

AGST Newsletter

Spring/Summer 2025



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In October 2024, Professor Ben Wubs of Erasmus University Rotterdam conducted the course 'Historical Approaches to Business and Economics A'. As the course title indicates, Professor Wubs lectured us on the history of businesses with a special emphasis on the role of states in economics and enterprises at the invitation of Professor Takafumi Kurosawa. The course is designed for global students, but a wider range of graduate students are welcomed.

Historical Approaches to Business and Economics A

by Dr. Ben Wubs

Erasmus University Rotterdam



We had seven classes, and the themes stretched from the seventeenth century to the present day. As the course covered a broad time frame of 500 years, the professor also introduced various topics. For the earlier periods, he taught us about the rise of large-scale manufacturing like the Venetian naval arsenal and the emergence of multinational enterprises like East India Companies. For more recent time, Professor Wubs also gave an insightful lecture about the arrival of the digital era and the rise of the platform industry, for example.

In addition to the rich content of the course, Professor Wubs always welcomed questions and debates in the classroom. His friendly attitude allowed the students to raise their hands whenever they encountered questions, thus providing a great opportunity for active learning. To give specific examples, we discussed the definition of the 'entrepreneurial state' coined by Mariana Mazzucato, as well as what policies we can expect practically to counter the ever-intensifying issues of climate change and global warming.

As such, 'Historical Approaches to Business and Economics A' was a wonderful course that provided both rich contents of lecture as well as the environment in which the students and the professor could debate openly. Not just as a TA but also as a post-graduate student, I recommend other students to participate in Professor Wubs' courses when the next opportunity arrives.

Shoya Fugetsu

Doctoral student, Graduate School of Economics

Comparative Development Studies B

by Dr. Kees Jansen

Wageningen University

Through instructor-led lectures and short presentations by students, the module opened up spaces to interrogate long-held beliefs concerning humanity's relationship with the more-than-human world. In particular, the (often deleterious) effects on the environment of capitalist growth served as a point of departure in discussions of risk and exposure, and the privileging of certain forms of knowledge over others, and the ways in which power shapes ecological outcomes. Ultimately, the notions of discourse and legitimization—as the example of the global pesticide complex shows—stand out as prime factors mediating conflicts over ecological distribution.

Agrarian political ecology was the central theme around which the first module of the intensive course was arranged. Dr. Kees Jansen from the Rural Sociology Group at Wageningen University & Research in the Netherlands led the discussions. Of primary interest during the module was the utility and relative novelty of the political ecology approach in problematizing and analyzing nature-society dynamics.



Rafael Noel

Doctoral student, Graduate School of Economics

During this autumnal season of 2024, Professor Jonathan P. conducted the first module of the Comparative Development Studies Course. His lecture was focused on social movements and reflections on how to bridge rural and urban divisions, as well as other professional, class, ethnic and gender-related fractures, to collectively coordinate for societal transformations. The course was coordinated by Senior Lecturer Iwashima Fumi and Professor Hisano Shuji, and was attended by twelve (undergraduate, master and doctoral) students. Through this class, we received the opportunity to come across new concepts such as the classes of labour, as well as academic debates centering around the difficulty and sustainability of collective alliances between diverse and overlapping categorizations (agrarian, rural, urban, petty capitalist populations, petty commodity producers...).

To help the students to navigate those notions, a moment of the session was dedicated to responding and discussing the different readings made available before the course, followed by a clarification time delivered by Professor Jonathan. The topics were then further explored through in-class discussions with him and between the students.

Professor Jonathan's extensive fieldwork experiences and the students' inputs on their experiences of their own contexts permitted to decenter the rural-urban divide topic from an academic tendency of Western-focus in debates such as the examination of rural populism positioning "against" urban elites. The course offered materials for reflectivity about farmers', rural, urban and agrarian social mobilizations, examining their fragilities and routes for massification. Other discussions also tackled racialized, gendered experiences of social movements, and how their level of inclusiveness and their capacity to generate encompassing, rallying common objectives have an impact on their longevity within coercive and stratified structures and contexts.

Comparative Development Studies A

by Dr. Jonathan P.

University of East Anglia



The discussion on populist movements in different countries is so animated that it carries onto break time

Professor Jonathan P. has a deep knowledge of his subject and a strong familiarity with a wide range of case studies. But the course was particularly enhanced by his openness to the students' inputs and sometimes contrarian opinions. In addition to being able to navigate issues of class of labour and of urban/rural divide in social mobilizations, the students gained the ability to understand better and position themselves within the academic debates articulated around these concepts. They also received precious new knowledge to better analyse inter-class alliance, which they were able to individually connect and interpret within the scope of their own research interests.

Overall, Professor Jonathan's class has been an important human and academic lesson, in terms of understanding social movements, their weaknesses and strengths in connecting populations with diverse social positioning within power structures such as capitalist and patriarchal systems. This course offered important complementary inputs to the students' knowledge, but also tools for self-reflectivity regarding our own political and societal mobilizations.

