This course is for non-majors, and students qualify for HF credit, a general education course in the Humanities area.

In this course, we will study short fiction, film, journalism, economic theory, and a memoir by the first great oil magnate, John D. Rockefeller. These texts all concern life in a commercial world. Although we will study non-fiction as well as fictional materials, one purpose of the course is to introduce students to the kinds of questions we ask in the humanities. As a primary way to ask these questions, we will consider the sorts of narratives that appear in all these different genres. As one asks about any narrative, we will ask how characters and persons in these texts experience commercial life in different settings. To what extent do persons and characters identify themselves through commercial relations? How does economic life affect our sense of ourselves?

We will read short essays and excerpts from writings by several well-known economists. We will examine these economic materials as narratives, which recount the progress of economies and also the aspirations of individuals and populations. Even a brief, well-known paragraph from Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations (1776), tells a story about how people interact. Generally, we will attend carefully to the language and strategies of all the course materials, so that we can learn how to interpret them. The range of materials will give us a broader view of the issues than fewer, longer texts.

Course materials. No books are on order at the University Bookstore. All readings for the course are fairly short or very short. Readings will be available as PDFs posted in the Course Notes page of the course Canvas page, and also in the Weekly Modules. I am hopeful that by late August, we will be feeling as if post-pandemic life is beginning. As the time approaches for the semester to begin, I will select recent newspaper articles which discuss some economic effects of the pandemic. I am including below a provisional syllabus, which includes some materials specific to critical junctures during the pandemic.

We will examine some brief 18th century materials (for example, Benjamin Franklin’s short story “The Way to Wealth” and some of his writing on paper money; a famous passage from Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations). We will look at some 19th century materials (by authors like Herman Melville, Mark Twain, Karl Marx, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, John D. Rockefeller, and Thorstein Veblen) to consider changes in narratives as the need for large-scale capitalization intensifies and as credit becomes a more primary mode of economic transaction. We will study some early to mid-20th century materials: the films Safety Last, starring Harold Lloyd [1923] and It’s a Wonderful Life, by Frank Capra [1946]; excerpts from John Maynard Keynes and Milton Friedman). We will spend the closing month of the semester with fiction (DeLillo), film (Margin Call, 2011), and economic analysis produced in the wake of the now decade old financial crisis. (Let
me note that Margin Call contains much foul language, which is supposed to capture the speech patterns of workers in the financial sector. But the film has no sex scenes and no physical violence; I prefer this film, as drama, slightly to The Big Short.

I have just described some course materials in chronological order, but in fact the course syllabus proceeds topically. We generally will discuss 1) basic understandings of property, wealth, and individual enterprise; 2) labor; 3) the concentration of capital; 4) modern economies and crises; 5) introduction to neo-liberalism.

Three of the four films we will study will be available for streaming through the Marriott Library. Safety Last! concerns activity around a department store. It’s a Wonderful Life considers the relation between community life and banking practices (and yes, with some attention to the Christmas season). Real Women Have Curves (2002) concerns Latina women working in a dress factory. These workers face very specific social expectations as Latina women. Margin Call concerns an investment firm during the collapse of the stock market in, say, late September 2008. Real Women Have Curves is not available for streaming through the Marriott Library, but this film, as well as the others, is available on Netflix or YouTube or Xfinity and other websites, for a fairly small fee if not for free. DVDs of these films will be available at the Marriott reserve desk.

**Issues treated in the course.** Public figures frequently speak of the need to spur economic growth. When public figures discuss economic growth, education, climate change, and so forth, they appeal, although not always explicitly, to people’s assumptions about the relation between commercial life and their own lives. Bear in mind that an important factor in the outcome of the 2016 presidential election (including the primary campaigns) was people’s sense of their relation to trends in manufacturing, evolving global markets, and individual debt. Similar concerns punctuated the 2020 presidential election campaign, and continue today. The pandemic surely underscored disparities in people’s sense of their relation to commercial life. The fiction and films we will study manifestly dramatize ways we form our sense of ourselves in commercial contexts. Benjamin Franklin’s 1757 short story “The Way to Wealth,” for example, concerns shopping and debt. I hope students will become adept at discovering similar dramas in journalism and excerpts from economic theory. Non-fiction involves narratives of the self as much as fiction does.

