be found below on page 8, but some specific assignments will be discussed during class*
- *Please note: reading assignments are quite intense the first week, so please use your time wisely and keep up with the assignments. For the second week, Marx's writings are difficult—though you are not assigned many pages to read, they are very difficult ones, so start early and take your time trying to understand them. In the third week you have not only reading assignments, but video ones as well—don't wait until the last minute to view these as technology can fail you! I do not accept technological failure as an excuse for not completing an assignment.*

Overview of Topics

Days 1-3: Here students are introduced to basic concepts in political economy and we examine the religious and political foundations of capitalism. Special attention is paid to the idea of the Protestant Work Ethic, the development of new social classes in early modern Europe, and the role of property rights in the emergence of capitalist economic systems.

Days 4-7: Students examine the basic structure of a market system, especially the roles of land, labor, capital, economic rationality, and consumer preferences. Special attention is paid to Adam Smith's theory in *The Wealth of Nations*.

Days 8-9: Marxist political economy is presented and students discuss fundamental concepts such as commodity fetishism, the theory of surplus value, trade unionism, and the role of the proletariat in industrial economies.

Days 10-12: These classes deal with contemporary issues arising from the socialist and modern liberal critiques of traditional capitalist theory. We take up controversies such as supply side economics, demand management, and the economic responsibilities of government.

Days 13-14: Students investigate problems in the domestic economies of foreign governments and we discuss central issues in international political economy, including fair vs. free trade, dependency and development, the role of multinational corporations, international trade regimes, global economic institutions (e.g., World Bank, IMF), and the political functions of foreign economic assistance.

9. Assignments.

Essay #1—Due Day 5

Max Weber states that capitalism prescribes “above all the idea of a duty of the individual to the increase of his capital, which is assumed as an end in itself. Truly what is preached here is not simply a means of making one’s way in the world, but a peculiar ethic (p. 51).” Organize an essay around the following questions:

- 1) What does Weber mean by suggesting that capitalism is fueled by an “ethic”? What is the nature of this ethic? Which characteristics comprise this ethic?
- 2) What *specific* evidence for this ethic can you find in the chapters of Benjamin Franklin, John Locke *and* Rosario Castellanos? Cite the texts and remember to use proper forms of citation (see the Hacker manual for these).
- 3) Have you internalized the ethic fundamental to capitalism? If so, give examples of how you have done so and explain why you think you have done so. If not, then explain why you think you have avoided developing a capitalist ethic.

Essay #2—Due Day 9

According to Adam Smith and Karl Marx, what is the role of government in the capitalist economy? How do their analyses of this role differ? Do they share any ideas in common? With whom do you agree and why? If you agree with neither of them, what is your own opinion of the proper role of government and why?

Presentation and Essay #3—Due Days 13 and 14

You will prepare a class presentation and economic policy paper for a country. Choose a country that is not the one you come from and examine the following issues:

- 1) Would you characterize this country’s economy as capitalist? Why or why not?
- 2) What are the most important goods and services produced by the country?
- 3) What do leading economic indicators tell you about that country’s economic strength and why?

- 4) How does that country rate on the United Nations' Human Development Index and what is the relative economic equality to be found in that country? What does this tell you about living standards in that country?
- 5) What is the role of the country's economy in the global economy?
- 6) What are the most serious social and economic problems found in the country?
- 7) If Milton Friedman and R.H. Tawney were advisors to the country's leaders which policies would they recommend? What do you think each of their justifications for these policies would be?
- 8) If you were advising the prime minister or president of that country what is the one policy you would recommend to him or her to help the economic situation of the country? Why do you make this suggestion?

Remember, as you do your presentation other members of the class may not know very much at all about your country so be sure to give sufficient background information (geography, history, etc.) to put the economic problems into context.

Remember also that as you do your paper you'll need an organizing thesis around which you will make an argument. Think very carefully about what central proposition you want to argue for.

Guidelines for writing a paper or essay examination in political economy (or for almost any other kind of assignment in expository writing)

Your job is to persuade me of a position that you have decided to take in the paper or essay exam. The more I am persuaded the higher your grade will be. It's that simple. Maybe not, you say? Well, let me suggest a few guidelines to help you be all that you can be.

