

SONOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

Economics 201: U.S. Economic History and Institutions

Sec. #: 001

Term: Spring 2025

Classroom/time: SALAZAR 1051, M/W, 1:00–2:15 p.m.

Office Hours:

In Person: Mondays 12:00 – 1:00 p.m.

Wednesdays 2:30 – 3:00 pm

Virtual: By appointment

Contact information

Instructor: Puspa Amri, Ph.D.

Office: STEV 2822

Zoom Meeting ID:

<https://SonomaState.zoom.us/j/9721546434>

Email: puspa.amri@sonoma.edu

Class website

<https://canvas.sonoma.edu/>

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

Welcome to **Econ 201** – U.S. Economic History and Institutions.

There has never been a better time to explore the story of America's economic ascent. The United States has been the largest economy in the world since around 1871, but what historical forces propelled it to such heights? We will investigate how changes in institutions, living standards, technology, population, and the financial system shaped the nation's economic trajectory. Although our primary focus is after 1870, the course takes a thematic approach, allowing us to uncover pivotal events from the American Revolution to early 20th century. From transformative technological innovations to the rise of financial systems in the 1800s, we'll connect the dots between early economic milestones and the country's later success and also lessons learned from its failures.

There are no prerequisites. This course satisfies the General Education/ Seawolf Studies American Institutions-History Overlay, Area D.

II. REQUIRED TEXTBOOK AND ONLINE HOMEWORK TOOLS

Siegler, Mark, *An Economic History of the United States: Connecting the Present with the Past*, Bloomsbury (2017). ISBN: 9781137393951

→ This textbook is available in hard-copy and/or electronic format. As I am not using the most recent edition, you are welcome to look for used copies or rent on websites such as Amazon.

→ You may want to bring the textbook to class for group discussions during class.

We will also be making use of historical data by the following authors. Access is provided through the Sonoma State Library (You will need to enter your SSU username and password to have access the datasets).

Carter, Susan B. Scott Sigmund Gartner, Michael R. Haines, Alan L. Olmstead, Richard Sutch, and Gavin Wright, eds., *Historical Statistics of the United States: Millennial Edition*, online version: <https://hsus-cambridge-org.sonoma.idm.oclc.org/HSUSWeb>

FYI. You are automatically enrolled in SSU's **Seawolf Bundle**, which charges a fixed fee per credit hour for your instructional materials, regardless of whether all your classes require textbooks. You can choose

to stay enrolled or opt out of the bundle if it doesn't fit your needs. I recommend evaluating the costs and benefits of the bundle based on your specific circumstances to decide what works best for you.

III. COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon successful completion of the course a student should be able to:

- Describe important economic and political events in U.S. history and the connection among them.
- Use the tools of economics to interpret and enhance your understanding of historic events, including analyzing historical data.
- Identify and explain key factors of U.S. economic growth, such as institutions, technology, population changes, and technological innovations.
- Explain the role of financial systems in shaping U.S. economic development, including banking and monetary policy.
- Describe the transformation of the U.S. economy from its (agrarian) colonial roots to a modern industrial and service-based economy.
- Assess income and wealth distribution in U.S. history, including the effects of segregation, discrimination, and immigration.

IV. COURSE FORMAT AND EXPECTATIONS

This course will be taught face-to-face. The primary method of instruction will be lectures, complemented by in-class discussions and assignments to enhance engagement and understanding.

Student expectations: Completing the assigned reading before class is crucial for success in a course such as economic history. Coming prepared makes it easier to engage in activities, ask meaningful questions, and solidify your understanding of the material. Plus, it makes learning economic history more enjoyable and less overwhelming!

V. CANVAS & COMMUNICATION FROM THE INSTRUCTOR

Canvas is SSU's Learning Management System (LMS). Canvas is where you will find the course syllabus, class announcements, lecture notes and where you will submit assignments for this course.

I'll also use Canvas Announcements to share important updates about the course. Be sure to stay subscribed so you don't miss anything!

To access the Canvas course website, use your SSU Seawolf ID and password to log into SSU's Online Services portal <https://login.sonoma.edu/>. Click on the **Canvas** link. When you get to the Canvas Dashboard, click on the course title you would like to access.

