

Second Term Critical Skills Assignments

Economics of Law, Policy and Organization

SOSC 2330 9.0

Fall/Winter 2006-2007

Course Director: Richard Wellen

Value: 5% of final mark

Each student will be assigned one of the questions below and will respond in the form of a 10-15 minute presentation. You should also hand in a one page outline or summary of your response. In some cases more than one student will be assigned to a given question and in those cases it is recommended that both students collaborate to prepare a debate on the topic.

Week 2 – Competition

1. What reasons might the government have for regulating monopolies? How do the readings by Stiglitz, Posner or Fellows illuminate this issue? [two students]
2. Do you think the anti-trust action against Microsoft was a case of protecting consumers or unfairly punishing a successful business? You may use the reading by Shapiro and any other materials you find useful. Again, you may want to conduct a debate with another student. [two students]

Week 3 – Health Care

3. Why are economists often skeptical of the demand that government do more to address health care problems? Please use at least two of the readings by Blank, Hyman and Strick and Rhoads. [one student]
4. Heath thinks we should support public health care but not worry so much about private delivery, commodification and even some forms of two-tier medicine. Explain his position and say whether you think he is right. [one or two students]

Week 4 – Pay Equity

5. How well do you think Broome succeeds in using ‘fairness’ as an ethical criterion in rationing health care resources? [one student]
6. Do you think England’s support for pay equity policies stands up to Rhoads’ market-based critique? [two students]
7. Explain Heath’s account of the gender-based division of labour. What are its implications? [one student]

Week 5 – Economics of Higher Education

8. Explain the ‘smart funding’ approach advocated by Wellen in his article on the “Tuition Dilemma.” Do you think this approach is a fairer and more effective alternative than that offered by the ‘Tuition Freeze’ movement? [two students]
9. If market competition often (or at least sometimes!) leads to more efficiency, lower prices and/or better quality, why does Wellen (in “The Student as Consumer”) say it can be damaging in our system of higher education? [one student]

Week 7 – Economies of Information and Consumers

10. Does Shapiro’s defense of intermediaries provide a good solution for the problem of limited consumer or citizen information (or the passivity of consumers and citizens)? To what degree are intermediaries obsolete in the age of blogs and Internet searches? [two students]
11. How does Heath define the problem of consumerism and why does it lead him to say that the solution is not simply to urge people to rebel against the alleged conformity and manipulation that our capitalist culture imposes on us. [one student]

Week 8 – The Media and the Market

12. The reason why we, as consumers of media, get access to so much cultural content, music, news and entertainment is because advertisers pay to supply it to us. In fact, if we had to pay the full price of our newspaper or our favorite TV program, we would be unlikely to have such rich access to all of this content. Why, then, is Baker so critical of the influence of advertising and markets over the media? Is he right? [two students].

Week 9 – Intellectual Property

13. Some people say that strong intellectual property rights (IPR) are necessary to encourage innovation; others say that they often go too far in creating monopolies and obstructing the useful sharing of knowledge and ideas. How would you respond to this controversy with respect to the following areas of IPR:
- Patents [one student]
 - Copyright [one student]
 - Trademarks [one student]

Week 10 – Inequality

14. Why is Heath so skeptical of attempts to redress economic inequalities? Give examples from his chapter and say whether you agree with him. [one student]

15. What is a winner-take-all economy? Do you think Frank has successfully used this concept to contest the view that widening inequality is the price we must pay for a growing and dynamic economy? [one or two students]

Week 11 – Social Welfare and Globalization

16. Do you think Sinn has given a good answer to the critics of the welfare state? Where do you stand on the issue? [one or two students]

17. Although Betcherman reviews some of the aspects of globalization that threaten the well-being of workers, he also gives some reasons for imagining a more positive outlook if the right policies are adopted. Do you think he has given us more reasons for optimism or pessimism? Explain. [one or two students]