

ECON 5200: Research Seminar for Masters' Students
2018/2019 Winter Course Syllabus

Class: Tuesday and Thursday; 13:05-14:25; McCain 1130

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Office hours: Thursday 11:35-12:55 or by appointment

Course Description

The course is organized around: [1] familiarizing students with the diversity and technical methodology of modern research papers in economics and [2] drafting and presenting a prospectus for an original research paper of their own. Students are also all expected to attend the Economics Department Seminar, which is held each Friday. Since the discussion of research projects is a major part of the learning process in this class, all students are expected to attend all classes.

Learning Objectives

The general objectives of this seminar are:

- [1] to introduce students to modern research methods in economics;
- [2] to develop written and verbal presentation skills and
- [3] to initiate the thesis, or extended essay, research of seminar participants.

Evaluation

Each student is responsible for:

- [a] presenting two recent research papers (see **A** below) and commenting on the presentations of another students (see **A1** below);
- [b] presenting a prospectus for an original research paper of their own (see **B** below) and commenting on the presentations of another students (see **B1** below);
- [c] providing a written (approximately 1,000 word) discussion and critique of a departmental seminar or a major paper(s).

The evaluation for the course will involve the following components.

- [a] your class presentations of **two** recent research papers (20% each); [b] your discussion comments of another **two** students' presentations (5% each time); [c] your class presentation of your own idea for an original research paper (25%); [d] your discussion comments of two other students' "original paper" presentations (5% each time); [e] your written summary and critique of a departmental seminar or a major paper(s) (15%).

Letter Grades correspond to Number Grades as follows:

A+ 90-100% B+ 77-79% F 0-69% A 85-89% B 73-76% A- 80-84% B- 70-72

A: Examples of Recent Research in Economics

Your first two assignments are to summarize and critique a recent Working Paper in economics from the recent research literature. Possible sources include the Working Paper series of any of the major academic departments or the NBER at <http://www.nber.org/papers.html> or CES-IFO <http://www.cesifo-group.de/ifoHome/publications/working-papers/CESifoWP.html> or Statistics Canada or the [Policy Research Working Paper](#) or [Poverty & Social Policy Working Paper](#) series of the World Bank or the Bank of Canada http://www.bankofcanada.ca/research/browse/?content_type%5B%5D=31

There are many, many others – if in doubt, just check with me.

When you present your summary of a recent research paper, it is your responsibility to provide a copy (electronic or paper) of that paper to me and to other members of the class at least a week before your presentation. On the Thursday before your presentation, you will meet with me in my office to present a ‘dry run’ of your seminar – this gives you time for revision of your presentation. Copies of your revised PowerPoint slides should be emailed to all seminar participants by noon of the day of your presentation. Your discussants are expected to lead the discussion and to send their written comments to all members of the class and to me by 6 PM of the Thursday following your presentation. You should take those comments into account and submit your written summary by the Monday afternoon following the presentation – it will normally be a bit more than 1,000 words in length.

Your summary and critique of the Working Paper you select should answer the following questions:

1. What is the core question which the paper is trying to answer?
2. What does the economics literature now have to say about this question?
 - a. What hypothesis or hypotheses does economic theory (or theories) suggest?
 - b. What specific empirical prediction(s) does economic theory (or theories) make?
 - c. Why does it matter? Who cares about this research question? Why should anyone care?
3. What methodology does the paper use to attempt to answer the core question?
What are the strengths and weaknesses of this methodology – in general, and in the specific context of this paper?
4. What are the main results? What contribution has this paper made?
 - a. How empirically significant are the results?
 - b. How firmly can they be believed?
 - c. What impact might these results have on economic understanding or public policy?
5. What are **two (2)** new questions for further research which reading this paper suggests to you?

A1: Discussant Comments

For each paper presented, a discussant will also be responsible for leading the class discussion of the paper, writing a 500 word summary evaluation of the working paper, articulating a possible new research question suggested by the paper, and suggesting a methodology for answering that question.

The ability to give, and receive, constructive criticism is one of the more important practical skills in life. In your comments you should ask: did the presentation accurately answer questions 1 to 4 above? If you think you would have answered questions 1 to 4 a bit differently, what would your answer have been? If part of the presentation was unclear, how could the form and the content of the presentation have been improved? Your comments should be worded clearly, yet tactfully – the objective is to help your colleague write a better summary

and analysis. Feel free to comment on the general area of the literature from which this example paper is drawn. Be sure to include one (1) new idea of a question for further research suggested by reading this paper.