VI. LIBRARY RESOURCES AND WRITING RESOURCES

Library Resources:

The Sonoma State Library can help you find information and conduct research for your homework and signature assignment. You can make an appointment with your subject librarian, get help online, or drop by the library during their open office hours. For more information visit

<https://library.sonoma.edu/research/help>

Writing Resources:

The SSU Learning and Academic Resource Center (LARC), located at Schulz 1103, helps SSU students become better writers and produce better written documents. The knowledgeable and [friendly tutors](#) (including writing/subject tutors in economics and political science) can help you with a wide array of concerns, from generating good ideas and organizing papers more clearly to learning citation formats and using semi-colons correctly. Visit the Learning and Academic Resource Center <https://larc.sonoma.edu> for more information on how to schedule time with a Writing Center tutor.

VII. ASSESSMENT AND COURSE GRADE CALCULATIONS

A. **Calculating your course grade.** A number of different components will be used to assess mastery of the course materials. Your course grade will be a weighted average of these components:

- **Exams (55%):** two midterms and one final exam
- **Online homework (20%):** assignments completed using Canvas Quizzes.
- **In Class Activities (10%):** see below for a list of activities.
- **Signature Assignment (15%):** A scaffolded essay project submitted in two parts, with each part building on the previous.
- **NOTE: Canvas grade weighting system only gives you an estimate of your current course standing.** You are encouraged to calculate your own course standing, and I will assist you as necessary.

B. **Exams:** Exams are closed book and will be administered in person during class time. Note cards may be allowed for selected items such as historical timelines. Please see the class schedule starting on page 5 of this syllabus for the scheduled examination dates.

Exam rescheduling policy: Only in very rare cases of university-approved excuses (e.g., death in the immediate family, serious injury/illness with doctor's letter, athletic and sports events representing the university) will rescheduling be permitted, at the **sole discretion of the instructor**. Students making requests for a rescheduled exam must contact the instructor ***before*** the exam takes place.

C. **Online Homework using Canvas Quiz :** There will be regular online homework assignments (chapter-by-chapter) via *Canvas Quizzes*. Each homework quiz will be a combination of multiple-choice and written-questions/free-response questions. Some of the questions will be problem solving using the economic tools that you learn in class, such as graphing. However, for certain weeks, the written portion of the assignment will be more in-depth. For example, you will be asked to collect and reflect on some historical data obtained from *Historical Statistics of the United States* or documents from the Library of Congress. You may also be asked to do a short critical essay.

The online homework will be due every Wednesday at 11:59 PM. No late assignments will be accepted, but two of the lowest Canvas Quiz grades will be dropped.

D. **In Class Activities/Attendance Policy:**

In-class activities are designed to complement the lecture format of the course and provide opportunities for active learning and for students to internalize key concepts discussed that day. These activities will be graded leniently—based on completion rather than depth or robustness. They may include:

1. **Group discussion questions:** Submitted in writing as a group.
2. **Most Important Term (MIT) reflection:** A free-response reflection on the key concept you learned in class. These are submitted individually.

3. **Short practice questions:** Quick exercises to reinforce understanding.

Attendance Policy:

If you miss class, you will miss the opportunity to earn credit for that day's activity. Credit is only given for paper submissions collected during class. To accommodate occasional absences, your two lowest grades in this category will be dropped at the end of the semester.

E. **Signature Assignment:** Every GE course at Sonoma State requires a signature assignment, which involves a real-world application of course knowledge accompanied by a reflection that connects historical events to contemporary situations. Students will be provided a list of topics and respond to selected questions in an essay style format. You will also be asked to incorporate data to complement your essay. You will complete this project in two parts; the first one will be a draft, the second part builds on the first part. Each part will be weighted equally. More details about this assignment will be provided later in the semester via Canvas.

GRADING SCALE AND COURSE LETTER GRADE

The following scale will apply in converting your numeric course grade to a letter grade:
93–100 (A), 90–92 (A–), 87–89 (B+), 83–86 (B), 80–82 (B–), 77–79 (C+), 73–76 (C), 70–72 (C–), 67–69 (D+), 63–66 (D), 60–62 (D–), and <60 (F).

VIII. ACADEMIC INTEGRITY, CHEATING AND PLAGIARISM POLICIES

Instances of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Any violations of academic integrity involving an exam or a writing assignment could result in failure of the assignment or failure of the course.

Academic Integrity and Generative AI (Artificial Intelligence)

Use of ChatGPT (or other similar tools that generate text) is allowed in this class **for specific assignments only and is strictly prohibited for tests**. When use of the tool is allowed, it will be explicitly noted in the assignment directions, such as in the Signature Assignment. I will show some examples in class of how the use of Generative AI tools can supplement the materials and readings from your textbook!

