CSS 320: The American Economy Before 1810 (Section 01)

Syllabus

Course Description

How do economic forces affect economic and institutional development? The course will address this question in the context of the early United States. We will begin with an overview of the colonial economy, including the influences of mercantilism and slavery. We will then examine the role of economics in the American Revolution, the failure of the Articles of Confederation, the framing of the US Constitution, and institutional development in the early republic. Readings will draw from historical documents and contemporary scholarship from both economists and historians.

Meeting Times and Instructor Information

Tutor: Prof. Gillian Brunet
Office: 37 Broad Street, room 112
Office hours: Wednesdays and Thursdays 1:30 to 2:30 PM, and by appointment
Email: gbrunet@wesleyan.edu
Please allow 24 hours for a response before sending a second email.
Class meetings: 2-4 PM Fridays in Fisk 404

Resources

Resources for the class are available on Moodle. Any Zoom links for the class will also be posted on Moodle.

Readings

Two textbooks are required for the course:


In addition to these books, the course will rely heavily on selected readings from scholarly journal articles and books. These readings are included in a of course packet. Purchasing the course packet is required (and will save you significant time over the course of the semester). You can order your course packet from WesPortal.
All assigned readings should be completed before the start of the class for which they are assigned.

**Assignments and Grading**

There will be weekly short paper assignments in addition to a longer final research paper. Each student may omit (skip) one short paper assignment (other than the paper for week 4) without penalty. All paper assignments will be submitted on Moodle using TurnItIn.

The paper assignment for week 4 (February 17) will be the proposal for your final research paper, including a preliminary bibliography. Students will briefly present their topics and workshop their proposals during class. Topics may relate to any aspect of the American economy before 1810. Detailed instructions will be provided by February 10.

The final paper will be due at 2 PM on Friday March 10 (the last day of class). There will not be any additional writing assignments for the last week (i.e. no short paper).

Active discussion and participation are integral to the course. Beginning Friday February 3, students will take turns leading class discussions in pairs. Each student will co-lead one class meeting. Students will sign up in advance to lead discussion, and are required to create handouts to aid discussion. All handouts should be sent via email to Prof. Brunet by 11 PM on the night before the relevant class meeting so that copies can be made.

Participation begins with showing up regularly and on time, though you will not be penalized for absences if you are sick or have another good reason for missing class—just send Professor Brunet an email, if possible before missing class. Participation also encompasses your preparation for class and your focused, attentive presence, as well as regular participation in class discussion. If you choose to engage in non-course related activities during class, expect your participation grade to reflect those choices.

Your course grade will be determined by your scores on these items as follows:

- Weekly Response Papers — 40% total
- Final Paper — 40%
- Participation & Discussion Leadership — 20%

**Learning During a Pandemic**

The last few years have been hard for everyone, in different ways and to varying degrees. At a minimum, everyone has experienced an immense amount of disruption over the last few years—including significant disruptions to your experience of high school and/or college. Please recognize that everyone has had different experiences and processed them in different ways. Make a conscious effort to be patient and kind to everyone around you.

**Masks will be required in class** and during office hours, for two reasons. First, masking helps minimize disruption to the class. Universal masking is much more effective than one-way
masking. Semesters are short enough that even a relatively mild case of Covid-19 can cause significant problems. Covid-19 remains a major public health crisis, and as such a threat to education. Please wear N95, KN95, or KF94 masks if possible. Your mask should fit properly over both your nose and mouth. If you need a mask, please let me know.

Please **do not come to class** in person if you are ill or if you know you are a close contact who has been exposed to Covid-19. Inform Prof. Brunet, who will make arrangements for you to attend via Zoom (or excuse you from class if you are not well enough to participate). These arrangements will be provided as needed throughout the semester.

Do your best to keep communication open if you face difficult circumstances and you will be granted flexibility. For example, if you will not be able to submit an assignment on time, let Prof. Brunet know and she will work with you to find options. You are never required to share personal information about your mental or physical health, so don’t feel obligated to give details beyond what is comfortable for you. It is always better to communicate about a problem or potential problem in advance.

**Honor Code**

All work submitted for this course must be your own original work. Any form of academic misconduct, including but not limited to cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, or facilitating others’ academic dishonesty, will be reported to the Honor Board.

**Disability Accommodations**

If you need disability accommodations for the course, please inform Professor Brunet and ensure that she receives the necessary paperwork from Accessibility Services as soon as possible, ideally by February 10. While you are always welcome to contact Professor Brunet privately about your needs, many accommodations require formal arrangements through the office of Accessibility Services. If you do not yet have formal accommodations but believe you qualify for them, please contact the office as soon as possible. Accessibility Services is located in North College rooms 021/022, and can be reached at 860-685-5581. Many disability accommodations require advance planning and cannot be provided retroactively, so your prompt action is vital to receiving the accommodations you require.

**Disclaimer**

This syllabus may be updated with small changes throughout the semester. A current version will always be posted on Moodle.

**Course Outline and Textbook Readings**

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<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Jan. 27</th>
<th>Colonial America and Its Place in the World</th>
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**Week 2 Feb. 3**  
**Slavery, Geography, and Institutions**


**Week 3 Feb. 10**  
**The American Revolution**


Week 4 Feb. 17 Confederation and Its Failures


Half of this class will be devoted to workshopping research paper proposals.

Week 5 Feb. 24 Crisis and Constitution


Week 6 Mar. 3 Financial Institutions, Public and Private


**Week 7 Mar. 10 Modernization and Early Industrialization, Summing Up**


