

Econ. 360: Economics of Developing Areas
George Mason University, Summer 2026 (Session D)
Lectures: Asynchronous

Instructor: Noel D. Johnson

Email: njohnsoL@gmu.edu

Office Location: Buchanan Hall D154

Office Hours: None set. Will meet on Zoom upon request.

Course Webpage: Canvas

Course Description

The aim of this course is to introduce various ideas and approaches to understanding economic growth and development. The course is split into four sections. In the first, we will review the basic facts of economic growth as well as discuss current empirical techniques used to study growth. In the second section we will discuss factor accumulation as an explanation for growth. In the third section we will discuss various explanations for differences in productivity across regions. In the final section we will take a deeper dive into government institutions and their relationship to growth. Throughout the course an effort will be made to link the theory of economic growth with empirical evidence. Textbook readings will be supplemented with recent academic papers and blog posts.

Week 1	Introduction
Week 2	Capital's Role in Production
Week 3	The Role of Population in Economic Growth
Week 4	The Effect of Human Capital on Growth
Week 5	Midterm Oral Exams
Week 6	How much does productivity growth differ among countries?
Week 7	Technology and Productivity
Week 8	Inefficiency and Productivity
Week 9	Government
Week 10	Final Oral Exams

Communication

I will post the syllabus, readings, and announcements to the class web page on Canvas.

Email is the best way to get in touch with me. You can contact me at: njohnsoL@gmu.edu.

There are no set office hours. However, if you ever want to set up a meeting with me we can meet on zoom. Zoom is free. [Follow the instructions at this link to get started.](#)

My personal zoom meeting room link is:

[Click this link to join zoom meeting](#)

Meeting ID: 912 315 3945

Passcode: 3J5KNG

Class Lectures

This is an online class and, as such, there will be no group in-person meetings. Lectures will be delivered “asynchronously”—meaning that I will record them on Zoom and then post them to Blackboard for you to view at your leisure.

Course Requirements

Eighty percent of success is showing up – Woody Allen

Hear the words of Snoop Dogg: [“The syllabus, you gotta do it, you gotta read it!”](#)

Your course grade will be based on the following:

- A oral midterm exam worth 30% of your grade.
- Problem sets worth 30% of your grade (15% each).
- A comprehensive oral final exam worth 40% of your grade.

The Oral Exams

There will be two oral exams in this class. The way they will work is that I will distribute a sign-up sheet and you will choose one of the 15 minute time slots. I will provide variety in terms of day of the week and time of day. Then, when that time slot arrives we will meet on Zoom. Before the exam, I will let you all know two or three of the topics I will be asking you about. For example, we will be spending a lot of time learning the Solow Growth Model in the first half of the semester. So, I may tell you that one of the questions I ask you will be about the Solow Growth Model. I will then expect you to be able to use the Whiteboard in Zoom to show the model in its initial equilibrium and then to use the model to answer a question like, “What happens in the model when savings rate increase”. I guarantee you that at least one of the questions I ask you will be about one of these topics I have told you I will ask about.

I’m requiring you to be either on a laptop or desktop with your camera on for the exam. No phones. This is because you will have to use the Whiteboard functionality of Zoom.

The Problem Sets

There will also be two problem sets in this course. They will be distributed a couple weeks before they are collected and you will work on them on your own time. If you turn in the problem set on time and have made a conscientious effort, you will get full credit. I will not be grading the problem sets in detail, but I will distribute an answer sheet that you can use to check your work. These problem sets are designed to give you practice using the models and implementing the concepts we learn. They will also serve as a source of questions I can ask you in the oral exam. For example, I may ask you to walk me through how you came to a certain answer on the problem set you turned in.

Course Materials

There is one required text: David N. Weil, *Economic Growth*, 3rd edition.

All other readings will be posted to the class webpage. The readings can also be downloaded from either JSTOR, the NBER Working Papers archive, or EconLit. You are required to acquire these papers and read them during the week they are listed on the course outline below. You are expected to know the papers on the course reading list for the exams.

The material behind the links in the reading list to blog posts, news articles, and videos are also mandatory.

