

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:

1. Plan on speaking for about 15 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, some crime policy debates boil down to one side believing the data say one thing, and the other side being more skeptical. In this example, you should consider what evidence there is that leads the other side to their conclusions.
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. 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.
7. In the past, some presentations have led to lengthy further discussion. This is welcomed.
8. 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.
9. 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 10 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.

Monday, February 11: Should the US enact an assault weapons ban? Owen Townsend and Joe Kerckmar

Wednesday, February 13: Is mandatory minimum sentencing an effective policy that should be continued/expanded? Matthew Jones and Amanda Goff

Friday, February 15: Should Kentucky abolish the death penalty? Michael Stetson and Sarah Bryant

Monday, March 4: Should the “exclusionary rule,” which holds that evidence collected illegally is inadmissible in a trial, be abolished? Austin Woods and Christopher Collins

Wednesday, March 6: Are Vice President Biden’s gun control recommendations likely to be effective policy, if implemented? Mary Ellen Wimberly and Palapol Teriyaphirom

Friday, March 8: Should Kentucky legalize marijuana? Christopher Jones and William Osborne

Monday, April 1: Does the US imprison too many people? Leslie Sandusky and Catherine McQuerry

Wednesday, April 3: Should prostitution be legalized and regulated? Daniel Gooch and Greg Goldbach

Friday, April 5: Should the US use monetary fines more intensively as a substitute for prison sentences? Xiao Zhang and Casey Lucchese

Monday, April 8: Should “hard” drugs like heroin and meth be treated as a criminal matter or a public health matter? Jeffrey Grover and Miso Kim