



ECO383: Comparative Economic Systems

Spring 2025 | Founders Hall 2 | TR 2:20-3:50 PM

The curious task of economics is to demonstrate to men how little they really know about what they imagine they can design.

—F.A. Hayek, 1988

Instructor

Kurtis A. Hingl

www.kurtishingl.com

Email: kahingl@phc.edu

Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:00-2:00 PM or by appointment

Course Description

As found in the college catalogue: *Understanding the implications of various economic systems and policies for the well-being of a nation's citizens is vitally important for anyone who hopes to participate in the formation of such policies. Comparative Economic Systems builds from a foundational knowledge of markets and market processes with an exploration of international and domestic economic systems, historical and current, to understand their implications. Areas of study include mercantilism, capitalism, statism, "hard" and "soft" socialism, closed and open trade, and protectionism. Prerequisite(s): ECO303*

"Since the discouraging fiasco in the Garden of Eden, all the world has been a place conspicuous in its scarcity of resources."¹ Firstly, this course explores how we choose to live together as temporary stewards of a world of scarcity through the lens of the great historical comparative economic debates. Who makes the decisions around here? That is, the decisions regarding creation, production, exchange, and consumption of goods and services. Secondly, this course invites students into a wrestling match with the Great Fact: the extraordinary economic and social transformation beginning around 1800 that left (most of) us unbelievably rich—a roughly 3000% increase in per capita standards of living worldwide. Why and how did this happen? Why did it happen first in western Europe? Why did it happen when it did? Will it inevitably continue? This is the greatest puzzle of economics and perhaps of all modern history.

Learning Objectives

1. Articulate and critically evaluate the role of institutions and organizations within the economic systems of traditional, socialist, and market economies.
2. Articulate the details of great debate over economic calculation and how it shapes theory and practice of 21st century political economy.

¹ From *Universal Economics* by Armen Alchian and William Allen, p. 3.

3. Critically evaluate the performance of the economic systems of traditional, socialist, and market economies and their modern approximations.
4. Articulate and critically evaluate competing approaches to topical comparative economic issues including but not limited to trade, alternative monies, population and resources, science, and foreign aid.
5. Articulate and critically evaluate various answers to the puzzle of the Great Fact.

Prerequisites

1. ECO303; knowledge of the basic terms of economics will be assumed.

Required Texts

1. Selected readings, available through Canvas.
2. *Comparative Economics in a Transforming World*. J. Barkley Rosser Jr. and Marina Rosser. MIT Press. Any edition. Abbreviated as **R&R**, ch. from 2nd ed. below.

You will also be assigned one of the following books for your project:

1. *Violence and Social Orders*. Douglas North, John Wallis, and Barry Weingast.
How do societies deal with violence? Demanding; very rewarding.
2. *The Victory of Reason*. Rodney Stark.
Did Christian theology birth the western world? Bold and punchy.
3. *Persecution and Toleration*. Noel Johnson and Mark Koyama.
Why did we stop fighting over religion? Detailed and engaging.
4. *Why Nations Fail*. Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson.
2024 Nobel Prize winners explain the rise and fall of nations. Very readable.
5. *A Culture of Growth*. Joel Mokyr.
Was the industrial revolution caused by vibes? Fun and informative.
6. *Leave Me Alone and I'll Make You Rich*. Deirdre Nansen McCloskey and Art Carden.
Liberalism first, then enrichment? Direct; a joyous read.
7. *Guns, Germs, and Steel*. Jared Diamond.
Pulitzer Prize-winning sweeping history of the world. Woah.
8. *The Long Divergence*. Timur Kuran.
Why not the Middle East? Extensive and powerful exposition.

Structure and Grading

Class meetings will be a mix of lectures, structured activities, and open discussion.

Your final grade is based on the following:

Participation: 10%

Includes in-class participation and surveys sent through Canvas.

Quizzes: 10%

Periodic in-class pop quizzes based on reading comprehension and conceptual understanding.

Project: 35%

This will include a book précis (15%), presentation (10%), and a response paper (10%). See separate handout.

Bonus: up to +5%. Create a custom GPT chatbot for your book to share with the class.

Exams: 45%

Midterm (20%) and Final (25%). These will consist of short-essay questions drawn from a question bank. There will be 8-10 questions on the Midterm, and 10-12 on the final. I will add 2-3 questions to the question bank each class meeting. You will add 1-2 questions to the bank with your presentation.