With one exception, the selections from economic theory are readily accessible to a general audience. Excerpts from John Locke and Adam Smith and essays by John Maynard Keynes and Milton Friedman—all very famous figures—are straightforward as well as brief. Each author tells a lively story. Friedman, for example, asserts that modern economies consists of interactions among many Robinson Crusoes! The early 20th century economist Thorstein Veblen wrote more difficult prose (he did so deliberately, for reasons I will explain when we study him), but the excerpt is not that long and not that hard, and Veblen introduces a crucial concept, “pecuniary emulation,” as well as the better known term “conspicuous consumption.” The 20-page excerpt we will study from Karl Marx’s Capital (1867), on the inevitable concentration of capital, is hard to read, a result of his writing style, quirks of German, and problems of translation. But this nonetheless fairly short excerpt, I think, explains a key element of modern economic
activity. (Consider the frequency of mergers nowadays. Google and Amazon, for example, constantly seek means to expand their footprint, as in Google’s acquisition of YouTube or Amazon’s recent acquisition of Whole Foods and the online pharmacy PillPack. Global conglomerates like Amazon have thrived during the pandemic. Globalization and large-scale capitalization were well underway in the 19th century.) Marx thinks people desire the concentration of capital (and thus the huge growth of a few firms at the expense of smaller firms and at the expense of labor), even as we protest many of the effects of these increases in economies of scale. The Marx excerpt is difficult, but you will forever think differently about large scale capitalization and consumer demand.

The course materials largely concern the American context. American colonials rebelled against the British monarchy under the auspices of commerce, upset that British rule unduly restricted American commerce and hopeful that the new nation could survive because of its commerce. Yet Americans have often been ambivalent about commerce. While Thomas Paine, in Common Sense (1776), announced that commerce would provide a basis for a “common bond,” he also worried that Americans’ pursuit of economic opportunity would “relax” their sense of “attachment” to others. Thomas Jefferson worried that individuals’ pursuit of commerce would dissolve the social fabric. The course materials reveal a wide range of responses to commercial life. The extremely popular, 1923 silent film Safety Last, for example—and at the time its star and creative force, Harold Lloyd, was a bigger box office draw than Charlie Chaplin—illustrates both the enthusiasm and stress that commercial life stimulates in us.

This course is an online course. The course involves no class meetings. Instead, students will participate twice a week in asynchronous online Discussions on Canvas. Several weeks before we arrive at each text in the syllabus, I will post on the course Canvas site a video version and a PDF version of a Lesson on the upcoming course materials. Because we want to help students in English classes attend to the language and structure of texts, the Lessons will often focus on specific passages in the primary texts. The Lessons also provide an introduction to the careers of the authors and filmmakers we study. Generally, two students will post initial comments on a question for each Discussion. Each student shall initiate about three Canvas Discussions during the term. The assignments to initiate Discussions follow the alphabet. I will send students the Lesson and questions for the Discussion they will initiate at least a week in advance. For each Discussion, the other students will respond to initial posts, with the individual option to engage in a broader conversation with other students.

Writing assignments: regular, brief exercises (@ 75 words; 15% of the final grade); one 2-page, optional, ungraded, diagnostic essay, to begin a conversation about writing with individual students; 2 formal, 3-page essays and a third essay, at 4-5 pages. I will distribute questions for all the essays. Students have the option to form their own question for the final essay. The first formal essay is worth 20% of the final grade; the second and third formal essays are each worth 25% percent of the final grade. Students can revise the first two essays, and the grade on the revision replaces the old grade. No exams. Contributions to the Discussions on Canvas will be worth 15% of the final grade. If you submit responses to all the Canvas Discussions, you automatically receive an “A”
for this portion of the final grade. Otherwise, your grade for the Discussions will reflect
the percentage of posts you submit during the semester. In addition, as I do for
traditional class discussion, I will add a bonus to some students’ grade for the
Discussions, if their Discussion posts are particularly helpful. The brief exercises enable
me to gauge whether students are keeping up with assignments and understanding the
material as we proceed. The exercises substitute for exams. The exercises help students
gain practice articulating ideas about the course materials. The stakes are low for any
single exercise, and so you can try out ideas. As I comment on the exercises, I can often
identify the germ of an argument for the formal essays. Submitting the exercises
regularly can only help a student’s grade; if you don’t submit the exercises, your grade by
definition will suffer.

Online Discussions 15%
Weekly writing exercises 15%
First formal essay 20%
Second formal essay 25%
Third formal essay 25%

You will likely have questions about any number of the matters I have outlined above.
For example, how do I evaluate the Exercises? What does the optional, diagnostic essay
involve? Or, what do I expect on revisions of essays? In ordinary classroom settings, we
regularly discuss such issues during class meetings. As Fall semester approaches, you
will find on the course Canvas site explanations of these and other matters in the pages
General Instructions and Writing Assignments. As specific issues or questions arise, I
can communicate with individual students or the entire class via email or in a Canvas
Announcement or by posting a video or PDF.

