

Amherst College
Department of Economics
Economics 498
Fall 2017

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Office Hours: Tuesday 1-3 & by appointment

ECONOMICS 498

SENIOR DEPARTMENTAL HONORS SEMINAR

The senior departmental honors seminar supports the first half of senior thesis work in economics. In this workshop setting, you will learn research methods, engage with economic research, and develop your own research proposal. You will be asked to engage in thoughtful reading and discussion of your own and others' work. By the end of the semester, you will have developed a thesis proposal that will clearly state your research question, place that question into context, and outline your approach. If all goes according to plan, you will be well into researching your project and will have begun writing your thesis.

Doing research in economics is different from almost anything you've done before. Most surprising is the level of engagement and personal commitment required. You must be ready to self-motivate to spend a lot of time and energy working on your thesis research.

COURSE INFORMATION

Class. We will meet twice weekly, Mondays and Wednesdays from 2:10 to 3:30 in Converse 308. Arrive on time, be prepared, and contribute.

Books. There are two short books for the seminar: *Doing Economics* by Steven Greenlaw, and *Economical Writing* by Deirdre McCloskey. Both can be purchased online. They are also on reserve at Frost Library and available to use in the Economics Computer Lab. I also recommend *A Guide to Econometrics* by Peter Kennedy.

Web. We will use the Moodle site for the course extensively. Check it regularly.

Articles. Some of our reading will be journal articles from the economics literature. These will be distributed in class or online. Mostly you will be reading articles and books of your own choosing in your particular area of inquiry.

Computing. STATA and other software programs are available for use in the Economics Computer Lab and via the Virtual Computing Lab. In addition, information on how to purchase your own copy of STATA is available in the Economics Department Office.

Outside Speakers. The Economics Department will be hosting outside speakers approximately every other week, usually on Thursdays at 4:00. You should attend at least two talks during the semester.

Assignments. There will be a wide range of assignments over the course of the semester. Most are listed on the course schedule below. All assignments must be turned in on time.

Grades. Grades will be based on the work you do on your thesis and in the seminar, including but not limited to: class participation, engagement papers, thesis proposals, thesis presentations, research assignments, in-class activities, and work with your preliminary advisor.

COURSE GOALS

The first goal of the thesis seminar is to develop a thesis topic and proposal. You will produce versions of your thesis proposal on multiple occasions. Everyone will read all of the proposals, and we will spend class time presenting and discussing them. You will discuss your work with faculty, your preliminary advisor, your peers, and Prof. Reyes. The proposal should be carefully crafted to be a clear expression of your topic and what you plan to do. Towards the end of the semester you will present your proposed thesis project to the entire Economics Department.

The second goal of the thesis seminar is to foster the development of the skills necessary to do research in economics. These skills include: formulating a sound research question, designing a solid project, researching the literature, reading papers, developing theory, analyzing data, and conveying ideas clearly. These skills are not easy to learn, but you can make a lot of progress if you dedicate yourself to this endeavor. Actually doing research is the best way to learn. Motivation, dedication, and curiosity are essential.

The third goal, in furtherance of the above two goals, is to develop a strong community of researchers. While independent research is indeed independent, we can learn a great deal from each other. We all thrive if we support each other in our work.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS AND RESOURCES

As discussed above, many of the skills required to do economic research are best learned by doing. There are, however, books and other resources that can be of great use. I list some of the best of these below. Most are available for your use in the Economics Department Computer Lab.

Amherst College Library Resources for Economics ** *Maintained by Social Science Librarian Dawn Cadogan.*

<https://www.amherst.edu/library/find/researchguides/ECON>

<https://www.amherst.edu/library/find/courseguides/1718F/ECON-498>

Greenlaw, Steven A. 2009. *Doing Economics: A Guide to Understanding and Carrying Out Economic Research*. Houghton Mifflin. *** *An excellent resource that you should read in its entirety.*

McCloskey, Deirdre. 1999. *Economical Writing, 2nd edition*. Waveland Press. ** *Valuable reading.*

Kennedy, Peter. 2003. *A Guide to Econometrics, 5th edition*. MIT Press. ** *Very valuable for empirical work.*

Acock, Alan. 2014. *A Gentle Introduction to STATA*. STATA Press. ** *Very valuable for empirical work.*

Angrist, Joshua & Jörn-Steffen Pischke. 2014. *Mastering 'Metrics*. Princeton University Press.

Angrist, Joshua & Jörn-Steffen Pischke. 2009. *Mostly Harmless Econometrics*. Princeton University Press.

Few, Stephen. 2012. *Show Me the Numbers*. Analytics Press.

Miller, Jane E. 2004. *The Chicago Guide to Writing about Numbers*. University of Chicago Press.

Thomson, William. 2001. *A Guide for the Young Economist*. MIT Press.

Tufte, Edward R. 2001. *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information, 2nd edition*. Graphics Press.

Wyrick, Thomas L. 2005. *The Economist's Handbook: A Research and Writing Guide*. Thomson.

