

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 Tuesday, 8 June 2021 at 3 PM via Canvas.**

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!

1. [*] Eichengreen's magisterial *Hall of Mirrors* is a dual history of the financial crises that led 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 perspective on the essential historical lessons backed by as much evidence as you can muster.
2. [**] This course has approached recent economic history from two perspectives: one focused on the shocks and aftershocks of the financial crisis, Great Recession,

and the COVID-19 pandemic; the other examining the role of trends in technology, education, capital accumulation, and the democratic process in shaping new political economic realities. Drawing on our readings and discussion, how do you expect the aftershocks of the COVID-19 pandemic to reshape or reinforce political and economic trends in Europe and/or North America over the coming decade?

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) narrow the set of plausible futures using our knowledge of political economy and other relevant fields.

It is possible to tackle this topic without drawing on further readings beyond those already assigned, but if you need a starting point, it may help to read some of the concluding chapters from books assigned in this course; you could then suggest how the pandemic will affect the feasibility and relevance of the policy prescriptions provided by our authors. The most useful and important chapters to consider are those from Piketty (chapters 13, 14, 15, 16 and Conclusion). You may also find stimulating material in Blythe (chapter 7), Galbraith (chapter 14) and Jacobs and King (chapter 5). Finally, you may bring in materials from outside the course, but you are not required to do so. Regardless, the key will be to focus your essay: it is better to make a cogent and well-supported argument about a smaller set of claims than to attempt to briefly discuss everything you think will happen in the next ten years.

3. [***] 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 a search for such pieces by looking for publications that cite these works.) Write a synthetic memo assessing the critics' arguments 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 27 May 2021) of your list of critical publications.

Option 3A. Thomas Piketty. 2014. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. *This is the option with*

the most available critical literature, including but not limited to the chapters collected in Boushey, DeLong, and Steinbaum (2017).

Option 3B. 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.*

Option 3C. Any other specific work or literature we have read in this course. If you choose this option, be specific in defining this work or literature in the introduction to your essay. *This is the most challenging option, so a sharp focus will be necessary.*

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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