

Econ 4309 – Honors Seminar I

Course Information

Course Meets 08/24/2004 - 12/09/2004

Tuesdays, 3:30pm – 6:00pm, Room: Econ 5

No Class: Tue, Nov 23 (Thanksgiving week)

Course Website: www.colorado.edu/Economics/courses/mobarak

Prerequisites: Course Enrollment by Permission of Economics Honors Program Only.
If you have not taken Econometrics, it is highly recommended that you enroll in that course now.

For Drop/Add Deadlines, see the course schedule.

Instructor Information

Professor: A. Mushfiq Mobarak, Assistant Professor, Department of Economics

Office: Economics Building, Room 14B

Phone: 303-492-8872 (office)

Email: mobarak@spot.colorado.edu (preferred method of contact)

Office Hours: Tue 2:15 pm – 3:15 pm; Thurs 1:30-2:30 pm

Recommended Texts

J. Wooldridge, *Introductory Econometrics: A Modern Approach 2e*, Thompson Southwestern Press, 2003. isbn: 0-324-11364-1.

(You can substitute the above with your favorite Econometrics reference text)

Deirdre N. McCloskey, *Economical Writing*, 2nd edition, Waveland Press, May 1999 (\$10.95 on Amazon.com)

Course Objectives & Description

The ostensible purpose of this course is to provide you some guidance to help you successfully write an honors thesis in Economics. More broadly, this course will help you conduct original research in Economics. Another purpose of this course is to ensure that you are making adequate and timely progress towards a final thesis, to be submitted and defended by mid-April 2005.

For those of you graduating at the end of Spring 2005, you have about 30 weeks from the first day of this class to complete an honors thesis project. This sets a tall order. In these 30 weeks, you will have to undertake 10 major tasks, roughly in the following order.

1. **Topic Area:** Identify a topic area in which you would like to work.
2. **Advisor:** Identify a faculty advisor who is willing to guide you one-on-one.
3. **Economics Research:** Understand what constitutes research in Economics, and what a successful honors thesis should look like.
4. **Hypothesis:** Identify a research question that you would like to address. This research question has to be both interesting and answerable.

5. **Literature Review:** Read the economics literature and possibly the literature in other social and natural sciences that speaks to your research question. Ensure that the research question you have chosen has not been answered by someone else already. Write a literature review which will become one component of your thesis.
6. **Data Collection:** Figure out what tools you would require in order to answer your research question. What kind of data do you need? Where can you get that data? Are databases available or do you have to collect data yourself? Remember, most honors theses contain an empirical component.
7. **Data Analysis:** Attain the required skills to analyze the data. This may involve learning econometrics and regression analysis. It may involve learning a software program such as SAS or Stata that can handle your data.
8. **Presentation/Feedback:** Figure out how to present your results. Using tables? Figures? Present your results to your faculty advisor, and to your peers in class. Make changes based on their comments.
9. **Final Product:** Write the thesis. Put together your literature review, data descriptions, data analysis, tables & figures, and write an introduction and a concluding section. Circulate, get comments, make changes.
10. **Defense:** Choose a 3-member committee. Your faculty advisor and either Ann Carlos or I will be on the committee. You have to ask a faculty member from another department to serve on the committee. Make a 20-minute presentation of your work, and be prepared to answer questions from the committee.

The goal of this course is to get you as far along as possible in the 10-step process outlined above. The second semester honors course will take you the rest of the way. By the end of this semester, ‘adequate progress’ would require that you are somewhere between step 6 and step 7. Even if you have a research question identified, but have no idea in mid-December where the data will come from, you will have made your life in the spring extremely difficult.

Assignments and Grading

During the course of the semester, you will be asked to complete a series of assignments and make presentations in class. Your course grade will be based on completing assignments in a timely fashion, and on the quality of your presentations. Some of the assignments are easy (such as steps 1 and 2 above – identifying a topic area and an advisor) whereas others (e.g. writing a literature review) will be more time-consuming. To get a passing grade for the course, you have to turn in a research proposal towards the end of the semester. Ideally, the research proposal will incorporate your testable hypothesis (the research question), a description of your approach to answering the research question including data description, and your literature review.

I will also take note of your class participation (e.g. providing comments to others during their in-class presentations) in determining your final grade.

The first major assignment will require you to team up with one of your classmates, and do a comprehensive review of one research topic area in economics. The “Symposium” section of a recent issue of the *Journal of Economic Perspectives* (available at Norlin

library, and some issues available online) is good fodder for identifying a research area. You have to read the published papers in the JEP, and read one of the key contributions in the field that those papers reference, and write a summary report on economists' thinking in that area and where research on the topic stands. In addition, you will have to present your findings verbally in class. Some examples of Symposium topics from the JEP are "Africa's Growth Tragedy," "Women in the Labor Market," "The Economics of Voting," and "Computers and Productivity." The purpose of this assignment is to help you understand what research in economics constitutes, and for you to read some research in an area relevant to your own thesis.

The assignments after this one will focus more on your own research topic. We will discuss the structure of those assignments and presentations at greater length in class.

Policies

You are required to attend all classes. If you need to miss class, you have to send me an email outlining the reason. You can only miss assignments for reasons that qualify as an 'emergency'. You are required to submit proof of the emergency. If you miss an assignment for any reason that does not qualify as a proven emergency, you get a zero.

University Policies

Students with disabilities who qualify for academic accommodations must provide a letter from Disability Services (DS) and discuss specific needs with the professor, preferably during the first two weeks of class. DS determines accommodations based on documented disabilities (303-492-8671, Willard 322, www.colorado.edu/sacs/disabilityservices

We will make reasonable accommodations for students who have conflicts between religious observance dates and course examinations or assignments. Please talk to me at the beginning of the semester, if you think you may require such accommodation. For university policies on this and on other things such as classroom behavior, see www.colorado.edu/policies/index.html.

For the university honor code, see www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode/
Plagiarism is not allowed. This means that you cannot copy anyone else's work and pass it off as your own. Each person must turn in assignments that are the fruit of his/her own sincere efforts.