In a traditional classroom setting, we discuss matters of composition for 5-10 minutes
each class meeting. I will to post some videos in which I discuss some element of
composition. Some of the brief exercises may ask students to revise a sentence that in
present form is ineffective. I try to help students learn to organize essays around a
crude thesis, with every stage of the essay developing this core argument. I try to help
students learn to organize sentences around concrete, active verbs. A file titled Matters
of Composition, posted in both the General Information and Writing Assignments pages
on Canvas, discusses many elements of essay writing.

**PROVISIONAL WEEKLY SYLLABUS** (I have adapted a year old syllabus, which
included materials to help us consider some effects of the pandemic during a more severe
stage of the crisis. By the start of fall semester, I will incorporate different materials
which concern recent developments.)

All readings for this course are available on Canvas. I have **ordered no texts** for the
course; you may have to rent or buy some of the films. Submit all formal essays by
email; send to h.horwitz@utah.edu. When you submit essays, you **MUST** attach the
essay as a Word file (.doc or .docx; don’t paste the text into the email) and label the file
with your name (not my name or a topic name) (for example: Jones1stEssay, or
Jones3223Essay#1; **not** HorwitzEssay#1 or TwainEssay#1).
Week #1 (August 24): Introduction:
Read Course Description and Syllabus, General Instructions for Online Course, Guidelines for Discussions. Discussion for Tuesday will be open for general questions (and only from 9 AM to 10 PM). **Each student must submit one question, or clarification, regarding procedures for the course.**
(Aug. 26) **Section 1: Property, Wealth, and the Self**
excerpt from John Locke, “Of Property”
excerpt from Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*
Read General Instructions on Weekly Writing Exercises;

Week #2 (Aug. 31): excerpts from Thorstein Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class*
**Sections 1 & 2. Matters of Composition**
(Sept. 2): Mark Twain, “The £1,000,000 Bank Note”
**Sections 4 & 7. Matters of Composition**
**TWO-PAGE OPTIONAL, DIAGNOSTIC ESSAY** on Locke or Smith, due Friday, Sept. 3

Week #3 (Sept. 7): Benjamin Franklin, 1758 Preface (“The Way to Wealth”)
**Sections 10 & 11. Matters of Composition**
(Sept. 9): Franklin, “The Nature and Necessity of Paper Currency” (1729)
Franklin, “The Internal State of America” (1785?)
**Sections 3 & 5. Matters of Composition**

Week #4 (Sept. 14): **Section 2: Labor and Assets (and race distinction)**
Herman Melville, “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids”
**Section 8. Matters of Composition**
(Sept. 16): finish Melville
Alice Kessler-Harris, excerpt from *Out Of Work*

Week #5 (Sept. 21): Alice Dunbar-Nelson, “Mrs. Newly-Wed and Her Servants”
(@ 1900)
Presser, “Black Families Deprived of Property”
**Section 9. Matters of Composition**
(Sept. 23): Charles Chesnutt, “The Goophered Grapevine” (1887)
Flitter, “Banking While Black”
Gelles, “Corporate America Has Failed Black America”

Week #6 (Sept. 28): *Real Women Have Curves* (2002, dir. Patricia Cardoso)
**Section 6. Matters of Composition**
(Sept. 30): finish Cardoso
Paton & Lazazzera, “Inside Italy’s Shadow Economy”
(NY Times, 9/20/2018)
Cohen and Casselman, Minority Workers during Pandemic
Cano, et. al., “Covid and Latino Communities”
Hubler, et. al., “Effects of Covid on Latinos”

FIRST ESSAY DUE: Friday, Oct. 1

Week #7 (Oct. 5 & 7): Safety Last (1923, dirs. Newmeyer and Taylor; starring Harold Lloyd)
Bryant & Dethloff, “Retailing,”
from A History of American Business

FALL BREAK, October 10-17

Week #8 (Oct. 19 & 21): Section 3: The Concentration of Capital
Karl Marx, Capital, Volume 1, excerpt from Chapter 25,
“The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation”

Week #9 (Oct. 26): John D. Rockefeller,
from Random Reminiscences of Men and Events (1904)
Bryant & Dethloff, “Multinational Corporations,”
from A History of American Business
Revision of first essay, due Friday, Oct. 29

