



Summer Reading Assignment Department of Politics & Government

Dear Major:

Welcome to Illinois State University. From this point on you will find yourself in a world of expectations. These expectations include reading, thinking, and discussing. Your educational experience is dependent on how you fulfill these expectations. College is unlike High School, in that professors do not give knowledge. They simply turn you in its direction. It will be your responsibility to be an active partner in your education at Illinois State. This program will be the first test of these expectations.

During Passages in August 2009, Political Science majors 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 or you can get it at home or off the internet. We have selected this book, in part, because its author will be on campus in the fall and because everyone should be aware now more than ever that any snapshot offered by experts who rely on data is rarely conclusive. 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.

Enjoy Levitt's questions as much as his answers. We will see you in August.—Prof. Rankin

What is Passages?

Illinois State's Welcome Weekend Program. This program will occur (August 12-16) with the Politics and Government Academic Meeting scheduled for Friday, August 14, 2009 from 9:45-10:30 a.m., this will be where we discuss the *Freakonomics* book. For more information please visit the summer reading website. (<http://www.provost.ilstu.edu/summerreading>)



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 political science 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, and 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 discuss 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?

--What are the consequences of economists demand that there be a strict separation of politics from economics?

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

Enjoy!