

4999: The first essay assignment

This assignment will be graded out of 10 points, as a quiz.

I need from you a proposed topic for your first essay.

Please convey your thoughts and ideas to me as an attachment to an email. Title your file “4999xxxEssay1topic.” where you replace xxx with your last name. I assume your file will be a WORD file or a PDF file.

In the subject heading of the email put the exact name of your attached file.

Your proposal will be a few pages long, and indicate that you seriously researched your topic. So, I need more than “I want to write about X.” If that is all you say, I have no way of evaluating whether it is an acceptable topic. For example, saying only that you want to write about wolves, abortion, free trade, or gay marriage, will not cut it. Any of these could be the makings of a great or lousy essay depending on how you plan to approach the topic. (see [What your essay should, and should not, achieve](#) for guidance)

Your assignment should include a proposed title for your essay. Something that is enticing and informative.

This assignment should include a list of the articles, book chapters, etc. that you have read or will read, indicating which you have already read with “(R)”. List your references using a standard referencing format. For details on sources and referencing those sources see [Sources, citations, your topic and your background](#)

Make sure your essay indicates that your topic is appropriate for the course.

Before you start writing this assignment, read

[What your essay should, and should not, achieve](#)

on the course web page.

The trickiest part of writing an essay is choosing a topic. You need a topic that is appropriate for this course and that will be interesting for both you and your readers. This is a critical thinking course in the Economics Department; keep this first in your mind: critically approach economics, questioning the assumptions of welfare economics. The topics of the course are ethics (moral philosophy), the basic assumptions of economics, and the environment. This is not an environmental course per se (like Econ 4545 and 4535) so topics that would be outstanding for one of those courses might be unsuitable for this course.

Consider the following example: In econ 4545 one might write how an economist would approach the problem of congestion on the I-70 corridor on ski weekends (there are a lot

of materials on the Econ 4545 web site on this topic). Writing a paper on how an economist would analyze the problem and solve it would be an excellent paper for Econ 4545. Such a paper would not be appropriate for our course. For this course you could write about traffic congestion, but I would need to see how both economists and others (non-economists) would approach the problem and why, including how their solutions would differ. Note that most economists would advocate a toll for using the road at times of high demand, most others would not. Also note that that traffic congestion on I-70 is not one of the great moral issues of our time, but could be an example of something much bigger, that is.

There are two ways to choose a topic: start with a problem or issue (pollution, poverty, health care, lack of clean water, hunting, global warming, etc.) rather than a concept, or start with a concept or assumption and then look for an example to inform your reader about the concept.

If you start with a problem or issue make sure it is fertile for examination from multiple perspectives, raises a significant ethical issue, or questions a basic assumption of economics. If it is not fertile for critical examination, you need a different problem.

Examples of concepts and assumptions are people have well-behaved preferences, paternalism, increasing efficiency is always good, happiness, animal rights, discounting, sustainability, majority voting, rights, natural law, individuals are rational, altruism, religion, preservation, extinction, etc.

If you start with a concept, you need to find an example or application to give the discussion of your concept specificity and interest.

Read

the student essays that I have posted from previous year at

[Interesting and noteworthy student essays](#)

Then go the reading and lecture notes on the course web page at

[Readings and lecture notes available online - by topic](#)

and read everything and anything that you think might relate to your topic.

For example, if your topic has to do with religion, or animal rights, or both, make sure to read the stuff on these topics on the course web page before you turn in a proposed topic.

You might also find relevant readings at

<http://www.colorado.edu/economics/morey/4545/4545home.html>

For example, if you are writing about an externality issue – it is your responsibility to know the economic theory and terminology germane to your topic - you will want to read the lecture notes and readings on the 4545 Environmental web page about market failures and externalities.

The more detail you can give me the better.

You will have discussed your proposed topic with some other students (in our class, or wherever) before you submit it.

Your proposal needs to be well written.

Thanks.

