

Economics 313, Winter 2019, Presentation Assignment

Each pair of students will be assigned a prominent economic entity. Immediately before class, a coin flip will determine which student goes first. The first student will be the prosecutor, alleging that the entity's actions prior and during the Great Recession should cause the class to find it deserves a large portion of the blame for the Great Recession or slow recovery in its aftermath. The student going second will be the defense, arguing that the entity deserves other none, or only a small share of the blame.

Note that the nature of the assignment requires that you prepare for both sides. This is intentional. The purpose of this uncertainty is to incentivize you to research both sides' strong points, which I believe is essential to a good presentation.

If final enrollment is an odd number, one student will be asked to take on a modified role.

Here are some guidelines:

1. Plan on speaking for about 10 minutes.
2. Try to identify the core economic issue which causes reasonable and informed people to disagree. Then argue for why your side of the issue is correct. For example, many economic policy debates boil down to one side believing that a market failure exists while the other believes that markets are efficient. In this example, you should identify the market failure, or lack thereof, and explain why your position remedies the problem or why the other side's does not.
3. A good presentation will acknowledge, refute, or mitigate the other side's best arguments.
4. In some cases, we will have already covered the related material in class. In others, we will not have done so. In the latter case, you will want to provide more background than the former.
5. Your goal is to provide reasoned and informed arguments to an audience of people with extensive coursework in economics. Tailor your presentation accordingly.
6. If the entity is a private firm, you should generally assume that they are rational profit maximizers. Guilt in such cases might consist of an externality that caused their actions to affect the rest of the economy. If the entity is a policy maker, then you should usually assume that they were trying to fulfill their statutory and legal obligations. Guilt in these cases might consist of having chosen a policy that performed worse than another feasible policy alternative.

7. Students who fail to show up for their presentation will receive a zero, and no opportunity for a makeup will be offered. If an unexpected conflict emerges, please contact me immediately. If a student does not show up, I will ask for a volunteer to “wing it.” Such a volunteer may receive extra credit at my discretion; their grade cannot be adversely affected by volunteering.

8. In the past, some presentations have led to lengthy further discussion. This is welcomed.

9. I am aware that this assignment may cause some students considerable anxiety, especially among those with little experience public speaking. I think overcoming this anxiety to give an effective presentation is an important skill, which is part of my motivation for including this assignment in the class. Remember that I am happy to meet with you or email with you to discuss your preparation and make sure that you are on the right track.

10. Your grade solely depends on the quality of your arguments, not your position (which is random anyways). Some topics are more difficult than others, I adjust my expectations accordingly.

Here is the list of topics. Depending on enrollment, one may be dropped. If needed, I may provide clarification or refinement of topics in class prior to the presentations.

Wednesday, January 23: The Government Sponsored Enterprises

Wednesday, January 30: U.S. Policy Promoting Home Ownership as a Stand Alone Goal

Wednesday, February 6: Mortgage Originators

Wednesday, February 13: The Credit Rating Agencies

Wednesday, February 27: Investment Banks

Wednesday, March 6: The Graham-Leach-Bliley Act (allowed conglomerate banks)

Wednesday, March 13: U.S. Fiscal Policy

Wednesday, March 20: The Community Reinvestment Act

Wednesday, March 27: The Federal Reserve

Wednesday, April 3: The Euro

Please complete the following questionnaire. I will do my best to accommodate your preferences.

Name:

Please rank the topics in order of most preferred to least preferred (please list at least three). Feel free to indicate the intensity of your preferences:

Are there any dates that you absolutely cannot present on?