

Amherst College
Department of Economics
Economics 77
Fall 2007

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Office Hours: M 9:30-10:30, Th 3-4

ECONOMICS 77 SENIOR HONORS SEMINAR

This course is designed to help you learn how to do original research in economics. It will help you develop an idea for your thesis, and begin the process of researching and refining that idea. During the semester, you will critique previous research, learn about research methods, and develop your own research proposal. You will be asked to engage in thoughtful and careful reading and discussion of your own and others' research. By the end of the semester, you will have developed a thesis proposal that will clearly state the question you will address, survey the primary research done in this area, and outline your approach. By December, you should have begun writing your thesis.

Doing research in economics is different from almost anything you've done before. Most surprising is the level of engagement and personal commitment required. You must want to do this, and you must be dedicated and disciplined. You must be ready to self-motivate to spend a lot of time working on your research both this semester and next. (I estimate it should be at least twice the amount of effort appropriate for a regular course.) This is your thesis, and only yours. Make it your own.

*NB: in addition to the usual meeting on Tuesdays from 2-4, the course will frequently meet on Thursdays from 2-4 also. Make sure your schedule allows for these additional Thursday meetings.

Grades in the seminar will be based on a variety of assignments, including but not limited to:

- Class participation
- Thesis proposals (including drafts)
- Response papers to readings
- Panel discussion
- Research assignments
- Journal of your thesis research (on-line)
- Thesis presentation

COURSE SCHEDULE

<i>Section</i>	<i>Week</i>	<i>Dates</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Thursday, and assignments</i>
Intro	1	9/4, 9/6	Introduction to the course - Overview of the course - Discuss topics Beginning the process - Overview of the research process - How to develop a project - How to read a paper	Topics – discuss * proposal outline(s) <u>due</u> Monday 9/10 * prelim lit review (at least 3 relevant articles) <u>due</u> Monday 9/10 (use econlit)
	2	9/11, 9/13	Topics and Proposals - How to develop a project, redux - Discuss topics - Match with faculty, meet with faculty - How to write a proposal Topics – discuss	Library Research (Lane Room, Frost Library) - How to write a literature review - Learn about research strategies, finding articles, developing a bibliography, reviewing the literature * proposal <u>due</u> Monday 9/17
Topics	3	9/18, 9/20	Topics – Proposal draft 1 Topics – discuss * Endnote orientation, Wed. Sept 19 th at 6:30pm (Lane Room, Frost Library)	Data (Lane Room, Frost Library) - overview of economic data - library resources for Data
	4	9/25, 9/27	Topics – discuss Advisors – assign preliminary advisors Articles – how to read	(no class) * work with preliminary advisor: meet wkly, set work plan, refine proposal, prepare 2nd draft * prepare panel presentations and response papers (various due-dates)
Tools	5	10/2, 10/4	Article discussion (panels 1, 2)	(no class) * literature review <u>due</u> Thursday 10/11
	6	10/11	(no class)	Article discussion (panels 3,4)
	7	10/16, 10/18	Article discussion (panels 5,6)	(no class) * proposal <u>due</u> on Thursday 10/18 (with preliminary advisor's commentary)
Topics	8	10/23, 10/25	Topics – Proposal draft 2 Topics – discuss	(no class, unless nec) * continue working with preliminary advisor, refining proposal
	9	10/30, 11/1	Topics – discuss	(no class, unless nec) * find data for Stata project <u>by</u> Monday 11/5
Tools	10	11/6, 11/8	Stata -overview and intro - begin Stata project in computer lab	(no class, unless nec) Stata – continue STATA projects * Stata project <u>due</u> on Mon 11/12
	11	11/13, 11/15	Stata - discuss Stata projects	* continue working with preliminary advisor, preparing final version of proposal
Topics	12	11/20, 11/22	(no class)	(no class) - *proposal due on Monday 11/26
	13	11/27, 11/29	Topics – Proposal 3 (final) Topics – discuss - prepare for presentations	Topics – discuss
	14	12/4, 12/6	Proposals – Presentations - *presentations to the department	Proposals – Presentations - *presentations to the department
	15	12/11	Wrap up	(no class)

* Schedule may be subject to change *

Course Goals

The thesis seminar has two main goals. The first goal is to develop a thesis topic. This will be done throughout the semester. There will be three occasions on which you produce a version of your thesis proposal. Everyone will read all of the proposals, and we will spend several class meetings presenting and discussing the proposals. You will meet with faculty, meet with your preliminary advisor, talk with your peers, and meet with me. The proposal should be clear enough so that your classmates and your advisors get a clear sense of your topic and exactly what you plan to do. In the beginning of December, you will present your proposed thesis project to the class and the entire Economics Department.

The second goal of the course is to help you develop the skills to do research in economics. These skills include: formulating a good research question, framing a good project, researching the literature, reading a paper, analyzing data, developing theory, and conveying your ideas clearly. These are not easy skills to learn, but you can certainly make a lot of progress if you dedicate yourself to the process. Actually doing research is the best way to learn. Motivation is essential.

The course is roughly divided into six two-week chunks, alternating between “topics” and “tools.” This is intended to keep these two endeavors proceeding in parallel, giving you time both to develop your particular thesis project and to develop the research skills you will need to complete that project.