Grade Breakdown:

Letter	Grade	Quality	Quality Points
A	93-100	Superior	4.00
A-	90-92		3.67
B+	87-89	Above Average	3.33
B	83-86		3.00
B-	80-82		2.67
C+	77-79		2.33
C	73-76	Average	2.00
C-	70-72		1.67
D+	67-69		1.33
D	63-66	Below Average	1.00
D-	60-62		0.67
F	0-59	Failure	0.00
WF	Withdraw While Failing		0.00
XF	Academic Disciplinary Failure		0.00

Not Included in GPA Calculation:

P: Pass

I: Incomplete

W: Withdrawal

WP: Withdrawal while Passing

X: Audit

N: Non-credit course

T: Transfer

Policies

Technology

Using digital technology for notetaking during lectures is permitted if used flat on a desk, but, for the benefit of your peers, using upright laptops is not permitted. Recording of lectures, audio or video, is not permitted. The use of LLMs and AI applications for writing, tutoring, or research assistance is permitted, *but this is a complement, not a substitute*, in your academic production function. You are responsible for all the work you turn in.

Late work

Assignments submitted past the deadline are subject to a 20% credit reduction per day. In case of emergency, credit will be shifted to your final.

Academic Integrity

As found in the college catalog: *The principles of truth and honesty are recognized as absolutely essential in every community of learning. It is expected that these principles will be scrupulously followed in all academic endeavors at Patrick Henry College, including, but not limited to, the preparation of all papers and reports and the taking of examinations. All academic work must be done by the student without unauthorized aid. Any compromise of truth or honesty, including, but not limited to, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, violation of guidelines under which the work is to be done, fabrication of data, unauthorized use of computer data or computer tools (including artificial intelligence), submission of a paper twice for the same course, submission of the same paper for multiple courses, and excessive revision by someone other than the student, may be considered sufficient grounds for suspension or expulsion from the College. Students may be given a grade of "XF" if it is determined that they have plagiarized or cheated in a course. The "XF" on a transcript indicates that a student violated integrity of scholarship policies. Students who successfully retake a course for which they have received an "XF" will have the "X" removed from their transcripts although the "F" will remain. The "XF" (or "F") and the grade earned in the retaken course will be used to calculate the grade point average.*

Disability Accommodations

As found in the college catalog: *Patrick Henry College is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. Students with a documented disability must contact the Office of the Dean of Academic Affairs before the end of the Drop/Add period in their first semester (or as soon as possible after the initial diagnosis) to request accommodations and provide documentation to verify the disability. Before the end of the Drop/Add period at the start of each term, students must also request accommodations in writing from the professor from whom they seek accommodations. Professors who have not been notified by the end of the Drop/Add period are not obligated to provide accommodations.*

Attendance

Routine absence will negatively affect your participation grade. As found in the college catalog: *Students are strongly encouraged to attend each and every class scheduled during the semester. There is no better way to perform well in any class than by attending the regularly scheduled lectures. However, there may be times when students cannot make a lecture, due to illness, participation in a sanctioned college event, or other conflicting commitments. While students should strive to avoid such conflicts, college is a very busy time and conflicts may occur. Patrick Henry College does not mandate an academic penalty for a student who misses a class, although a zero may be received for any unfulfilled class requirements. Students participating in college sanctioned events will know about any conflicts well in advance and are expected to discuss these with their professors to arrange for dealing with affected assignments prior to the absence.*

Course Schedule

This schedule is tentative. I will notify you at least one week in advance if I elect to make substantial changes, including assignment due dates.

* = Required

1. January 16 – Introduction and the Great Fact

Reading

* Syllabus

2. January 21 – Economics and Economic Systems

Reading

* Heyne, Paul. 1993. “Are Economists Basically Immoral?”

* Read, Leonard. 1958. “I, Pencil.”

* Heyne, Boettke, Prychitko. From *The Economic Way of Thinking*. Ch. 1.

– R&R Ch. 1.

3. January 23 – The Market

Reading

* Radford, Robert A. 1945. “The Economic Organisation of a POW Camp.”

* Hayek, FA. 1945. “The Use of Knowledge in Society.”

– R&R Ch. 2.

4. January 28 – Economic Calculation I

Reading

* Mises. 1920. From *Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth*. Ch. 2 & 3.

* Boettke, Candela, Truitt. 2024. From *The Socialist Calculation Debate*. Section 2.

– R&R Ch. 3.

