

ECON 4389-1 (21237) Contemporary Economics – Food and Agriculture, Spring 2014

Instructor information:

Dr. Thomas DeGregori

Phone: (713) 743-3838

Email: trdegreg@uh.edu (I prefer to receive emails)

Website: <http://www.uh.edu/~trdegreg>

Office: 209D, McElhinney Hall

Office Hours: TBA

Course Information:

Start/end: January 13, 2014 to May 9, 2014

Day/time: Tuesday and Thursday 2.30PM-4.00PM

Room: M115

Note: There will be no exams or quizzes and there will be no final exam

Course Objective:

The objective of this course is to provide reading material and lectures which facilitate a better understanding of the world, its politics, its agriculture and food production, the dynamics of population, the problems facing the global environment and the changing global economy in which we live. We will also explore the diversity of different cultures and peoples and the condition of those who have experienced a dramatic transformation and improvement in the conditions of their life and those that have not. The diversity of the reading matter and topic assignment is considerably greater than can be achieved in a three hour course in one semester. The boundaries for the course are wide allowing the students to fashion a course that responds to their particular needs and interests as long as they in some way cover all three topics of the course title, use all of the assigned sources and largely within the course boundaries.

Required reading:

Harvesting the Biosphere: What We Have Taken from Nature Hardcover by Vaclav Smil, The MIT Press (December 21, 2012)

(Students taking ECON 3351 and using “Harvesting the Biosphere” can read both “Cuisine and Empire” and “Consider the Fork” instead)

Genetic Glass Ceilings: Transgenics for Crop Biodiversity by Jonathan Gressel Johns Hopkins University Press; 1 edition (February 12, 2008)

Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World: A Global Ecological History (Studies in Environment and History) by Gregory T. Cushman Cambridge University Press (March 25, 2013)

One of the following two:

Cuisine and Empire: Cooking in World History by Rachel Laudan: University of California Press (November 21, 2013)

OR

Consider the Fork: A History of How We Cook and Eat Hardcover by Bee Wilson Basic Books; 1st edition (October 2, 2012)

One of the following two:

Gulp: Adventures on the Alimentary Canal [Hardcover] by Mary Roach W. W. Norton & Company; First Edition (April 1, 2013)

OR

The Drunken Botanist: The Plants That Create the World's Great Drinks by Amy Stewart Algonquin Books; 1 edition (March 19, 2013)

A student can earn 1, 2 or 3 hours extra credit. Students **WILL HAVE TO ENROLL** for these hours (ECON 4398-1, ECON 4398-2, ECON 4398-3, Independent Study – see posted instructions for these course) at the beginning of the Semester. In addition to filling out the form there will be an exchange of emails between me and each student taking these specifying the requirements. A copy of these emails must be submitted along with any final written work.

Project Topics for 4389-1:

- Trends in Global Food Production since 1960
- Trends in Global Poverty and Hunger since 1950.
- Trends in Global Life Expectancy since 1950.
- Trends in Global Population since 1950.
- Trends in Global Infant and Child Mortality Since 1960.
- Neglected Tropical Diseases (there is an online journal covering that topic among other sources)
- Digital Technologies for Development
- Globalization and Development

Assignments (general guidelines):

You are to write four papers of (very) roughly 8 to 10 pages each. No paper is to be less than seven pages. You have considerable latitude as to the length of each paper as long as the total for all four is about 30 to 40 pages. For any deviation from the syllabus, an exchange of emails is required - verbal authorization is not sufficient - with the email granting permission being attached to your papers. Given the large choice of topics, no deviation should be necessary unless there is a topic of specific interest to you! I will be offering the same range of topics to both my classes this semester even though some topics are vastly more relevant to one course than another. Those taking both courses are required to select different topics for each course.

