Course Information

Economics 1480 is an inquiry into the social and political consequences of economic growth, in the sense of sustained increase over time in per capita standards of living. The central question under discussion is whether -- and if so, under what conditions -- rising living standards lead a society toward openness of opportunity, social mobility, tolerance of diversity, inclusiveness with respect to potentially marginalized groups, commitment to fairness, democratic political institutions, and other related characteristics of free societies. Is economic growth simply a matter of ever greater material well-being, or is there a moral dimension too? And what implications follow for important public policy issues? The material covered in the course includes economic theory and evidence as well as ideas drawn from philosophical, historical and literary perspectives on these questions.

The nature of the course is that of a frankly speculative inquiry, rather than an exposition of solidly established ideas. The object is not so much to absorb specific concepts and facts -- although these are important too -- but to learn how to think about a set of highly important but very difficult problems. Class size is limited in order to admit discussion, and in writing their papers students are encouraged to develop their own views on the issues raised in the course.

Prerequisite: Intermediate micro- and macroeconomics.

Requirements:

(1) A 10-15 page paper, due November 1, focused on the economic and/or psychological concepts covered in the first parts of the course.

(2) A 10-15 page paper, due December 2, relating any one of a group of major works of fiction (list to be distributed) to the issues discussed in the course.

(3) A 20-30 page paper, due January 31, on an aspect of the course material to be chosen by the student and approved by Professor Friedman.

Course Meetings:

Lectures at 10:00 each Monday and Wednesday.

Discussion sessions (also at 10:00) on some Fridays, to be announced in advance.

Office Hours: Mondays, 3:45-5:30, in Littauer 127.

Students should feel free to visit during office hours, or to make additional appointments if office hours are insufficient. One-on-one conversation is an important part of the learning process -- for both students and professors.
I. Introduction: Some History of Ideas
   Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (1976), Ch. 6.
   Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (1991), Ch. 2.

II. Enlightenment Views of the Moral Society

III. Linking Economic Conditions and Social Attitudes: Psychological Concepts

IV. Linking Economic Conditions and Social Attitudes: Psychological Concepts
   George Loewenstein and Jon Elster, *Choice Over Time* (1992), Ch. 9.

V. Views of the American Experience
   David Potter, *People of Plenty* (1954), Ch. 1-5.

VI. Perspectives on Economic Development
   Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (1968), Ch. 1.
VII. Evidence on Income Distribution and Social Mobility


Stephen Thernstrom, The Other Bostonians (1973), Ch. 2-4. 9.

Hartmut Kaelble, "Eras of Social Mobility in 19th and 20th Century Europe." Journal of Social History (Spring, 1984).


VIII. Implications for Current Policy Issues

Joseph Stiglitz, Economics (1993), Ch. 23.


Benjamin Friedman, Day of Reckoning (1988), Ch. 1, 2, 8.

Peter Peterson, Facing Up (1993), Ch. 1, 8.


David Ellwood, Poor Support (1988), Ch. 2, 7.