Students should be familiar with the University's Cheating and Plagiarism policy at <https://policies.sonoma.edu/policies/cheating-and-plagiarism>

IX. CLASS ATTENDANCE, CONDUCT AND RELATED UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Class attendance is mandatory and is positively correlated with student performance.

The following is an excerpt from SSU Policy regarding class attendance

*Class attendance is an important part of a student's university experience. However, there are legitimate reasons for missing class, such as illness, accidents, death of a close family member, jury duty, religious observance or **representing the University at officially approved University activities**. Students should be cautioned that even though absences may be for legitimate reasons, such absences can impair performance and result in a lower grade. Faculty have primary authority for setting class*

attendance policy according to discipline standards. There are class activities, such as labs, assignments and discussions that cannot reasonably be made up.

Please communicate with me ahead of times if you have difficulties meeting the course attendance policies.

In addition, there are important University policies that you should be aware of, such as the add/drop policy; cheating and plagiarism policy, grade appeal procedures; accommodations for students with disabilities and the diversity vision statement. See here <https://www.sonoma.edu/policies> and more specifically, enrollment-related policies here <https://registrar.sonoma.edu/enrollment-policies>).

Classroom Conduct

I expect everyone to be considerate of their fellow students and contribute to a positive learning environment. Disruptive behavior not only impacts your own learning but also takes away from the education that others have invested in. Behaviors such as consistent lateness, texting, chatting, working on unrelated materials, or displaying a negative attitude will not be tolerated. Let's work together to ensure that the classroom remains a productive and respectful space for everyone.

X. SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS

If you are a student with a disability, and think you may need academic accommodations, please contact Disability Services for Students (DSS) at <https://dss.sonoma.edu/>. Once your accommodation has been verified by DSS, please inform me immediately so that accommodations can be made for you. Use of DSS services requires prior authorization. See SSU's policy here: <https://policies.sonoma.edu/policies/disability-access-students>

XI. DISCLAIMER

All information in this syllabus is subject to change. Students will be notified ahead of time if and when changes are made to course requirements or course topics.

XII. SCHEDULE OF TOPICS

This schedule is a general outline of the course. It may be altered based on the pace of the class. I reserve the right to make changes. However, all changes will be announced in class and on Canvas.

Week	Dates	Topics	Readings
1	Jan 22	Introduction to Economic History and the Story of the American Economic Development	Siegler Chapter 1
2	Jan 27 & 29	Economic concepts part 1: Opportunity Cost, Economic Methodology, and Supply and Demand in the Market	Siegler Chapter 1

3	Feb 3 & 5	Economic concepts part 2: Measuring economic growth, income distribution and living standards	Siegler – selected sections from Chapters: 2.1,2.2,13.1, 18.1
4	Feb 10 & 12	Institutions as a source of American economic growth	Siegler Chapter 2 (2.4), Chapter 4 & 6.1, The U.S. Constitution
5	Feb 17 & 19	Population and Immigration as a source of American economic growth	Siegler Chapter 7 & 15
6	Feb 24	Finance and banking as a source of American economic growth, part 1	Siegler Chapter 5
6	Feb 26	EXAM 1	
7	Mar 3 & 5	Finance and banking as a source of American economic growth, part 2)	Siegler Chapter 5
8	Mar 10 & 12	Transformation of the American economy from agriculture to industry, part 1	Siegler Chapters 8, 9 and 10 (selected sections)
9	Mar 17 & 19	No Class- Spring Break	
10	Mar 24 & 26	Transformation of the American economy from agriculture to industry, part 2	Siegler Chapters 8,9 and 10 (selected sections)
11	Mar 31	No Class- Cesar Chavez Day	
11	April 2	EXAM 2	
12	April 7 & 9	Selected cases of technological innovations in American history	Supplemental readings from the instructor
13	April 14 & 16	The Distribution of Income and Wealth, segregation and discrimination, part 1	Siegler Chapters 13 & 14
14	Apr 21 & 23	The Distribution of Income and Wealth, segregation and discrimination, part 2	Siegler Chapters 13 & 14
15	Apr 28 & 30	Market failure, the role of government in the economy, the Great Depression and New Deal policies.	Siegler Chapter 16 (16.3 & 16.4), Chapter 18(18.2,18.3)

16	May 5 & 7	Antitrust Policies & Historical Examples of U.S. Monopolies Wrap-up: connecting the past to the present	Siegler Chapter 17.1 & 17.2 Siegler Chapter 21
	Monday May 12	<i>FINAL EXAM (1:00 to 3:00 pm)</i>	