First, if I have not indicated it in the assignment, **DO NOT ASK ME HOW LONG A PAPER OR AN ESSAY SHOULD BE!!** In doing so, you demonstrate that you do not understand the idea of a rational argument. I am not prepared to tell you when your argument is finished, only you can know this. That's not the point of the exercise.

This means that a good paper is judged not on its length, but on how well you fit the evidence you present, and the argument you fashion, to the thesis or claim that you want to make. Occasionally I give guidelines as to the length of a paper or essay, in order that you don't continue writing endlessly about particular subjects; but I do not judge the worth of a paper or an exam essay on its length.

So what am I looking for in your writing?

- 1) A logical presentation of argument. This means that you need to actually think about the paper before you write it; an outline is invaluable. You don't want to write down things in the order that you think of them, but you want to craft a logical progression that presents your argument in a coherent fashion.
- 2) Clarity in your prose. Use simple words, rather than complicated ones. Don't use words of which you are uncertain, and use a thesaurus carefully. Not all words presented as synonyms are really the ones you want to convey your points. Also—think carefully about the words you employ. Do you really mean to say some thing, when another word would have come closer to the point you were trying to make?
- 3) Careful documentation. If you say that this or that person said something, give me the page number where this claim was made.
- 4) Active sentences. Here's an exercise for you: try to write your paper without using the verb "to be" in any of its conjugated forms. It's not easy, and I have difficulty doing it myself (note this very sentence!). It may also require you to re-write the sentence entirely, but you'll begin to notice how much more alive your sentences have become. (One hint: words that end in "tion" can generally be transformed into verbs).
- 5) Your well-reasoned opinions. I generally do not want mere descriptions of what you are reading, but I want you to take a position on an issue, and defend your own viewpoint. I would welcome this even in answering exam questions where I don't explicitly ask you to do so.

So how can you go about this step-by-step? Well there's no one way, but here are some things to consider:

- 1) Begin your essay with a substantive title that conveys the main point of the argument. Don't just write "paper number one" or "assignment for Dr. Gorham" or "paper on Plato." Rather, give me a sense of what the point of your paper will be in the title (without making that title too long, of course).
- 2) Impress me with your opening paragraph. The opening paragraph has a burden on it—it must set the tone for the argument of the paper. It answers the following questions: What's the subject of the paper? What's the

theme of the paper? What position will you be taking in the paper? But how do you know what position you want to take as you start to write? Well, you don't, and that's why you need to consider writing this paragraph after you have finished the rest of the paper!!!! (For obvious reasons this cannot be true for an essay exam. So an outline is crucial to the organization of your essay before you start to write). You will then be in a better position to know what you have argued. And you will also leave out facts or issues irrelevant to the paper—such as where or when a certain political theorist was born, or grandiose (and meaningless) statements like “Politics is all around us.”

- 3) From your outline, develop the main points of your paper. This means providing reasoned evidence or arguments defending the claim you have made in the first paragraph. As you write out your ideas you may find that your initial thesis has changed, or that you have finally arrived at a thesis. Here's where you've got to do the most brainwork. The key is defending your thesis. The stronger or more general your claims, the more difficulty you will have in defending it. Compare these two claims: 1) Liberal political theory is wrong; 2) Modern political liberals, such as John Dewey, misunderstand human nature when they claim that individuals are developmental human beings. Which one helps you focus your essay more precisely?
- 4) Edit, re-edit, and edit once again. Make sure everything fits together after you've written it all down once. If you're unsure about how well you've made your argument, consider paying a visit to the learning commons, to get an impartial observer's advice.
- 5) Avoid “big finishes” in your concluding paragraph. Whatever profound insights about the nature of the world you think you have in your conclusion, please remember that I have already read it in someone else's paper before you even started elementary school. Don't make any new claims in your concluding paragraphs. New claims need to be defended. Your concluding paragraph is, well, the last one.
Ipsa facto and *e pluribus unum* ☺, you don't have the opportunity to defend them.
- 6) Proofread. In typed papers, I don't accept typos, but even on in-class exams, make sure you are saying things and spelling things the way you want to say and spell them. For typed papers, the spell-check button on your word processing program is a very handy device. Use it. Remember, though, that it will not correct all errors—“form” and “from” are both proper English words!