

Eco 499 presentation assignment

Students are assigned in pairs to a policy debate regarding an aspect of the economics of crime. Immediately before the presentations, each student will randomly be assigned one side of the issue. You must thus prepare to argue both sides. The purpose of this uncertainty is to incentivize you to research both sides strong points, which I believe is essential to a good presentation.

Here are some guidelines:

- Plan on speaking for 10-15 minutes.
- Start by introducing the issue, and explaining what you see as causing reasonable and informed people to disagree.
- Proceed to argue for why your side of the issue is correct. For example, some crime policy debates boil down to one side believing the data say one thing, and the other side being more skeptical. Explain what the argument is for your side of the debate given the data and what if any reason there is to doubt the other side's conclusions.
- A good presentation will acknowledge, refute, or mitigate the other side's best arguments.
- 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. Your goal is to provide reasoned and informed arguments to an audience of people with extensive coursework in economics. Tailor your presentation accordingly.
- After your opponent speaks, I expect you to ask your opponent 2-3 questions. Your questions should be designed to expose the weaker points of your opponent's arguments.
- After you speak, your opponent will ask you 2-3 questions. You should respond appropriately. Keep in mind that every argument has its weak points, so your answers need not be dismissive of the questions, but should say why, on balance, your side is more compelling.
- Collaboration between you and your opponent prior to the debate is encouraged. The point of this assignment is for the presenters and the audience to learn about a wide array of issues, not to score debating points on your opponent. If sharing notes or outlines of your presentation with your opponent will help further this goal, then this is a good thing.
- 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.
- 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.

- 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.

Dates and topics: I have selected 5 dates throughout the semester to dedicate to the debates. As you have all had an opportunity to let me know of scheduling conflicts, I will not alter this schedule, but I am open to your switching with another student. Any student who does not show up to his scheduled presentation time will receive a zero on the assignment. Of course, please let me know if you would like help in getting started with your debate prep or in better understanding a topic.

Wednesday, February 19: Do there exist gun control policies not yet in place that are likely to be effective at reducing crime?

Megan Abell and Jonathan Allen

Wednesday, February 19: Is mandatory minimum sentencing an effective policy that should be continued/expanded?

Carly Baker and Derek Campbell

Wednesday, March 5: Should Kentucky abolish the death penalty?

Anthony Change and Brandon Colley

Wednesday, March 5: Should the “exclusionary rule,” which holds that evidence collected illegally is inadmissible in a trial, be abolished?

Adam Deye and Andrew Durham

Wednesday, March 12: Should Kentucky legalize and regulate prostitution?

Andrew Dwyer and Katie Eichinger

Wednesday, March 12: Should Kentucky legalize marijuana?

Taylor Farris and Chaz Giles

Wednesday, March 26: Does the US imprison too many people?

Aaron Hipsher and Kara Lowery

Wednesday, March 26: Should the US enact an assault weapons ban?

Nelson Mason and Andrew Merkle

Wednesday, April 9: Should the US use monetary fines more intensively as a substitute for prison sentences?

Andrew Satornino and Richard Vidal

Wednesday, April 9: Should “hard” drugs like heroin and meth be treated as a criminal matter or a public health matter?

Hendrik Visser (pick a side, briefly state the merits of the opposite side, and then explain why you believe your side is correct)