

Cameron M. Weber
Application Essay

1. your quality and commitment as a teacher, scholar, and interpreter of the humanities

I am an adjunct, non-tenure track college professor, and teach 5 or 6 courses per year. I began teaching at St. John's University in Queens, NYC eight years ago, when half finished with my dual doctorate in economics and history at the New School for Social Research (Ph.D., 2015). I started teaching, and at St. John's, because it is one of the few universities in the area which offers a course in economic history, and other courses in economics also have a historical component. In Economic History of the Western Community, I teach the classical stadial periods of history (Smith uses stadial history, probably influenced by Turgot though uncited, in *Wealth of Nations*, 1776), especially from feudalism to Smith's commercial era (Marx's capitalism), and the engagement of the Enlightenment with mercantilism and the divine right to rule, with a focus on the rule of law and the rights of man. I use art in my teaching to give context. For example, I use *Analogy of Good and Bad Government* (Lorenzetti 1338-1339) as an entry point to discuss political theory and *Don Quixote* to discuss what the character sees as the (communist: no property rights dividing people) 'golden' age of the hunter-gatherer tribes, pre-history.

I am also a scholar in the history of economic thought (one of my Ph.D. fields) and have contributed regularly in the Summer Institute (SI) for the History of Economic Thought, held at the University of Richmond (VA) for 6 years. Like the "Invisible Bonds" seminar, the scholarly exchange at the SI is immersive, with an open discussion of research which is presented in an extended format. In 2010, we discussed my research on the original "class struggle" as articulated by the French Liberals of the early 19th century (Charles Dunoyer, Charles Comte and Augustin Thierry), who find the state as the exploiter class against 'productive man'. I also show, using archival records, how Karl Marx knew about these writers and 'turned' the original

class struggle into his own. (You can find a video of the presentation and discussion, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGOERDXYdEI>.)

2. *your intellectual interests as they relate to the topic of the seminar or institute*

I am interested in classical liberalism and how this relates to Enlightenment thought. There is indeed an unresolved tension in the Enlightenment between the individual and the collective, between subjective utility as value and the value of the public good. I know from the reading list that your seminar will help me engage further with these ideas. From the writing sample as part of this application (an unpublished part of my dissertation requested by the historian and the sociologist on my dissertation committee) you will see my interest in exploring further the American founders' engagement with Enlightenment ideas, and how this played-out during the Constitutional Convention and ratification period between the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists. Additionally, one of the tenets of the Summer Institute on the History of Economic Thought is 'analytical egalitarianism', where we start with the axiom that individuals are capable of subjective self-determination. It was of course during the evolution of the Enlightenment when the notion of an egalitarian society came to the fore in western thought.

3. *your special perspectives, skills, or experiences that would contribute to the program*

I find (among other, though not all, scholars) that there are inconsistencies in thought in Smith's work from the *Theory* to the *Lectures* to the *Wealth of Nations*. Where we turn from the aesthetic of subjective voluntary exchange as value to one of a labor theory of value, a turn from *laissez-faire* to classifications of 'productive' and 'unproductive' labor, due to Smith's engagement with the Physiocrats in the interim. There are many "Adam Smith Problems", such as did he become less or more *laissez-faire* and why the turn from psychology and the study of human nature to

materialism? Why, if any, the turn in interest from emerged social institutions to directed social institutions? I hope that my insights in the history of economic thought and cultural economics (my second Ph.D. field and research interest) might add value to the seminar. For example, in my dissertation I find that Kant has an egalitarian position on the demand-side for art (we are all capable of the sublime moment and this creates the objective collective from the subjective), but a non-egalitarian position on the supply-side where only (male) genius can create works of art capable of the sublime.

4. *evidence that participation will enhance your long-term teaching and scholarship*

The seminar will give me the space and time to further both expand and refine my understanding of the Enlightenment, and as well as the transition from the Enlightenment into Romanticism and the rise of the nation-state in western society. I emphasize this transition in both my teaching and my research. For example, I believe, like Edmund Phelps (see his “What is Wrong with the West’s Economies”, *New York Review of Books*, August 2015), that the Enlightenment project may have ended with the adaptation into political economy of utilitarian philosophy and the welfare state (a form of elitism?), which has alienated many in the west from the ideal of self-determination, creativity and entrepreneurship (see below on Richard Cantillon). The seminar will also allow me to directly engage with the writings of Montesquieu on the law, I have yet had this opportunity. I have recently published (*Research in the History of Economic Thought and Methodology*, 2017) part of my dissertation on the method of cultural economics, which includes the finding that the research program does not include the analysis of state art-production as creating preferences for an enlarged role for the state in society. I use Ingres’ *Vow of Louis XIII* (1824) as an example as well as the social realism created under the New Deal Federal Art Project.

5. *if appropriate, an independent project and its potential contribution to the seminar or institute.*

I have a project that I would like to pursue prior to and during the seminar. I am interested in the relationship between Smith's *Lectures* of the 1760s and the subsequent *Wealth of Nations*. As stated one of the Smith "problems" is that some scholars believe Smith's materialist orientation in *WN* leads to Marxism and that the *Lectures* are more based on the free-market subjectivity of Richard Cantillon (1680-1734). I have yet to engage with either the *Lectures* or Cantillon directly so seminar participation will allow and motivate this research. Specifically, I will look at differences in Smith's prescriptions for the role of the state between the two. For example, one of the debates in the Adam Smith problem writ-large is that Smith was an apologist for monopolizing manufacturing with England in the nascent global economy. A careful reading of both the *Lectures* and *WN* in relation to Cantillon will help me understand this and contribute to this scholarship as well as contribute to the discussion of Smith (and his precursors and successors) at the seminar.