In addition to the information below, I will announce in class the reduced writing assignment for those who attend class regularly. However, the reduced writing option expires when the final grades are posted meaning that a student who takes an incomplete has to follow the syllabus as posted. Students, while filling out the course evaluations, have repeatedly asked for due dates for the assignments. I will repeat the due dates and announce in class the benefits for meeting them and the penalties for failing to do so. Students regularly attending class will be required to write two papers for a total of 20 to 25 pages and participate in a class project or with written permission write three papers for a total of 30+ pages. Students absent more than three class periods without written permission will write four papers for a total of 35 to 40 pages. Independent study is not an option for this course.

ALL PAPERS HAVE TO INCLUDE CITED MATERIAL (source, date and pages cited) **FROM THE ASSIGNED READINGS**. Each paper must include at least two of the assigned sources though you

may use as many as you wish on any paper. All papers taken together must show that all assigned sources have been read and used. Every paragraph in your papers must have at least one cited assigned source unless it is either drawn from your own experience or is a concluding paragraph. Each paper should have a separate reference page that does not count towards your page requirements. You will lose one letter grade for each assigned source that is not "substantially" used (in other words, used in a way that indicates an understanding of what the book is saying). This may seem like a rigid requirement but since there are no exams or quizzes, it is the only way that I know (or think that I know) that you have done the reading and that the paper is yours and not found on the web. ALL GRADES ARE FINAL UNLESS THE STUDENT CAN DEMONSTRATE THAT AN ERROR WAS MADE IN THE GRADING. FINAL MEANS FINAL. DO NOT ASK TO BE ABLE TO RE-DO YOUR PAPERS IF YOUR GRADE WAS LOWERED BECAUSE YOU FAILED TO FOLLOW THE CLEARLY POSTED RULES. PLEASE DO NOT HESITATE TO ASK SHOULD YOU NOT UNDERSTAND THEM. Ruining a 4.0 grade point average or preventing you from graduating are not acceptable reasons for allowing you to re-do your papers. Neither is the claim that a book or books did not fit your chosen topics acceptably. You have a wide choice of topics so pick topics in which you can use all of the assigned sources in doing them. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. Every paragraph in your papers must have at least one cited source unless it is either drawn from your own experience or is a concluding paragraph. Please number your pages. Every paper should have two reference sheets with your name, course name and number, and number of pages of your paper. In other words, if the text for your paper is nine pages (not counting separate cover sheet if you use one) then the reference pages will be numbered 9a and 9b. I will tear of 9b out to use for final grading.

YOU MAY USE OTHER RESEARCH MATERIAL AS WELL. IF YOU USE INFORMATION FROM THE WWW, PLEASE GIVE AS COMPLETE A CITATION AS POSSIBLE INCLUDING THE URL. Give page numbers for all citations from printed matter. For e-books, if there are no page numbers, give the chapter or other identifying features so I can find the cited material. As a rough rule of thumb, use only sources published this century unless there is a compelling reason to use an older source. All material that is not original to you must have a citation. Quotation marks are required only when you are using someone else's wording. If you are using their ideas and facts that are put in your own words, you still need to cite the source but quotation marks would be inappropriate. Please do not start a sentence with "I feel" or in "my opinion." Instead use phrases such as "I conclude" or "it is my judgment based upon the evidence" etc. If you present solid evidence on an issue and then follow with a rational argument to reach a conclusion, I will assume that this is not only your conclusion but it is also how you "feel" or that it is your "opinion." I care about your feelings but for then purpose of evaluating your work, I need to know what you have learned.

Assignment due dates (with some flexibility):

February 11, 2014 - A ten page paper that makes substantial use of at least two of the assigned sources.

February 18, 2014 - Students who have exams or other academic commitments that make the February 11 due date difficult, may turn in a fifteen page paper that makes substantial use of at least three of the assigned sources without penalty. Ten page papers by this date will lose one to two thirds of a grade on it - for example A- to either a B+ or a B. After this date, any ten page paper will lose a full letter grade.

February 25, 2014 - Students turning in their first paper of fifteen pages which makes substantial use of at least three of the assigned sources by this date will lose one to two thirds of a grade on it - for example A- to either a B+ or a B. After this date, any paper of any length will lose a full letter grade.

