Research Methods in Economics for M.A. Students
ECON 6209

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University of Colorado

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Administrative Details:

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Course Materials:


Also of interest:

Course Objectives (abbreviated):

The ultimate purpose of this course is to help you develop an idea into an M.A. Thesis that, in turn, will be publishable as an article or monograph. It is, of course, difficult to teach "creativity," but much of what seems like a creative endeavor is merely following practical rules of research conduct.

Topical Outline of the Course:

I. Introduction, Overview, and Thinking About a Thesis Topic
   Phil Graves, "Publish or Perish: A Student Guide" (handout)
   Maier, "Introduction"

II. Scientific Methods and Research Methodology in Economics
   Ethridge, Chapters 1-4

III. Writing Economics
   A. Writing Methods and Practices
   B. Economic Content of Published Research
IV. Thesis Topic Workshop

V. Access to Existing Research Knowledge and Methods
   A. Locating Economic Data
      Maier, The Data Game
   B. Transforming Economic Data

VI. Critical Evaluations of Economic Research
   A. Characteristics and Examples of Effective Research
      Members of the faculty will present research papers to the class that they
      feel are particularly good examples of economic research. Those examples will
      focus on and critique methodology and uses of theory and empirical methods in
      economics.
   B. Critical Review of Economic Literature
      Students will write and present a brief critical review of the literature
      related to the topic of their research proposal.

VII. Problems and Strategies in Economic Research
   A. Rules
   B. Conducting Research and Preparing a Proposal
   C. Presentation and Class Critique of Research Proposals
      Each student will present his or her research proposal to the class. These
      presentations may build upon earlier presentations of each student if appropriate.
      The resulting discussion and peer critique will help each student progress toward
      a viable Master’s thesis project for the following semester.

Graded Assignments:
   A. Research Proposal: Students will develop a research proposal that shows an
      understanding of economic methodology and develops an interesting research hypothesis and plan
      of investigation. This proposal will need to be thoroughly researched and differentiated from
      current literature. (80% of grade)
   B. Critical Reviews: Students will write three short critical review papers. One will be
      a literature review that later will be merged into the research proposal. The other two will be
      seminar summaries—writ-ups of two of the various seminars from the Department’s seminar
      series this Fall. (20% of grade)
Economics M.A. Thesis Proposal Checklist

1. Time Frame and Rules
   A. Make sure you know deadlines and are prepared to meet them.
   B. Keep appraised of the Graduate School rules on form, style, etc.

2. Committee
   A. Work closely with a chair/major advisor on topic and proposal.
   B. Don’t worry too much about a committee, unless there is some secondary faculty member whose input is also of primary importance.
   C. Your advisor will help with suggestions about filling out the committee.

3. Thesis objectives
   A. Do interesting work: You should be aiming to ask a question that others will find of interest. Start from your knowledge of the literature. Try to juxtapose different elements of the literature, apply a different type of empirical technique (e.g., experimental, survey, time series, etc.) to a more traditional problem, employ some novel data set.
   B. Plan for publication: This gives you your own standard to meet, something to be proud of and a role model.
   C. Get it written, don’t get it right: Make sure you continue to make progress.

4. Proposal outline
   A. Introduction: Make sure your topic is well explained and understood by your prospective readers.
   B. Literature: Discuss what has already been discovered in this area, with constant references (either for yourself or your readers) to how it relates to your thesis.
   C. Economic analysis: This is the formal development of your hypotheses. You need to explain not only what you are setting out to demonstrate, but how you arrived there.
   D. Empirical analysis: For the proposal, you need to relate the methods, the tests and the data that you will depend upon in the final work.
   E. Concluding remarks: My advice is to generate concluding remarks, not a "conclusion". Such a section in the final thesis allows you to say where you might go next with the problem, what went right and wrong, and discuss the general tenor of the results from potentially different perspectives than the basic one taken in the thesis.