Economics 397W – On-line version, 2015

Economics 397W is the Economics Department's Junior Year Writing Course. Theoretically, students who take it are juniors, but some are seniors who still need the course in order to graduate.

The course consists of a great deal of writing, at various levels of formality. The instructor will post assignments, students will write essays and other exercises and send them to the instructor, and the instructor will read and comment on these and send them back to the authors.

The principal writing assignments are of two sorts, short and long. These terms are more a description of how much time is devoted to the essays for each assignment than of how many pages long the papers are. Papers for "Long" assignments may be five pages or so.

The three long assignments are based on three sets of readings:

1. *Freakonomics*, Levitt and Dubner. An example of vigorous writing about economics, much more in the style of a newspaper and magazine journalist than in the style of most academic journals. Emphasis first on the authors' commentary on the usefulness of data and statistics; second, and central to the long assignment, the authors' discussion of the correlation between socioeconomic variables and student test performance in school. Also various articles about education reform.


3. *The Big Truck That Went By*, Jonathan Katz, and *Architecture By Moonlight*, Paul Fallon. Also various other readings about economic development and disaster relief in Haiti.

Each long assignment will involve writing at least three versions of the essay, with intervening peer reviews by fellow students and mid-process reading and comments by the instructor. The final version will be graded.

The eight short assignments (typically 1-3 pages) will be on a variety of topics, the intention being to promote some creativity on the part of the writer while also drawing on the writer's knowledge of economics.

The course will also include periodic chat-room or Google-based discussions of the readings and the assignments, as well as online office hours and/or email communication between students and instructor. Grades will be based on writing quality, participation in discussions, and most of all on the student's demonstrated improvement in his or her writing, in the process of receiving feedback and applying suggestions and lessons to subsequent essays in the course.