B: Your own idea for an original economics research paper

I will meet students individually in my office on Thursday to discuss their ideas for a research paper.

In past years, students have often used their analyses/replication of recent working papers as the first stage of their independent selection of a research topic, but this is certainly not required. Regardless of how you select your topic, your responsibility is to present a possible research project which you might personally be interested in undertaking in partial fulfilment of your degree requirements at Dalhousie University by making a class presentation of your research idea and writing a 1,000 word outline.

Before your presentation, you will meet with me in my office to present a ‘dry run’ of your seminar – this gives you the weekend for revision of the presentation. Copies of your revised PowerPoint slides should be emailed to all class participants by the morning of your presentation. Your discussants are expected to send their written comments to all members of the class and to me by 6 PM of the Thursday following your presentation. You should take those comments into account and submit your written summary to me by the Monday afternoon following the presentation – it will normally be a bit more than 1,000 words in length.

In your outline of this possible research topic, you should address the following issues:

1. What is the core question which your paper will try to answer?
2. What does the economics literature now have to say about this general topic?
 - a) What hypothesis or hypotheses does economic theory suggest?
 - b) What empirical prediction(s) does theory make?
 - c) What is the current state of empirical knowledge?
3. How will your paper attempt to answer your core question?
 - a) What hypotheses are suggested by theory?
 - b) How will you test them? – Specifically:
 - i. What specific econometric methodology will you use?
 - ii. Which data sources and which variables will you use? {NOTE: **Be Exact!**}
 - c) Who cares? Who should be interested in your research results? Why?
4. Outline a possible schedule of the sequence of tasks necessary to complete this research project.
5. What problems do you now anticipate as possible impediments? How do you anticipate dealing with them?

B1: Comments on Presentation of an idea for an original economics research paper

In your comments you should ask: did the presentation clearly answer questions 1 to 5 above? If the core organizing question to be answered was not clearly stated, what would be a clearer statement of the research question which the paper will answer? If part of the presentation was unclear, how could the form and the content of the presentation have been improved? Could the methodology suggested actually provide a clear answer to the research question proposed? Do you think there are any potential econometric or data problems? Is the schedule realistic? Who would care about the results? Why? Your comments should be worded clearly, yet tactfully – the objective is to help your colleague write a better paper. Feel free to comment on the general area of the literature which this paper will contribute to.

NOTE – this is not a commitment to writing your thesis on this specific topic. Indeed, one of the main objectives of this course is for all seminar participants to discuss the feasibility of alternative possible research topics. If a given research topic is not feasible, it is much better to find that out earlier, rather than later.

A student is explicitly designated to take the lead in the seminar discussion and to prepare written comments (500 words), but ALL students are responsible for participation in the class discussions.

A substantial amount of written work is required in this course – and Dalhousie has a Writing Center to help any student who feels that some assistance in improving their writing skills might be useful. Go to:

http://www.dal.ca/campus_life/student_services/academic-support/writing-and-study-skills.html

In doing economic research we are very rarely starting from “Ground Zero” – other people have, almost always, done useful work on whatever topic you are considering. In this course, because you are asked to summarize the work of others and to prepare your own research paper, after considering the economic literature on your research topic, you will want to refer to the work of others. However, you also want to avoid charges of “plagiarism” – which is a serious academic offence. But what exactly is the difference between plagiarism and acceptable academic practice? There are many grey areas in academia, so all students are urged to complete a useful online course which can be found at:

http://www.dal.ca/campus_life/student_services/academic-support/writing-and-study-skills/academic-integrity-module.html

Just enter the Academic Integrity Module and follow the instructions to guide yourself through the course.