Orane Le Saout
Doctoral student, Graduate School of Economics

Sustainable Industry Development

by Mr. Edward Clarence-Smith

This semester, we had the privilege of diving deep into a systematic introduction of Sustainable Industry Development, delivered by Professor Edward Clarence-Smith. With over 40 years' experience working for international organizations, governments, the private sector, and environmental NGOs across the world, He is an expert in the environmental sector and is passionate about circular economies. Together, we explored strategies to shift from linear economies to circular economies that prioritize sustainability, resource efficiency, and waste reduction.



Our intensive course brought together a diverse group of eight passionate learners from six different countries, covering a range of industries and real-world examples and combining global frameworks with localized applications. We began by exploring the core principles of the circular economy, emphasizing the strategies of “narrowing”, “slowing down”, “closing loops” onto every stage of their lifecycle.

Discussions spanned a wide array of industry sectors. We started from agriculture and analyzed how agricultural practices can implement above strategies, such as optimizing input use and turning “unwanted stuff” into “wanted stuff”. We also explored the manufacturing and distribution sector, focusing on the roles that producers, governments and customers should play. With kind guidance and detailed explanation from Professor Ned, we deepened our understanding of the assessment process in a successful implemented circular economy (CE) practice.

Interactive sessions turned to a micro perspective, through which we were encouraged by Professor Ned to apply these CE practices in real-world issues. Potential CE practices of familiar items of motorcycles, plastic packaging, tomatoes and sugar were extensively exploited through a combination of producer autonomy, government regulation and customer awareness. A focus on case study highlighted how re-designing, remanufacturing and reusing/sharing applied in a “business model” can work on circularizing a motorcycle.

We came to a final presentation on how the above three CE strategies—“narrowing”, “slowing down” and “closing loops”—can be applied to four product categories of our interest, such as mobile phones and T-shirts. By choosing a CE “business model”, we showed the major barriers that exist to its implementation and suggested the best policies government should adopt to facilitate a well-functioning business model.

A highlight of this course was the rich exchange of ideas from students representing different countries, which was instrumental in deepening our understanding and creativity. It was further enriched by the thought-provoking insights of Professor Ned, whose expertise and passion guided our discussions.

This course reinforced our collective ability to drive meaningful change through shared knowledge. Thank you to all participants and Professor Ned for your enthusiasm, insights, and guidance. Let's continue to advance the practices of circular economy and work toward a more sustainable future.

Zhang Yimeng
Doctoral student, Graduate School of Economics



AGST Top Global Course

It is a pleasure to announce that one student from the Graduate School of Agriculture and eight students from the Graduate School of Letters completed the AGST Top Global Course, in November 2024 and in March 2025 respectively. This brings the total number of students that have completed the programme to 88 since it was launched in March 2017. More information about this programme can be found [here](#).



I had the opportunity to take the “Special Lecture on Global Issues in Agricultural Science 3,” taught by Jayalath Hemasiri Edirisinghe. The lecture focused on communication in agriculture, and to be honest, my expectations were low at first. I thought it might be a dry, theoretical discussion on communication methods or andragogy—concepts often linked to agricultural extension, particularly when working with older farmers. However, what I encountered in this class surprised me and left a lasting impression.

To my surprise, the lecturer was also a member of Toastmasters International with exceptional communication and speech skills. For those unfamiliar, Toastmasters International is a nonprofit educational organization that operates clubs worldwide to help people develop communication, public speaking, and leadership skills. This completely transformed the dynamics of the class. Instead of focusing on theories, he introduced us to practical techniques, shared his experiences as a Toastmaster, and made the class interactive and engaging.

We didn’t just learn communication theories—we participated in various interesting exercises, such as short impromptu speeches, role-playing activities, and communication games. These exercises taught us not only how to communicate but also how to think critically about how we communicate. I learned that communication isn’t just about the content; how you deliver it is just as important. Every word, gesture, and pause can shape how your message is received.

One of the most important lessons I took from this class is that effective communication comes from speaking with both your mind and your heart. Before delivering a message, it’s essential to take a moment to reflect, think about how to express it clearly and authentically, and consider how the message might leave an impression or affect the people who hear it. Whether addressing farmers, colleagues, or a larger audience, connecting with people requires thoughtfulness, confidence, and sincerity.

By the end of the semester, I realized that communication is much more than simply conveying information—it’s about engaging your audience, delivering your message with purpose, and adapting your style to create genuine connections.

This class was a transformative experience, and I encourage anyone looking to improve their communication skills to seek similar opportunities. Even if you’re not fluent in English, I encourage you to take this class, because communication is not about testing language fluency—it’s about how you connect and express yourself.

