

SEMINAR ON CURRENT SOCIAL ISSUES

Coordinator: Winthrop Thies

This year shows that complicated current social/economic issues are vulnerable to misrepresentation and faulty logic. The study group helps members use data and explanations to analyze contemporary problems in economics, politics and society. Rational discourse is our method and some consensus about possible solutions is the goal. The group is seminar style with one member taking responsibility each week to present and lead an in-depth discussion of a topic of his or her choice. Presenters use articles from periodicals, think tanks and government agencies to outline and discuss the topics. Each presenter (with Coordinator help) develops an outline, including articles. The outline and reading links go to members a week prior to the session. The Coordinator presents the first session to demonstrate a model.

Readings and other Materials/Online Services: No readings prescribed at this point, but each member must have Internet access. Readings sent as links or PDFs one week before each study group session.

Win has coordinated two study groups. A lawyer by background, he has been sending out near daily essays on current issues to IRP and other friends for a year.

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As noted, the overall schedule and syllabus is developed as the semester progresses and as each member submits the outline for his/her session. The Coordinator starts the semester rotation with a presentation for week one.

Members may choose their own topics or issues for their presentation but the coordinator will also have a list of possible topic ideas for presenters and will work with all study group members to help them select and define topics and reading sources.

The topics below are only samples showing the range of topics and kinds of readings that may be part of the study group. Members will select the actual topics, except for the first week, after the study group begins.

Weeks 1 and 2— Why is the U.S. economy so stagnant?

John H. Cochrane, “Ending America’s Slow-Growth Tailspin” from May 2, 2016 Wall St Jnl; Martin Ford, Huffington Post blog 1-28-16 reviewing Prof Gordon’s “The Rise and Fall of American Growth”; two essays by Eduardo Porter from NY Times, 4-27-16, “Moving on from Farm and Factory—The Presidential Candidates’ Calls to Revive Industry Are Futile”, and 5-11-16, “Government: The Real Job Creator”.

Also, Tyler Cowen in Mar-Apr 2016 “Foreign Affairs” reviews Gordon’s book.

Other articles may appear and be substituted before relevant sessions.

Weeks 3 and 4—Robots, Pay, Unemployment and Inequality.

Richard B. Freeman, “Who Owns the Robots Rules the World” from HARVARD magazine, May-June 2016. Also, Sue Halpern, “How Robots & Algorithms Are Taking Over” from 4-2-15 NY Rev of Bks; “Stocks & Bots” from NY Times Magazine, 2-28-16; Derek Thompson, “A World Without Work”, Atlantic, Jly-Aug 2015. Finally, Farhad Manjoo, “A Plan in Case Robots Take the Jobs...”. NY Times, 3-3-16.

Weeks 5 and 6—Is free trade still good for America?

N. Gregory Mankiw, “Economists Actually Agree on This: The Wisdom of Free Trade”. Also, from Economic Policy Institute’s Dan Kaufman, “What Side Are You On, Hillary?”. Also, study Wikipedia on “free trade” and “Trade Adjustment Assistance”.

For theoretical foundation, read Steven M. Suranovic, “The Theory of Comparative Advantage—Overview”.