This is an advanced graduate seminar on the central questions of development: why are some countries rich while others have remained poor? Why, among the poor countries, have some of them been able to achieve rapid rates of economic growth? Why have some countries been more successful than others in reducing poverty and inequality?

We will approach development by understanding the political logic, at the micro level, of the macro aggregate patterns that are observed around the world. Hence, while cross sectional growth regressions allow us to set the stage to the problems and issues of development, the course will be mostly devoted to assessing recent literature that seeks to understand the mechanisms behind cross sectional correlations. We will read work by economists, in order to become “literate” in the mechanisms which that discipline has uncovered explaining economic growth, poverty and inequality, but our focus will be on bridging that literature with the political incentives that can make those mechanisms work or fail. The political economy approach we will take is hence grounded on the classics of Smith, Ricardo and Marx, and the more recent contributions by Hirschman, North and Bates.

As in any seminar, making this a learning experience for all of us requires coming to class having made the readings in advance. Moreover, an active engagement in the discussions is essential for us to have a lively exchange of ideas. The course grade is based on the following:

25% Presentation, and leading the discussion for one of the week’s material.

25% 5 page report, discussing the week’s required material together with at least two of the recommended readings, to be circulated to the class the day before our class meeting.

50% Final paper

Two books, Ray and Easterly, are available for purchase at the bookstore. Most papers are available through the web. You might want to purchase some of the books that we will discuss, but they have not been ordered at the bookstore. The rest of the materials will be distributed in a box outside my office.


Material marked with * is a required reading.
1. Growth (April 8)

* Easterly: Chapters 1 to 4. pp.1-85.

* Ray: Chapters 1 to 4, pp. 3-129.


2. Poverty and Inequality (April 14 WED)

* Ray: Chapters 6 to 8, pp.169-294.


3. History, Geography and Borders (April 22)

* Ray: chapter 5, pp. 131-167

* Easterly: Chapters 8 to 10.


4. The great transformation.

* Ray, chapter 10, pp.345-402

Acemoglu and Robinson “Economic Backwardness in Political Perspective” (typescript).


Hirschman, Alberto O. (1971), Bias For Hope, New Haven: Yale University Press.

Industrialization and Big Push


5. Land distribution and land reform

* Ray: Chapters 11 and 12, 403-481.


6. Capital formation (investment, finance and education)

* Ray: Chapters 13 and 14, 483-589


7. Public Good Provision


Bardhan, Pranab and Mookherjee, Dilip (typescript), “Decentralizing Anti-Poverty Program Delivery in Developing Countries”


Brusco, Valeria, Nazareno, Marcelo and Stokes, Susan “Clientelism and Democracy. An Analysis of Ecological Data for Argentina”


Scott, James (1972a) “Patron-Client politics and Political Change in Southeast Asia” *American Political Science Review* 66(1)

8. Regimes and political representation


9. Globalization

* Ray: Chapters 16 to 18, pp. 621-756.

* Easterly: Chapters 6 and 7.


