Overview

I define political economy as “the study of the impact of group identity and collective conflict on the organization of economic activity and its consequences.” Political economy traditions tend to focus on class as a source of identity and group conflict. In this course, we will expand that focus to incorporate other sources of group membership, giving you a broad background in economic approaches to inequality and identity based on race/ethnicity and gender. We will focus primarily on the neoclassical, Marxist political economy and feminist literatures. In addition to learning more about the relationship between group membership and economic structures, we will use the prisms of race and gender to better understand and critique various approaches to economic analysis. And while much of the literature focuses on the U.S. context, I will try to broaden the discussion as often as possible, and encourage students to do the same.

I welcome students from other social science disciplines. Although we will cover some advanced material that may be difficult for those who have not completed graduate economics courses, the emphasis will be on the main points, rather than the technical detail.

The syllabus includes both required readings (*starred) and supplemental readings/sections as I wanted to give you a more complete sense of the literature if you are interested in looking further into a particular topic. You can access electronic copies of most of the required readings through the library. In other cases, I’ll have electronic copies of the readings available on RamCT.

The syllabus is provisional, and though I have a rough idea of how much time we will take for each section, I expect to do a lot of planning and negotiating as we move along.

Papers, Exam and Evaluation

I will base your grade on three main components.

1. Class (40%)

   • Reaction papers or discussion leadership (20%). Two “reaction” papers to the assigned readings to be shared with other students and me at least one day before class discussion of the readings. These are relatively informal, low-stakes papers reflecting on the material, 3-5 pages in length. We will try to distribute responsibility for these so that all of the assigned readings are covered. Each one will count for 10% of your final grade. Alternatively, in lieu of writing something up you take on facilitating discussion that day – just let me know.

   • Class participation (10%). I will begin every class with some comments on the readings, but most of the class session will be devoted to group discussion of the readings. Every student is required to participate actively in class by coming prepared to discuss the assigned material. Participation will be 10% of your final grade.

   • An addition to the syllabus (10%). There is a lot of material and subjects that I haven’t yet incorporated. And while that can be said of any course, I am particularly interested in areas that you feel are important to represent. In this assignment you will craft a new section (or sub-section) for the syllabus, including at least five readings (and indicating which should be required). I’ll also ask you to present a short overview of the section to the rest of us during the last couple of weeks of class. Due April 26.
2. Critical literature review or research paper (30%)
You have two choices for the third paper: (1) a critical literature review, or (2) a research paper. For the critical literature review, you should go into more detail on a reading that is not required, providing a critical analysis that links it to the assigned reading and to questions raised in class. The research paper option is pretty wide open – it just has to be related to the subject matter of the course and okayed with me beforehand. The paper should be no longer than 15 pages, including references and will be due Thursday, May 4. Each student will also make a 15 minute presentation of their papers during the last couple of class sessions.

3. Take home final (30%)
I'll distribute a list of questions the last day of class. It will be due Monday, May 7 at noon.

Class Policies
Accommodation of students with disabilities
If you are a student who needs any special accommodations in this class, please let me know about those needs in a timely way. A verifying memo from the office of Resources for Disabled Students may be required before accommodation is provided.

Academic integrity
Any evidence of academic dishonesty, including plagiarism or cheating on exams, will be penalized with a failing grade for the course and passed on to the Office of Student Affairs for investigation and possible disciplinary action.

Reading List

I. Introduction to Feminist Economics (2 weeks)

II. Individuals and Groups (4 weeks)

A. Methodological Individualism, Preferences, & False Consciousness (1 week)


B. Group Identity (1 week)


C. Group Conflict & Collective Action (1 week)


D. Evolutionary/Biological approaches to preferences and norms (1 week)


*Diamond, Author’s summary: http://www.jareddiamond.org/Jared_Diamond/Guns,_Germs_and_Steel.html

Economist, The. 2008. “Darwinism: Why we are, as we are,” December 20.


1. Gendered Preferences & Evolutionary Psychology


III. Race/Ethnicity (3 weeks)

A. Accounts of Racial Inequality (2 weeks)


B. Genetic Differences (B&C 1 week)


C. Culture


D. Affirmative Action


IV. Gender (3 weeks)

A. Theories of the Family


**B. Economics of Marriage**


**C. Care Work & Social Reproduction**


**D. Institutional Economics and Property Rights**


E. Macro & International

1. *International Trade, Investment and Finance*


2. Macro Policy & Growth


5. Race & Gender in Labor Economics (2 weeks)


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**If you are thinking about the 2016 US election:**
