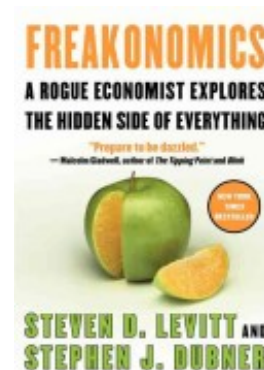


## Summer Reading Assignment Department of History



Dear Majors:

Welcome to I.S.U.'s Department of History. From the outset, you should know that we are majors who read books and then get together to discuss them. Sometimes those books are professional historical monographs, but we also read memoirs, biographies, diaries, and novels. In this case, we are reading a popular economist's challenge to conventional wisdom. This is your first chance to get to know some faculty from the department and get a taste of what your classroom experience will be like.

During Passages '09, specifically on Friday, August 14<sup>th</sup> from 9:45-10:30 a.m., History and History-Social Sciences Education majors (new freshmen and transfer students) will gather in small groups to discuss Levitt and Dubner's Freakonomics. While you are on campus, go by the *Barnes & Noble* store in the Bone Student Center and you may purchase a copy. If you prefer, you may get it at home, off the internet or from your local library as well. We have also included a variety of questions (see below) for you to consider as you read. You should take some notes, as some time might pass between when you read the book and when you meet to discuss it.

For more information about Passages please see: [www.passages.ilstu.edu](http://www.passages.ilstu.edu). Remember to enjoy Levitt's questions as much as his answers. We will see you in August.

—Dr. Gifford



**Look for this logo to help find resources, programs, and services to guide you through yearOne at Illinois State!**

## Questions/Ideas to Consider

As you read, consider what students of history can learn from a variety of sources, even the musings of a “rogue” economist.

--In looking at the Table of Contents, what kind of impression do you get from the chapter titles? Do you already have some basic assumptions about cheating, crime, parenting? Do you expect to find challenges to those assumptions once the evidence is revealed?

--In the introduction, the authors argue, “Morality...represents the way that people would like the world to work—whereas economics represents how it actually does work.” What does this mean? On what five assumptions do the authors base their conclusions? As you are reading consider how those pre-suppositions may affect their analysis.

--In Chapter one the authors talk about incentives, particularly those to cheat or not for Sumo wrestlers and schoolteachers. What produces a cheater and does everybody cheat?

--In Chapter two, the authors note, “Information is a beacon, a cudgel, an olive branch, a deterrent—all depending on who wields it and how.” Given that, what do the KKK and real estate agents have in common?

--In his analysis of drug dealers, Levitt finds that many still live with their mother; so, why sell drugs? Where is the incentive?

--What are the explanations for the dramatic drop in the crime rate in the 1990s? Why, ultimately, according to Levitt does the crime rate drop?

--In analyzing how important parents are to rearing children, what do we learn about correlation and some of the assumptions we seem to have about what parents do?

--So, what is “Freakonomics” and how can it help you this year in college?

Enjoy!

See: [www.provost.ilstu.edu/summerreading/](http://www.provost.ilstu.edu/summerreading/)