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COURSE SCHEDULE

<i>Part 1: Starting Out</i>			
<i>Week</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Class Material</i>	<i>Assignments for this class</i>
1	Wed 9/6	Introduction Beginning the Process - Overview of the research process - Discuss proposals, summer reading & prep - How to develop a project - How to read a paper	Preliminary Thesis Proposal due Monday 9/4 at 5pm on dept website Read: Summer Reading due Wednesday 9/6 in class
2	Mon 9/11	Topics – Discuss	Read: <u>all</u> of the thesis proposals. (complete PDF will be posted on Moodle) Read: <i>Greenlaw</i> Chapters 1 and 2 Prepare: C+Q (compliment + question)
2	Wed 9/13	Topics and Proposals - How to develop a project - How to write a proposal - Discuss topics - Match with faculty	Read: <i>Greenlaw</i> Chapters 3 and 6 <i>Meet with faculty this week, discuss proposal, plan reading of 5-10 initial articles.</i>
3	Mon 9/18	Library Research in Economics with Dawn Cadogan (Frost Library) - Research strategies, finding articles, developing a bibliography, reviewing the literature, finding data.	Preliminary literature review (3-5 articles) due Monday 9/18 at start of class <i>Read articles.</i>
3	Wed 9/20	Writing Workshop	Read: <i>Greenlaw</i> Chapters 4 and 5 Read: <i>Greenlaw</i> , Chapter 8 Full bibliography (10-20 articles) due Wednesday 9/20 at start of class

Part 2: Proposals

<i>Week</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Class Material</i>	<i>Assignments for this class</i>
4	Mon 9/25	Proposal Version 1 Topics – Discuss	Thesis Proposal: 1 st version due Sunday 9/24 at 5 pm on Moodle Read: <u>all</u> of the thesis proposals (PDF will be posted on Moodle by Sunday 8 pm) Prepare: C+Q (compliment + question)
4	Wed 9/27	Topics – Discuss	<i>Meet with: preliminary advisor, peers, and Prof. Reyes. Read articles, revise proposal.</i>

Part 3: Developing Research Skills

<i>Week</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Class Material</i>	<i>Assignments for this class</i>
5	Mon 10/2	(No Class)	<i>Work with preliminary advisor: meet weekly, read articles, refine proposal. Prepare draft of literature review.</i>
5	Wed 10/4	Reading Economic Literature Presenting Economic Research	Read: <i>Greenlaw</i> Chapters 6 and 7 Read: <i>Greenlaw</i> Chapter 12
6	Mon 10/9	(No Class – Fall Break)	<i>Discuss literature review with preliminary advisor this week. Revise accordingly.</i>
6	Wed 10/11	Article Discussion & Presentation	Presentation Handout or Response Paper due Wednesday 10/11 at 9 am
7	Mon 10/16	Article Discussion & Presentation	Presentation Handout or Response Paper due Monday 10/16 at 9 am
7	Wed 10/18	Empirical Analysis - overview of and intro to analyzing data - STATA tutorial - begin empirical project in computer lab	Literature review due Wednesday 10/18 in class Read: <i>Greenlaw</i> , Chapters 8, 9, 10, 11 Work through <i>A Gentle Introduction to Stata</i> as appropriate.
8	Mon 10/23	Empirical Analysis - discuss empirical data issues - continue empirical project in computer lab	Prepare project plan. (Map out empirical/theoretical analysis project. Find and organize data for empirical project.) due Monday 10/23 at start of class

Part 4: Refining the Proposals

Week	Date	Class Material	Assignments for this class
8	Wed 10/25	General Discussion	<i>Discuss revisions of proposal with class, preliminary advisor, and Prof. Reyes.</i>
9	Mon 10/30	Public Speaking Workshop	Thesis Proposal: 2 nd version due Sunday 10/29 at 5pm on Moodle
9	Wed 11/1	Topics – Discuss	Read: <u>all</u> of the thesis proposals Prepare: C+Q (compliment + question) <i>Work with preliminary advisor: meet weekly, read further, write sections, refine proposal.</i>
10	Mon 11/6	Topics – Discuss	<i>Meet with peers to discuss proposals.</i> Empirical or Theoretical Project due Tuesday 11/7 at noon
10	Wed 11/8	Empirical & Theoretical Analysis - discuss empirical/theoretical projects	<i>Work with preliminary advisor: finalize proposal, incorporate project, prepare presentation.</i>
11	Mon 11/13	(No Class)	<i>Discuss revisions of proposal with class, preliminary advisor, and Prof. Reyes.</i>
11	Wed 11/15	Empirical & Theoretical Analysis - discuss empirical/theoretical projects	

Part 5: Final Thesis Proposals and Presentations

Week	Date	Class Material	Assignments for this class
12	Mon 11/27	Proposal Version 3 Topics – Discuss	Thesis Proposal: 3 rd version (final!) due Sunday 11/26 at 5pm on Moodle (also bring paper copy to class) Prepare presentation and slides. draft due Monday 11/27 in class
12	Wed 11/29	Practice Presentations	Read: <u>all</u> of the thesis proposals Prepare: C+Q (compliment + question) Prepare presentation and slides. Practice! final due Wednesday 11/29 in class
12	Thurs 11/30	<u>Presentations: Thurs 3:30 to 6:30</u>	<i>Meet with peers to practice presentations.</i>
13	Mon 12/4	(No Class)	<i>Meet with preliminary advisor re next steps. Plan Interterm. Prepare Agenda.</i>
13	Wed 12/6	Discussion of Presentations & Comments	Thesis Outline and Work Agenda (Dec-Apr) due in Wednesday 12/6 in class
14	Mon 12/11	Wrap up, Next Steps	