Rai Raditya

Master’s student, Graduate School of Agriculture

Global Environmental Sustainability

by Dr. Randy Alan Dahlgren
UC Davis, USA

agriculture consuming 70% of freshwater. He stressed the urgency of groundwater conservation and sustainable water cycling. Shifting to soil health, he emphasized its role in sustaining ecosystems, warning that erosion threatens productivity while pollutants like PFAS compromise soil and water integrity. Food security deeply tied to climate and soil degradation, was exemplified by the stark choice: 232 kg of corn can either fill a 50L car tank with ethanol or feed a child for a year. His discussion of forests highlighted their ecological and cultural importance, from the Japanese practice of Shinrin-yoku (forest bathing) to the inspiring Zai technique pioneered by Yacouba Sawadogo to combat desertification in Africa. Overfishing’s devastation, particularly through bottom trawling, was linked to the Rivet Hypothesis, warning of biodiversity loss leading to ecosystem collapse. He also explored the socio-political dimensions, discussing the Kaya Identity, the Kuznets Curve, and environmental justice, highlighting how marginalized communities bear disproportionate ecological harm despite minimal emissions.

Professor Randy also warned of approaching environmental tipping points, thresholds beyond which ecosystems may irreversibly collapse. He cited climate feedback loops, such as permafrost thawing releasing methane and deforestation reducing carbon sinks, accelerating global warming. The loss of keystone species, declining freshwater reserves, and ocean acidification all signal destabilizing shifts that could push Earth’s systems beyond recovery.

The lecture transcended academic discourse; it was a clarion call for urgent, systemic change. The challenges of climate change, resource depletion, and biodiversity collapse demand collective action and policy innovation. Quoting Thoreau, he left us with a resonant thought: “What’s the use of a fine house if you haven’t got a tolerable planet to put it on?” This reflection reinforced that sustainability is not merely a scientific or political issue, it is an ethical imperative for future generations.

Regina Cantika Dewi Firdaus

Master’s student, Graduate School of Agriculture

Sow, Speak, Grow: The Vital Role of Communication in Agriculture

by Dr. Jayalath Hemasiri Edirisinghe
University of Peradeniya

Attending Professor Randyn Randy A. Dahlgren’s global sustainability lecture in November 2024 was intellectually stimulating and profoundly urgent. His expertise in environmental science, particularly at UC Davis, allowed him to present pressing global ecological challenges.

A focal point of the lecture was the escalating global water crisis, highlighting how rising living standards intensify demand, with

From March 19th – March 26th, I participated in the Joint Heidelberg-Strasbourg Workshop organized by Kyoto University, Heidelberg University and Strasbourg University. It was a pleasure to meet and exchange with fellow students on the Master's Degree in Transcultural Studies program as well as in Japanese Studies.

Heidelberg University and Strasbourg University Workshop Report (2025/3/19-26)



Group photo at the Louise Weiss Building

On the first workshop day, we had diverse presentations, from an exploration of Queer Art, the historical study of the Tokkōtai and knowledge exchanges in the Trillium plant. The breadth of the studies was truly transcultural, in that we were able to explore the topics of migratory species, people and art, and were able to look at how these changes have occurred over time. It was also appreciative to be able to engage in conversations alongside transcultural peers, as well as professors in the program.

On our last day in Strasbourg, we were also able to visit the European Parliament where we could see how the 28 member states engaged in debate and in dialogue as they tackle pertinent issues of the 21st century. While the stakes may not be as high, this reflects some of the academic exchanges that we will continue to have throughout the program, particularly during our colloquium in the coming months. I think both the activities in the European Parliament and at university highlight the significance of dialogue and interacting with peers and fellow members on key academic and societal debates and to have collaborative and reflective discussions on such issues as Inclusion, Equity and Participation, the theme of our workshop.

Between the workshops, we participated in a guided tour of the “Edo Capitale du livre” (Edo Capital of the Book) exposition at the University of Strasbourg with Professor Sandra Schaal of Japanese Studies (28th February – 23rd of March). The exposition itself was a transcultural endeavor, alongside the public lecture some of us attended on “The Birth of Typography, in Europe and the Far East” by Professor Sasaki Takahiro (former Director of the Institute of Oriental Classics at Keiō University). The exposition was supported by artifacts lent from the University Gakushūin in Tokyo, and both events highlighted the longstanding history of the physical migrations of books and artifacts across time and space. Professor Sasaki highlighted how we can identify the migration of typography from Korea to Japan, and how it later spread to Europe by looking at the iconography and visual imagery of the texts. For my research in the Environmental History of the Lake Biwa Canal, I was reminded of the importance of patient archival work in understanding what artifacts can tell us about how and why they have moved between different places.



Public lecture by Professor Takahiro Sasaki



Plenary chamber of the European Parliament

Finally, I greatly enjoyed my time in Strasbourg, itself a trans-migratory space where we could see an eclectic mix of cultures from Germany, France, as well as learning about the Christian and Jewish communities from the Historical Museums. I enjoyed eating Alsatian food, mostly consisting of brewed meat, sauerkraut and potatoes, and was astounded by the magnificence of the Strasbourg Cathedral and the view from above.

I particularly want to thank Professor Bjorn-Öle Kamm and Professor Kiell Ericson for accompanying and supporting us throughout the week-long workshop, and for ensuring we got on our trains on time! I would also like to thank Ms. Yui Nozawa for all of her administrative and logistical support.

Sari Imai
Master's student, Graduate School of Letters