Week #10 (Nov. 2): Section 4: Modern Economies and Crises
John Maynard Keynes, “Saving and Spending” (January 1931)
Cohen, “Picking up Work”
(Nov. 4) Milton Friedman, “Relation between Economic Freedom
and Political Freedom” (1964)

Week #11 (Nov. 9 & 11): It’s a Wonderful Life (1946, dir. Capra)
SECOND ESSAY DUE: Friday, Nov. 12

Week #12 (Nov. 16): Richard A. Posner, excerpt from A Failure of Capitalism
(Nov. 18): Don DeLillo, “Hammer and Sickle”

Week #13 (Nov. 23): Joseph Stiglitz, excerpt from Freefall
(Nov. 25): THANKSGIVING DAY, No Class

Week #14 (Nov. 30 & Dec. 2): Margin Call (2011, dir. Chandor)
Revisions of second essay due Friday, Dec. 3

Week #15 (Dec. 7): Section 5: Introduction to Neoliberalism
excerpt from Michel Foucault, Birth of Biopolitics
Flitter, et. al., Buybacks, Cash, Restaurant Chains
Jacobs, FEMA Sends Faulty Protective Gear
(Dec. 9): Brown, “Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy”
Cohen, “Jobs May Vanish Forever”

Finals Week Third essay due: Thursday, Dec. 16
**University Writing Center:** The University Writing Center offers one-on-one assistance with writing. Tutors can help you understand your writing assignments, work through the writing process, and/or polish your drafts for all the courses in which you are enrolled. Sessions are free of charge, and you can meet as often as you need. To make an appointment, call 801.587.9122. The Writing Center is located on the second floor of the Marriott Library. Visit the website at writingcenter.utah.edu. Let me suggest that before you visit the Writing Center, come to my office, and certainly show me outlines and drafts of the formal essays. I myself have in the past helped train some of the tutors at the University Writing Center, and these tutors are well trained and experienced. But bring me your writing first. Discussing with me your exercises, on which the stakes are low, might be useful as preparation for longer writing assignments.

**University and Department Policy Statements**

**Students with Disabilities (ADA statement):** The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services, and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in the class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability & Access, 162 Union Building, 801-581-5020. disability.utah.edu. CDA will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations. *All written information in this course can be made available in alternative format with prior notification to the Center for Disability & Access.*

**Covid-19 Campus Guidelines:** I am posting here university Covid-19 guidelines for Spring 2021; by August, the university will have changed its guidelines, and I will incorporate the new guidelines. **Students are required to self-report if they test positive for COVID-19.** To report, please contact: COVID-19 Central @ The U, 801-213-2874, coronavirus.utah.edu.

To reduce the spread of COVID-19 on campus, the University of Utah requires face coverings in all in-person classes for both students AND faculty. Based on CDC guidelines, the University requires everyone to wear face coverings in shared public spaces on campus, including our classroom. As a reminder, when I wear a face covering, I am protecting you. When you wear a face covering, you are protecting me and all of your classmates. If students forget a face covering, they will be asked to leave class to retrieve it. **If you repeatedly fail to wear a face covering in class, you may be referred to the Dean of Students for a possible violation of the Student Code.** Some courses may require attendance due to hands-on coursework. Please read the syllabus and attendance requirements for the course thoroughly.

**Some students may qualify for accommodations & exemptions from these guidelines through the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).** If you believe you meet these criteria and desire an exception to the face covering policy, contact the Center for Disability and Access (CDA). Accommodations should be obtained prior to the first day of class so that I am notified by CDA of any students who are not required to wear a face covering. Please note that face shields alone are not an acceptable form of face covering. Accommodations should be obtained prior to the first day of class. If you believe you
meet these criteria, contact the **Center for Disability & Access**, 162 Union Building, 801-581-5020. [disability.utah.edu](http://disability.utah.edu).

**University Safety Statement**: The University of Utah values the safety of all campus community members. To report suspicious activity or to request a courtesy escort, call campus police at 801-585-COPS (801-585-2677). Members of the University will receive important emergency alerts and safety messages regarding campus safety via text message. For more information regarding safety and to view available training resources, including helpful videos, visit [safeu.utah.edu](http://safeu.utah.edu).