Some Important Dates

First Day of Classes: **5/18**

Last Day of Classes: **7/22**

Midterm Oral Exams: **6/15 – 6/19**

Final Oral Exams: **7/23 – 7/25**

PLEASE NOTE: COURSE POLICIES

1. George Mason University Honor System and Code

Honor Code

George Mason University has an Honor Code, which requires all members of this community to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. Cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing are all prohibited.

All violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee.

Plagiarism (statements from Mason Web Site)

Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another person without giving that person credit.

<http://mason.gmu.edu/montecin/plagiarism.htm#plagiarism>

Please familiarize yourself with the Honor System and Code, as stated in the George Mason University Undergraduate Catalog. When you are given an assignment as an individual, the work must be your own. Some of your work may be collaborative; source material for group projects and work of individual group members must be carefully documented for individual contributions.

<http://mason.gmu.edu/montecin/plagiarism.htm>

2. Class Registration

Students are responsible for verifying the accuracy of their own schedules. Students need to check PatriotWeb regularly to verify that they are registered for the classes that they think they are. This is particularly important since students are no longer dropped for nonpayment.

Faculty may not allow a student who is not registered to continue to attend class and may not grade the work of students who do not appear on the official class roster.

Deadlines each semester are published in the Schedule of Classes available from the Registrar's Web Site registrar.gmu.edu

After the last day to drop a class, withdrawing from this class requires the approval of the dean and is only allowed for nonacademic reasons.

Undergraduate students may choose to exercise a selective withdrawal. See the Schedule of Classes for selective withdrawal procedures.

3. Accommodations for students with disabilities:

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Resources at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

The need for accommodations should be identified at the beginning of the semester and the specific accommodation has to be arranged through the Office of Disability Resources. Faculty cannot provide accommodations to students on their own (e.g. allowing a student extra time to complete an exam because the student reports having a disability).

Course Outline

Week 1: Introduction

- Weil Chapters 1 and 2: Differences in the level and rate of income growth among countries
- [Hans Rosling BBC video on income differences over time](#)
- MR University: [When in India, Get a Haircut](#)

Week 2: Capital's Role in Production

- Weil Chapter 3: Capital's Role in Production
- Marginal Revolution: [Soviet Growth & American Textbooks](#)
- MR University: [Foreign Aid: Does it Increase Growth?](#)
- **Problem Set 1 Distributed**

Week 3: The Role of Population in Economic Growth

- Weil Chapter 4: The Role of Population in Economic Growth (skip appendix).
- MR University: [Demographic Transitions](#)
- MR University: [Paul Romer](#)
- Pages 681 to 687 of Kremer, M. (1993). Population growth and technological change: One million bc to 1990. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 108(3):681–716

Week 4: The Effect of Human Capital on Growth

- Weil Chapter 6: The Effect of Human Capital on Growth
- **Problem Set 1 Collected**
- **Problem Set 2 Distributed**

Week 5: Oral Midterm Exams (6/15 – 6/19)

Week 6: How much does productivity growth differ among countries?

- Weil Chapter 7: How much does productivity growth differ among countries?

Week 7: Technology and Productivity

- Weil Chapters 8 and 9: The Role of Technology in Growth (skip section 8.3 of Ch. 8)

- Robert C Allen. Why the industrial revolution was british: commerce, induced invention, and the scientific revolution. *The Economic History Review*, 64(2):357–384, 2011
- Freakonomics Podcast: [“Are We Running Out of Ideas?”](#)

Week 8: Inefficiency and Productivity

- Weil Chapter 10: How much of productivity differences come from inefficiency?
- IGC Video: [Chang-Tai Hsieh: Resource misallocation & productive growth](#)
- Core Econ Video: [Van Reenen: what determines productivity?](#) (This one seems to auto-start about half-way through. You’ll need to rewind and watch the whole thing.)

Week 9: Government

- Weil Chapter 12: Government
- MR University: [Institutions](#)
- MR University: [The Importance of Institutions](#)
- Pages 28 to 32 of Griffiths, P. (2015). *The Economist’s Tale: a consultant encounters hunger and the World Bank*. Zed Books Ltd
- Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James A Robinson. The colonial origins of comparative development: An empirical investigation. *American economic review*, 91(5):1369–1401, 2001
- Melissa Dell. The persistent effects of peru’s mining mita. *Econometrica*, 78(6):1863–1903, 2010
- **Problem Set 2 Collected**

Week 10: Oral Final Exams (7/23 – 7/25)