

Syllabus

Economics 4309

Undergraduate Honors Seminar I

Fall 2006

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Location: Economics 5
Meeting Times: Tuesday 3:30 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.
Office Hours: Tuesday 2 p.m. - 3:30 p.m. and by appointment

Course Books:

Economical Writing, Deirdre N. McCloskey (required)
Doing Economics, Steven A. Greenlaw (required)
The Elements of Style, William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White (highly recommended)

Course Objectives: This course is intended to help you conduct original research in economics. In particular, we need to get you working on your undergraduate honors thesis. To put things in perspective, you have a little over thirty weeks to finish your thesis for spring graduation. In order to write a respectable honors thesis without driving yourself over the edge, you must have a carefully conceived research topic and methodological approach by semester's end. Our primary goal is to get you to this point. To this end, you will turn in a research proposal that will form the basis of your undergraduate honors thesis. You will also present your research proposal to the class. Since scholarship is a community endeavor, we will all strive to create an atmosphere of communication in the class that will allow you to help each other through the process. The final process is two-fold. First, you have to come up with the good research question and plan of action. Second, you have to communicate this question and plan to the class and convince us that what you are doing is worthwhile. Although I will assign you a grade in the course, your real test will be with the colleagues sitting next to you. I firmly believe that if you can convince your colleagues of the merit of your project, you will succeed in writing a good thesis.

I have so far focused on the end, the final goals of the class. Along the way we have to think about what exactly constitutes good (and bad) research in economics. There are many factors that determine whether a research project is a success. To name a few we have the basic research

question, the scholarship behind the question, the methodological approach, the limits of inference, and the effectiveness of communication. The class will consider all of these elements as well as others.

Course Components

(1) **Research Readings and Discussions-** We will begin by reading and analyzing research papers from economics. In analyzing these papers, we will focus on the elements of research. For each paper, you will have to write up a brief summary of the paper. The summaries will generally be due on the day of discussion. In addition to getting you to focus on the elements of research, these exercises are intended to help you think critically about research.

(2) **Research Readings and Discussions, Your Field-** Following up on a few classics, you will choose some papers in your area of research interest that will serve as the focus of our discussion and analysis. These papers can be either published or unpublished work. In order to sharpen your communication skills, you will be required to make class presentations at the beginning of the discussion session.

(3) **Research Proposal Development Exercises-** In order to ensure a continuous process through completion of your research proposal, you will complete three development exercises leading up to your final research proposal. Exercise 1 will require you to conduct a literature review for your area of interest. You will write a paper and make a class presentation of the literature review. Exercise 2 requires you to provide present a research question. In this case you will write a short paper and we will discuss in class. In presenting your research question, you will need to focus on placing the research question in the context of the literature and defending the question itself. Exercise 3 requires you to identify the methodology that you will use for answering your research question. Here you will write a paper and we will discuss in class.

(4) **Research Proposal Presentation-** You will present your finished research proposal to the class and to your advisor. The presentation will provide you the final semester's feedback from your colleagues and your advisor. In addition to delivering on the substance, you will want to focus on form. The final presentation is designed to serve as a warm up for you spring thesis defense.

(5) **Research Proposal-** It is no accident that the development exercises form the basic building blocks of your research proposal. At this point I expect you to deliver a highly polished written research proposal.

Evaluative Criteria: In order to earn a passing grade in the course, you must complete and turn in your research proposal by the last day of class. There will be no exceptions to this requirement. The course grade will be determined by (1) your written work, (2) your presentations, and (3) your participation in the course. Evaluation of written work will be based on content, organization, and execution. Written work for the exercises will be due at the time of presentation with the exception of the final paper. Evaluation of presentations will be based on how well you communicate your work *in the allotted time*. It is imperative that students help one another through the research process. One observable way of helping is to

provide constructive comments during presentations and discussions. All students will begin the semester with zero participation points. Points will be earned by providing helpful comments throughout the semester.

Faculty/Student Consultation: For each research exercise, grades will be assigned in the week following the last exercise presentation. Students will be kept abreast of their course progress through written communication and consultation with the professor.

Odds & Ends: While much of the course revolves around formal presentations, we need to strive to maintain a workshop atmosphere. There is enormous collective knowledge within our workshop group. In order to facilitate the exchange of ideas and suggestions, ample discussion time is built into the schedule. Attendance is mandatory for all scheduled classes.

Special Accommodations Policy

If you have specific physical, psychiatric, or learning disabilities and require accommodations, please let me know early in the semester so that your learning needs may be appropriately met. You will need to provide documentation of your disability to the Disability Services Office in Willard 322 (phone 303-492-8671).

Important Class Dates

August 28: First Day of This Class

November 18-26: Off for Thanksgiving Break

December 12: Last Meeting Day for This Class