**Addressing Sexual Misconduct**: The university and English Department seek to affirm Lauren’s Promise. If a student reports any assault or harassment to university staff or faculty, we will assume the credibility of your report and we are obligated to forward this report to the proper office. Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender (which includes sexual orientation and gender identity/expression) is a civil rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, color, religion, age, status as a person with a disability, veteran’s status or genetic information. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you are encouraged to report it to the Title IX Coordinator in the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, 135 Park Building, 801-581-8365, or the Office of the Dean of Students, 270 Union Building, 801-581-7066. For support and confidential consultation, contact the Center for Student Wellness, 426 SSB, 801-581-7776. To report to the police, contact the Department of Public Safety, 801-585-2677 (COPS). For fuller explanations of sexual assault and sexual misconduct, visit [http://safeu.utah.edu/](http://safeu.utah.edu/).

If you witness sexual assault or feel that you are in imminent and immediate danger, dial 911. Report sexual assault or sexual misconduct to campus police (801-585-2677) or the Title IX office ([https://utah.i-sight.com/external/case/new](https://utah.i-sight.com/external/case/new); 801-581-8365; or oeo@utah.edu).

**English Department Diversity Statement**: Literature allows us to imagine the lives of others and broaden our perspectives. Our conversations about literature, in the physical or virtual classroom, are part of that process. Our diverse identities and experiences will inform and enhance those discussions. As we approach sometimes difficult topics, each member of the class is expected to help foster a respectful, generous, and supportive classroom environment that makes room for productive difference and reasoned debate.

**University Accommodations Policy**: Students should visit [http://regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-100.php](http://regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-100.php) to review the university’s Accommodations Policy (Policy 6-100-Q., especially Q1.-Q3, and in particular Q3a.-Q3d). Students should notify me if they seek any scheduling accommodations under the terms of Policy 6-100-Q. Also in accord with this policy, please note that the content of course materials and consequently of class discussions may conflict with some students’ deeply held core beliefs. Any student has the right to petition the instructor in writing for a content accommodation. Please review the syllabus carefully, and if you have a concern about the content of any course materials, please discuss it with me immediately.
If you wish to petition for an accommodation, I recommend that you submit it as soon as possible.

**Plagiarism**: Plagiarism is one form of “academic misconduct” (see Policy 6-400 (Student Code), Section 1.B. 2., at http://regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-400.php). University Policy 6-400, Section 1.B. 2.c., defines plagiarism as “the intentional unacknowledged use or incorporation of any other person’s work in, or as a basis for, one’s own work offered for academic consideration or credit for public presentation. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, representing as one’s own, without attribution, any individual’s words, phrasing, ideas, sequence of ideas, information or any other mode or content of expression.” You must cite any material you have consulted on the web or in a library; otherwise you have plagiarized the material, whether you quote (or copy) passages or just allude to concepts discussed on a website. Do not adapt other students’ work nor collaborate with others on your essays. The work you submit must be your own.

Student plagiarism is often easy to detect, because plagiarized passages do not sound like student writing and often depart from a thesis you have developed for this course. Google and other digital tools make plagiarism increasingly easy to document. Faculty are required to report for disciplinary action all instances of plagiarism to the Offices of the Vice President for Student Affairs and the Vice President for Academic Affairs. Students who plagiarize have not learned the skills any discipline tries to cultivate, and professors are authorized to decide appropriate penalties. We can fail plagiarized work or even fail for the course students guilty of plagiarism. Plagiarized work is generally not high quality anyway, so better to discuss with your instructor any difficulties you encounter while crafting essays. Learn from these difficulties; do not try to disguise them. In general, do not use sources you find on the web to help you fulfill assignments for this course, because you will be unable to evaluate the quality of the source. The questions we discuss in class are specific to this course, and websites will provide only general information.

**University Drop/Withdrawal Policy**: Students may drop a course within the first two weeks of a given semester without any penalties. Students may officially withdraw (W) from a class or all classes after the drop deadline through the midpoint of a course. A “W” grade is recorded on the transcript and appropriate tuition/fees are assessed. The grade “W” is not used in calculating the student’s GPA. For deadlines to withdraw from full-term, first, and second session classes, see the U’s Academic Calendar

**Wellness at the U**: Your personal health and wellness are essential to your success as a student. Personal concerns like stress, anxiety, relationship difficulties, depression, or cross-cultural differences can interfere with a student’s ability to succeed and thrive in this course and at the University of Utah. Please feel welcome to reach out to your instructor or TA’s to handle issues regarding your coursework. For helpful resources to manage your personal wellness and counseling options, contact: **Center for Student Wellness**, 801-581-7776, wellness.utah.edu, 2100 Eccles Student Life Center; **Women's Resource Center**, 801-581-8030, womenscenter.utah.edu, 411 Union Building.