March 18, 2014 - Second paper due in class.

March 21 option - students who made a B+ or better on their first paper have the option of combining two topics in a ten to fifteen page paper (bringing the total to 25 to 30 pages) using three previously not used assigned sources completing use of all assigned sources. They will turn in a three to five page draft or outline indicating the topics and how they will be combined. This will be returned OK written on it and will be turned back in along with the complete paper on the due date for the third paper.

March 21, 2014 - Second paper due in class, with a penalty of one to two thirds of a grade on it - for example A- to either a B+ or a B. After this date, any paper will lose a full letter grade.

April 1, 2014- Third paper due in class

April 8, 2014- Third paper due in class, with a penalty of one to two thirds of a grade on it - for example A- to either a B+ or a B. After this date, any paper will lose a full letter grade.

April 22, 2014 (in class) - guaranteed to be graded in time for the posting of final grades. As often happens, I am able to grade late papers in time for them to be recorded. However, after the due date, there will be a grade penalty that increases the later the paper is turned. I will consider removing the one third grade penalty for students who turn in two of the three papers (including the final paper) by the due dates. Full letter grade penalties will not be removed.

The due date for the fourth paper, if you are required to write one, is in class on April 22, 2014.

General guidelines:

Under current University policy, your email address given in People Soft is considered the official method of notification making you responsible for any information sent to that address. The best advice is to check it regularly. Not having checked it will not be an acceptable excuse for failing to comply with the instructions given there. If you turn in your papers for my class in the main economics office - 204 M - as I often request that you do, please do not call or email me asking if I received them. And do not ask what grade that you received. I do not mean to be rude but your calls or emails will not likely be answered. Keep digital copies of all of your papers in the very unlikely event that they are somehow lost. After the - DUE DATE FOR ALL PAPERS - before 4 PM, Monday, April 22, 2014 (in class or in the Economics office, 204 M), emails and calls will not be taken and returned. There are NO EXCEPTIONS except one. If you have an acceptable, verifiable reason beyond your control why you were unable to complete papers such as hospitalization, then you may either bring or send the documentation to me and receive an "I." Please no elaborate excuses, only documented cases can be accepted. Since we have to fill out a form for the "I" with your signature, send the documentation only if you are physically unable to bring it. It also has to be approved by the department. Needless to say, without adequate documentation to support the form, an "I" cannot be given. Unlike an "I," a grade of "F" can no longer be removed except in the most extreme set of circumstances. If towards the end of the semester, it becomes obvious to you that you will not be able to complete your work, you might consider dropping the course by the last day to drop a course or withdraw without hours counting towards the <<http://www.uh.edu/provost/stu/stu_enrollcapqs.html>> Enrollment Cap for Texas Residents (Wednesday, January 29, 2014) or the last day to drop a course or withdraw (Wednesday, March 26, 2014). You will not be given a failing grade for withdrawing since I have not given any exams. If you drop the course using People Soft and for some reason the system fails to record your drop, contact the Registrar's Office in order to correct the problem. Do not contact me or my T.A. or the Economics Department about this matter. If you receive an "F," I will gladly change it to a "W" if notified to do so by the Administration. I am not allowed to do it on my own nor am I allowed to give you a "W" for a final grade unless the final role sheet shows that you have dropped. Every semester, a large number of students take my courses as independent study without attending class. I have always sought to make my courses available to those who could not attend for whatever reasons. This option is NOT open for this class this semester. Further, it is no longer encouraged except for those who have

absolutely no other options since past experience shows that those who attended class regularly were vastly more likely to finish the course on time and not need an "I."

My word may be my sacred bond but my memory for promises made is not. If you wish some change in paper topic or other course change, you may seek permission verbally BUT such permission is only valid if confirmed by an exchange of emails shortly after permission is granted. The student will return printed out copy the email approving a change at the appropriate time. Do not ask me later in the semester to "remember" having given you permission to for a special request.