

## POLS/ECON 409 · *Final Paper Topics*

Select *one* of the options below and write a 10–12 page paper answering the question posed. Your paper must draw significantly on readings from the course. Formally cite all sources you use, including materials from the course reading list.

Papers that clearly develop an argument and support that argument with well-sourced and explained evidence will receive the highest marks. Papers that fail to make a clear argument, provide only weak, poorly explained, or poorly sourced evidence, or suffer from serious deficits in writing will be marked down accordingly. **The final paper is due Wednesday, 7 June 2017 at 3 PM in the instructor's box in the Department of Political Science main office (101 Gowen Hall).**

The questions vary in difficulty. Questions marked \*\*\* are the most challenging: for these questions, simply pinning down a plausible set of arguments and supporting evidence for them will be sufficient for strong marks. Questions marked \* follow more directly from course discussions, so high marks will require more polished essays skillfully weighing opposing arguments and persuasively presenting your conclusions. Questions marked \*\* fall in the middle. It is possible to score high marks under any question, but don't think it will be easier to do so if you choose an "easier" question!

- I. [\*] This course has approached recent economic history from two perspectives: one focussed on the shocks and aftershocks of the financial crisis and Great Recession, and the other examining the role of trends in technology, education, capital accumulation, and the democratic process in shaping new political economic realities. Sifting through the evidence presented in the course readings, which of these explanations matter most for explaining the current state of economies in North America and Europe?

Because we have discussed these issues at length, you have a great deal of material to pare down into well-supported arguments. Strong essays will go beyond assertions to support sharp claims with clear logic and concrete evidence. Bear in mind that some explanations may have greater effects on some economic outcomes than others and that at times the shocks of the Great Recession and the shifts in underlying trends may have an interactive effect on politics and the economy. Finally, don't forget politics, a critical medium through which shocks and trends can affect economic outcomes.

2. [★★] The stable postwar political economy of the advanced democracies of Europe and North America ended with a bang in the 2008 financial crisis. In its wake emerged new economic trends and political forces that have yet to coalesce into a new era of political economy. Consider the economic forces of education, automation, and capital accumulation, on one hand, and the nascent political responses of leaders and voters on the populist right, the center, and the left. Drawing on our readings and discussion, what major political and economic developments do you expect to see over the coming 20 years in Europe and North America? Be sure to address how you expect these economic forces to develop and pressure or benefit both masses and elites, and how you expect the conflict among these political groups to evolve. You may provide one or more scenarios. Although all essays on this topic will necessarily be speculative, strong essays will (a) support speculation with as much theory and evidence as possible, (b) tie specific predictions to the necessary conditions for those forecast to come true, and (c) attempt to narrow the set of plausible futures using our knowledge of political economy and other relevant fields.
  
3. [★★] Eichengreen’s magisterial *Hall of Mirrors* is a dual history of the financial crises that lead to the Great Depression and Great Recession in the United States and Europe. We read only the half of the book pertaining to the Great Recession. Now go back and read the chapters on the Great Depression (1–3, 7–10, and 15–18), and consider the four cases: the US in the 1920s–1930s, the US in the 2000s–2010s, Europe in the 1920s–1930s, and Europe in the 2000s–2010s. In your own view – supported by evidence from Eichengreen and other sources in the course – what are the key common causes of these crises, and what are the important differences? Be selective, providing the clearest possible distillation of your own view of the essential historical lessons backed by as much evidence as you can muster.
  
4. [★★★] Pick any of the works listed below and look up (at least) 3 published critiques of that work. (Note that critiques need not be uniformly skeptical; they could also be modifications or extensions of a work that alter the original conclusions in some way; you could start by looking for work that cites these pieces.) Write a synthetic memo assessing the critics’ claims against the original work and rendering your own judgment on who is right on the major claims. You must

receive instructor's approval by email (no later than 26 May 2017) of your list of critical publications.

Thomas Piketty. 2014. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Claudia Goldin and Lawrence F. Katz. 2008. *The Race Between Education and Technology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. *You may need to read additional chapters, depending on the focus of the critiques you select.*

Colin Crouch. 2004. *Post-Democracy*. Cambridge: Polity.

*Hint for getting your list of published critiques approved:* The quality of the final essay depends on having incisive critiques published in either a scientific journal or a well-regarded magazine or weblog. Your essay will have little to contribute if you only respond to vague, superficial, or limited criticism.

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