

Economics Research Methods Workshop

ECON 8219

Spring 2010 TR 12:30-1:45, Econ 5

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Objectives

This second semester research colloquium is for students working on their third-year papers to discuss and present their ongoing work. In this course, you will be asked to produce a completed research paper or a polished research proposal. As you do so, you will also be asked to communicate your research findings in a concise, clear, and convincing fashion; to keep working on drafts of your paper and presentation slides until they are polished and free of obvious errors; and to develop an ability to formulate critical questions. To this end, the course is run as a series of presentations in which you present increasingly complete drafts of your paper, while continuing to be active in responding and thinking about the ongoing research of others.

Each student should, it is hoped, have a project by April or May that is ready to be defended as your oral comprehensive exam. Students who pass the exam are formally admitted to candidacy. Ideally, this paper will also serve as a substantial chapter of your thesis. By using the third-year paper to fulfill the oral exam requirement of the graduate program, you will thus also have made significant progress towards the completion of your thesis.

Course Requirements

1. You will make a series of presentations of your own paper and have short assignments. Attendance at all presentations of other students is mandatory. To facilitate class participation, you should send your paper and presentation slides to the class one day before your scheduled presentation. (You may continue to make changes to your slides if needed.)
2. Participation in departmental research seminars.
3. A course paper, including an abstract and references, due on the day of your final course presentation.

Departmental Research Seminars

There will be a number of departmental research seminars on the schedule this semester. Some of these seminars will be given by Ph.D. students presenting a paper out of their dissertation. This is your chance to sit in the audience and consider what a job market paper and presentation looks like.

Observing economics seminars will also help when it comes to writing and presenting your own work. For this course, I would like you to attend weekly seminars, but am asking that you provide a written response to just *six* seminars. For this short assignment, turn in a written response to the seminar (a couple of paragraphs, not more than 1 typed page). Do not bother summarizing the detailed substance of the paper. Instead, the goal is for you to think about what constitutes a compelling paper and a good presentation—the two are not always the same. Here are some possible aspects to consider:

- Of all the questions from the audience, which were among the best questions, and why?
Your answer may include a question that you asked the speaker yourself.
- What was the most compelling aspect of the paper and presentation, and why?
- What was the weakest aspect of the paper and presentation, and why?
- What lessons, if any did you draw from observing the style of the speaker and the way in which the presentation slides were organized?
- Did the speaker defend his paper successfully, in your opinion? If you were presenting this paper, what would you have done or said differently?
- Compare this paper and presentation to the previous ones you have seen. What did you like, what did you not like?
- Anything else that strikes you as important.

Tentative Schedule

January 12. Introduction to Research Methods II.

January 14. Topic: What is the “Introduction” to a paper.

January 19. No class.

January 21 - February 16. In the first round presentation, you present your paper from the introduction to the review of the literature section. If you are writing a theoretical paper, use the time to motivate your paper with examples and anecdotes of empirical relevance. At this point, your topic, or the “question” you are asking in the paper should be clearly stated. Those who are not presenting are required to read the paper and have prepared at least three thought-out questions that you would be prepared to ask (please write them out before or during class). The format of these presentations will be the “workshop style”, i.e. you jump in with your question at what you judge to be an appropriate moment. There will be one or two presenters scheduled for each class.

February 18. Topic: What to include in the “Data” section of an empirical paper. This class is optional for those writing theory papers, but may be useful to you if you intend to deal with data in a later paper.

February 23 - March 18. In your second round presentation, you briefly summarize your topic introduction and focus your presentation on your data sources, present descriptive statistics and any results obtained thus far from work-in-progress. Those presenting a theoretical paper should discuss new aspects of their model not covered in your previous presentation. Those not presenting should think about questions for the presenters (please write them out).

March 23-27 (Mon-Fri). Spring Break.

March 30. Regroup, no presentations.

April 6-April 22. In the third round presentation, you will present the results from your paper as they stand at this point. There will be two presenters scheduled for each class day. Those presenting should send their papers to the class at least one day (24 hours) ahead of the presentation. Those not presenting should think about questions for the presenters. Again, write them out.

April 27-May 7. No class. Final presentations. Your main advisors will be asked to be present at this final presentation whether or not you are taking your comprehensive exam this semester.

Comprehensive Examination

The exam is a one hour long presentation that is based on your third-year paper. Your final presentation in ECON 8219 can serve to fulfill this requirement. (**Note:** even if your advisors think you are not yet ready for your comprehensive exam, you still have to make a final presentation in ECON 8219.) You are strongly advised to complete the comprehensive requirement in the Spring semester of your 3rd year so that you can move on to the other papers in your dissertation. This is only one of several papers that you will have to write for your dissertation!

At least three faculty members must be present at the exam. Typically, this committee will include your primary and secondary advisors.

The written paper (i.e., your 3rd year paper) including references and all results, must be circulated to the comprehensive examiners two weeks prior to your presentation.

You can expect the format of your presentation to be similar to that of a typical economics seminar, where you may be interrupted with questions as you speak. Examiners may raise any issue that they wish, but generally, the questions and comments will be relevant to your research paper topic.

Course Grade

Grading will be determined by the quality of your course paper, with overall weight given to your final presentation and paper. Your class participation, the thoroughness of your responses to the presentations of others in class as well as in departmental seminars is also part of the course grade. For the shorter assignments grading will be based on a scale from 0 to 2. (0 for not handing in the assignment, 1 for minimal effort, 2 for a thoughtful response)

Class participation & shorter assignments	30%
Class participation (15%)	
Department seminar assignments (15%)	
Presentations and paper	70%