5. January 30 – Economic Calculation II

Reading

* Hayek. 1944. From *The Road to Serfdom*, condensed version. pp. 31-62.

* Boettke, Candela, Truitt. 2024. From *The Socialist Calculation Debate*. Section 3.

– R&R Ch. 5.

6. February 4 – Socialism in Practice I

Reading

- * Boettke, Zhukov, and Mitchell. From *The Road to Socialism and Back: An Economic History of Poland, 1939–2019*. Intro, Ch. 1, & Ch. 2.
- R&R Ch. 10 & 12.

7. February 6 – Socialism in Practice II

Reading

- * Mitchell, Boettke, and Zhukov. From *The Road to Freedom: Estonia's Rise from Soviet Vassal State to One of the Freest Nations on Earth*. Ch. 4.
- R&R Ch. 11 & 15.

8. February 11 – Public Choice

Reading

- * Butler, Eamonn. 2012. From *Public Choice – A Primer*. Ch. 3, 7, & 10.
- Holcombe, Randall. 2018. “Transitional Gains and Rent Extraction.”

9. February 13 – Political Capitalism

Reading

- * Holcombe, Randall. 2015. “Political Capitalism.”

10. February 18 – Traditional Economies

Reading

- * Woodburn, James. 1982. “Egalitarian Societies.”
- R&R Ch. 4 & 17.

11. February 20 – Islands of Socialism

Reading

- * Coase, R. H. 1937. “The Nature of the Firm.”
- Alchian and Demsetz. 1972. “Production, Information Costs, and Economic Organization.”

Due

Book Précis

12. February 25 – Review

Reading

- * Alchian, A. 1965. “Some Economics of Property Rights.”

13. February 27 – Midterm Exam

(March 4, March 6 – Spring Break)

14. March 11 – The Great Fact, Reprise

Reading

* Koyama and Rubin. 2022. From *How the World Became Rich*. Ch. 1.

15. March 13 – Presentations

16. March 18 – Presentations

17. March 20 – Presentations

18. March 25 – Topics in Comparative Economics: Trade

Reading

* White, Lawrence. 2012. “Free Trade, Protectionism, and Trade Deficits,” Ch. 14 from *The Clash of Economic Ideas*, pp. 260-381.

* Landsburg, Steven. “The Iowa Car Crop,” Ch. 21 from *The Armchair Economist*.

19. March 27 – Topics in Comparative Economics: Family (with Prof. Flowers)

Prof. Hingl’s baby is due!

Reading

* TBD

20. April 1 – Topics in Comparative Economics: TBD

Reading

* TBD

21. April 3 – Topics in Comparative Economics: Monies

Reading

* Menger, Carl. 1892. From *On the Origins of Money*. Sections VI & VII. pp. 33-43.

* White, Lawrence. 2024. “Comparing and Contrasting Gold and Bitcoin Standards,” Ch. 6 from *Better Money*, pp. 191-212.

22. April 8 – Topics in Comparative Economics: Population and Resources

Reading

- * Spend 20 minutes inquiring about Malthus's ideas on population here:
<https://www.econgoat.ai/en/chat/gpt>
- * Ritchie, Hannah. "Who would have won the Simon-Ehrlich bet over different decades, and what do long-term prices tell us about resource scarcity?" Available here:
<https://ourworldindata.org/simon-ehrlich-bet>

23. April 10 – Topics in Comparative Economics: Science and R&D

Reading

- * Polanyi, Michael. 1945. "Science and Welfare," Ch. 5 from *Logic of Liberty*.
- * Levy, David. "Research and Development." Available here:
<https://www.econlib.org/library/enc/researchanddevelopment.html>

24. April 15 – Topics in Comparative Economics: Foreign Aid

Watch

- * Chris Coyne: [Why Humanitarian Action Fails](#)
- * Esther Duflo: [Social experiments to fight poverty](#)

(April 17 – Easter Break)

25. April 22 – Review

Reading

- * Roser, Max. "What is economic growth? And why is it so important?" Available here:
<https://ourworldindata.org/what-is-economic-growth>
- * Romer, Paul. "Economic Growth." Available here:
<https://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/EconomicGrowth.html>

27. April 24 – Comparative Economics, Today and Tomorrow

Reading

- * Shleifer, Andrei. 2009. "The Age of Milton Friedman."

Due

Response Paper

April 29 & 30 – Reading Days

May 1-6 – Final Exam Week