Useful Readings

Tips 4 Economists:

<https://sites.google.com/site/mkudamatsu/tips4economists>

Writing Economics. Robert Neugeboren with Mireille Jacobson. @2001 The President and Fellows of Harvard University (minor revisions in Jan. 2005)

<http://www.economics.harvard.edu/files/WritingEconomics.pdf>

A Guide to Writing in Economics Paul Dudenhefer, Duke University, December 2009

<http://lupus.econ.duke.edu/ecoteach/undergrad/manual.pdf>

[Sinning in the Basement: What are the Rules? The Ten Commandments of Applied Econometrics](#). Kennedy, P.E.. *Journal of Economic Surveys*, Sep2002, Vol. 16 Issue 4, p569-589, 21p

Available at Dal Online or at:

<http://www.bus.lsu.edu/hill/writing/kennedy.pdf>

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Students with disabilities should register as quickly as possible at Student Accessibility Services if they want to receive academic accommodations. To do so please phone 494-2836, e-mail <disabilities@dal.ca>, or drop in at the Killam, G28.

(Presentation) Grading Rubric

Student Name: _____ B00: _____

Rubric Criteria	Excellent	Good	Competent	Problematic	Score
Nonverbal Skills; Eye Contact, Body Language, Poise (max 20 pts)	18 The student holds the attention of the audience, using direct eye contact, without reference to notes. Movements are fluid, and the student displays a relaxed, self-confident nature. No mistakes.	15 The student consistently uses direct eye contact, with little reference to notes. Movements enhance articulation, and the student displays little or no tension. Minor mistakes, but she quickly recovers from them.	12 The student displays minimum eye contact, referring constantly to notes. Little movement or descriptive gestures, and the student displays mild tension. She has trouble recovering from mistakes.	10 The student displays no eye contact, reading from notes. No movement or descriptive gestures, and the student displays tension and nervousness. She has trouble recovering from mistakes.	
Verbal Skills; Enthusiasm, Elocution (max 20 pts)	18 The student demonstrates a strong, positive feeling about the topic during the entire presentation, using a clear voice and pronunciation; entire audience can hear.	15 The student demonstrates occasional positive feeling about the topic, using a clear voice and pronunciation; most audience members can hear.	12 The student demonstrates some negativity about the topic, using a low voice; audience members have difficulty hearing.	10 The student demonstrates no interest about the topic, and mumbles; most audience members cannot hear.	
Content; Subject Knowledge, Organization, Mechanics (max 60 pts)	56 The student demonstrates a convincing knowledge gap and full knowledge of the literature. Information is presented in logical, interesting sequence that audience can follow. Presentation has no spelling or grammatical errors.	46 The student demonstrates a convincing knowledge gap and good knowledge of the literature. Information is presented in logical sequence that audience can follow. Presentation has a couple of spelling or grammatical errors.	36 The student is unable to demonstrate a convincing knowledge gap but has a good knowledge of the literature. Presentation is difficult to follow. Presentation has a few spelling or grammatical errors.	30 The student is unable to demonstrate a convincing knowledge gap and knowledge of the literature. Presentation lacks logical sequence. Presentation has many spelling or grammatical errors.	
Total (maximum 100 points)					

Review Grading Rubric

Student Name: _____ B00: _____

Rubric Criteria	Excellent	Good	Competent	Problematic	Score
Revision of Knowledge Gap (max 10 pts)	9 The student addresses issues raised.	8 The student partly addresses issues raised in a satisfactory manner.	6 The student does not address issues raised in a satisfactory manner.	5 The student ignores comments.	
Style Guidelines: Format and Content (max 20 pts)	18 The student follows the style guidelines, and content is properly organized in an introduction, main body, and conclusion.	15 The student mainly follows the style guidelines, and the content is properly organized in sections.	12 The student attempts to follow the style guidelines, but the content is not properly organized.	10 The student does not follow the style guidelines, and has many errors. The content is not properly organized.	
Conceptual Framework; Theoretical Model (max 45 pts)	40 The student explicitly identifies and describes the economic theory/conceptual framework related to her research question.	34 The student identifies the general economic theory but does not explicitly present its relation to her research topic.	27 The student attempts to identify the general economic theory and its relation to her research topic.	22 The student does not identify a proper conceptual framework.	
Empirical Framework; Econometric Model (max 25 pts)	22 The student provides an empirical framework for her research question, explains how they are related, and she presents all necessary assumptions and conditions.	19 The student provides an empirical framework for her research question, but does not explain how they are related or what the necessary assumptions are.	15 The student attempts to provide an empirical framework for her research question.	12 The student does not provide a relevant empirical framework or the framework is not appropriate.	
Total (maximum 100 points)					