Course objectives

My objective this quarter is to introduce various frameworks that can be used to think about how economic forces shape the world within which community development praxis occurs. My fundamental premise is that almost anything done within the community development arena is affected by the political economy. This course will not provide training in the use of the tools of economic analysis, but rather aims to understand the larger political economic forces. For me, economics is about how resources are created, distributed, and consumed in society. In each of these areas, economics and politics are inextricably intertwined. Who works, how they work, how much they receive, and what is consumed are political questions as much as economic questions. Moreover, the economic arrangements of society are constructed from a near infinite set of victories, truces, and defeats shaped by individual and collective decisions. So even though arrangements experienced by most actors as being natural are, in fact, constructed and open to change -- subject to a variety of technical, social, and physical constraints.

We are in an odd world. Today's economy is more globalized than ever before. And yet, even as globalization has swept all localities into its maelstrom of change, the importance of localities as the locus of political and economic activity has increased. This course introduces a variety of perspectives regarding the dynamics of regional and local economies and the relationships with global economic forces. One goal is to cultivate an ability to understand ourselves and praxis in the larger political economic environment. Another is to provide some perspectives for understanding current dynamics of capitalist economies. Special attention is given to the economic structures that insert specific locations into the global economy.

This course aims to deepen understanding of the mechanisms and institutions through which political economic forces operate. Learning about and understanding the operations of capitalist systems does not presuppose approval of any particular outcome or agreement that these outcomes are necessary. As with any creation, human action can change our creations.

Required reading

Readings are an essential part of the course and will be discussed during class. They are a necessary background for discussion. Class participation is important.

Major sections of the following books will be read:


Course requirements

The course grade will be based upon the following:

- Participation 10%
- Midterm 30%
- Term paper 60%
Participation: Participation is an integral aspect of the class. For every class a team of students will lead the discussion. However, all students should contribute and will be expected to have cogent and coherent comments on the assigned reading. We can decide whether we wish to do the midterm or just a final paper.

Take-home Midterm: The take-home midterm examination will be assigned on a Monday and be due at the beginning of class on the next Monday (there will be no exceptions). The paper topic will include materials from the reading and also reward independent thinking on your part. The paper must be typewritten, double-spaced. References, citations or quotations that are used must be listed at the end of the paper in a consistent style (you are free to choose the style). You will receive the midterm questions on November 1st and submit it on CANVAS on November 8th before class begins.

Final paper: For the final paper you must choose an industrial cluster, a town or a distinct part of a city or a supply chain and describe its political economic history. In general, places that you cannot visit at least once during the term are difficult to do effectively. It is especially nice if you choose a place you are interested in. The choice is up to you. And yet, I would like to discuss the choice with each of you. Therefore, I ask you to be prepared with your initial choice on Monday, October 4, 2022 to be discuss in class and your final choice should be made by October 11, 2022.

The earlier you begin work on the paper, the more insightful and interesting the paper will be. Sample papers written in previous years will be made available on Canvas to provide some ideas on how you might approach this assignment.

The most important part of this paper is to get the history right. The history should be excellent. However, the truly excellent papers are those that integrate the readings into this history. For example, do any of the readings help you understand what happened? If so, how? Please raise questions in class about these papers. Let's talk about it. Finally, excellent papers will be put on reserve in the library for you to look at.

The term paper must be typewritten, double-spaced, and one-sided. References, citations or quotations must be listed at the end of the paper in a consistent style (you are free to choose the style). It will be due at the end of the day of the regularly scheduled final. Please submit the paper as a DOCX file through CANVAS.

Class Presentations: At the end of the quarter, each student will make an in-class presentation of approximately 20 minutes on their research. This is ungraded, but is a very important part of the class because you can discuss your work with all of us. The presentations will be on the last day of classes.

Class Operation:

We will appoint two discussion leaders for each meeting. They will be responsible for conducting the class in cooperation with me. You can organize the discussions in a variety of ways, but if you plan to use breakout groups or some other such vehicle please check with me first as it is important that the discussion groups be organized in a way such that all students share the knowledge and that too much time is not spent in the discussion groups.

Class Meetings and Readings

1. Tuesday, September 27, 2022 – Welcome and Introductions

2. Tuesday, October 4, 2022 – Understanding Marx (initial topic choice to be discussed in class)


Optional:

For those so inclined, I strongly recommend David Harvey’s reading capital lecture series http://davidharvey.org/reading-capital/.

3. Tuesday, October 11, 2022 – Hierarchies, Markets, Networks, and Ecosystems (final paper topic choice)


4. Tuesday, October 18, 2022 - Global Value Chains and Ecosystems

Required:


Optional:


### 5. Tuesday, October 25, 2022 – Industrial Clusters/Districts/Ecosystems: History and Evolution of the Concept


**OPTIONAL:**

There is an enormous literature on this topic. For example, see the numerous articles in *World Development, Economic Geography, and Regional Science* in the last decade. More recently, business journals such as *Organization Science* have also begun to contribute to this discussion.

### 6. Tuesday, November 1, 2022 – Digitalization, Online Platforms and Community {hand out mid-term exam topic}


7. **Tuesday, November 8, 2022 – Social Capital and Sociology (mid-term exam due)**


8. **Tuesday, November 15, 2022 – The Economy of Cities**


**OPTIONAL:**


9. **Tuesday, November 22, 2022 – Cities and Growth Machines**
REQUIRED:


OPTIONAL:


10. Monday, Tuesday 29, 2022 -- Presentations