Economics 685
Economic Research Methods
Spring, 2007

Office Hours: T/R 3:15-4:45pm. Wed. 1-3pm. Other hours by appointment.


Course Description:
This course is designed to help you learn the basics of how to develop and pursue a research agenda. The ultimate goal of the course is to help you make progress towards completing your exit paper by choosing a topic, completing a literature review, and having a fairly good idea of what you are going to do, what data you will need (and where you can get it) and what statistical approaches you will have to undertake.

I will talk about 30 minutes each class period about how to do economic research. However, a key approach of the course is to expose you to several fields in economics, and to have you read economics critically. To this end you will be asked to read and critique 18 journal articles, both for technique and content. Each of you is expected to choose an article that interests you, write a 3-4 page referee report about the article and then lead a 45 minute class discussion. I have listed some interesting and/or important papers that represent a broad spectrum of empirical work in economics in fields in both microeconomics and macroeconomics; you may choose an article from this list, or choose one that is not on the list.

Additionally, for each article, about half the class will write a 1 page executive summary of the article that briefly summarizes the article and lists 2 questions or comments you have about the paper.

Class discussion and attendance are large components of how you will be evaluated in the course. My expectations of your preparedness are high and I expect you all to be active participants in the learning process.

In addition to attending class, you are expected to attend at least 3 departmental seminars over the course of the semester.

Evaluation:

Course grades will be assigned according to the following weights:

Literature review: 30% (paper = 20%, milestone report = 5%, presentation = 5%)
Written executive summaries (10 each worth 3%): 30%
Presented referee report (1 @ 15% each): 15%
Written summaries of 2 JEL articles: 10%
Class participation (includes attending departmental seminars): 15%

JEL summary #1 due: 1/30/06
JEL summary #2 due: 2/13/06
Milestone report #1 due: 3/6/06
Milestone report #2 due: 4/3/06
Paper due: 5/1/06
Tips:

For JEL summaries:

For this assignment, look at the Journal of Economic Literature (available online) for the past 7 years (or so) and choose a review article (not of a book review) in an area that interests you. Write a short paper (around 5 pages) based on the following questions:
1) What is the basic research question? How does it relate to topics that you have studied before in classes?
2) What important issues have been “resolved”? Which remain “unresolved”? Why do they remain “unresolved”?
3) If you had to design a research project to continue work on this research question, what would it be? What would be your biggest problem in executing your design?

For referee reports:

Each referee report of 3-4 pages should briefly summarize the main points and findings of the paper, talk about the main question (& conclusions), how the paper fills a gap in the existing literature, identify the data set and methods the paper uses, and identify problems with the paper or additional questions it raises. You are expected to lead class discussion; have a list of questions and comments handy.

For executive summaries:

You should be able to summarize the article and its key points in a page or so. In addition, list 2 questions or comments you have and plan to discuss.

For exit papers:

Finding an exit paper topic is never easy. You should look for topics and articles that you find interesting and probe them to find out what has been done and what opportunities for further research exist. I would suggest finding topics early on (talk to professors who are working in areas you are interested in, READ (I can’t stress this enough), and think). You might change topics later on, but it is important to have identified a “do-able” topic by early March when your paper milestone is due.

Good places to find current articles in the field in which you are interested include the Journal of Economic Literature (JEL) and the Journal of Economic Perspectives (JEP) at King Library (or on-line). Both JEL and JEP publish review articles that summarize both recent and more classical contributions. Economics Literature is a searchable online database (at the library or its website) that lists all published papers in economics. Many journals are available online at the library as well. Also check out the current working papers at the web site of the NBER. Plan on searching quite a bit; starting early is the key. Talk to faculty and find a faculty supervisor ASAP. If you are doing an empirical paper, you must find data. Several datasets are available online, but sometimes you need to collect your own (so plan ahead). Make use of all of your resources. The librarians at King are quite helpful, and faculty are always willing to talk if you come prepared.
Possible articles (choose one of these or another that is not on the list—please make it from an economics journal within the last 20 or so years)

Labor


Health:


Experimental:

**Law & Economics:**


**Public/Economics of Education:**


**Macro/Growth:**