

ECON-480-002: Senior research seminar

Prof. Martha Starr
Department of Economics
American University
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Telephone: (202) 885-3747
Office: Roper Hall 201
Office hours: Tuesdays 11:15-2:05 pm, Fridays 11:15-2:05 pm & by appt.
Email: mstarr@american.edu
Please put "econ-480" in the subject line
Class website: AU blackboard

Course Objectives:

The objective of this class is to help students develop applied research skills that will be valuable in their future professional and/or academic lives. A central activity of the class is participation in the "Fed Challenge" -- an annual competition sponsored by the Federal Reserve System in which teams of college students make mock monetary-policy presentations to a panel of judges at a regional Federal Reserve bank or branch, and winners advance to a national-level competition held at the Federal Reserve Board in Washington, D.C. The topics covered in the Fed Challenge vary widely, including macroeconomics, financial institutions and markets, monetary and fiscal policy, international trade and finance, foreign currency markets, world commodity markets, employment and wages, housing sales and prices, and forecasting. Every effort is made to match students with areas to cover that are consistent with their research interests and professional aspirations.

Specific applied research skills that will be developed or strengthened in the class include:

- Strong knowledge of closely-followed macroeconomic and financial statistics -- and ability to interpret them
- Agility in using Excel to manipulate data (e.g. to make charts, perform computations)
- Basic proficiency in a widely-used econometric software package, Eviews, which will be used to manipulate data and run basic time-series analyses
- Ability to express your ideas clearly and persuasively in writing
- Ability to make top-notch presentations and answer questions under pressure
- Ability to work productively in a team -- including giving feedback to others and getting and using feedback from others to improve your own work
- Experience in producing your own analysis of a topic of current interest in macroeconomics, finance, labor, or international economics, which can serve as an example of your work for prospective employers or graduate-school applications

Readings and other resources

There is an overwhelming amount of macroeconomic and financial data available on the internet. Some of it is important, reliable, and closely-watched -- but some of it is not. Two good guides to macro/financial data are available for purchase from the AU bookstore:

- Bernard Baumohl. *The Secrets of Economic Indicators: Hidden Clues to Future Economic Trends and Investment Opportunities*, 2nd Edition (2008).
- *The Economist. Guide to Economic Indicators: Making Sense of Economics*, 6th edition (2007).

In terms of electronic resources, the Blackboard site for the class contains many links and references to material in specific areas. Also, the Federal Reserve will give us a complementary subscription to a heavily used macro/financial data portal, Dismalscientist.com, for the duration of the Fed Challenge. Information on how to access the 'Dismal' site will be distributed as soon as we receive it.

Subscription to the *Wall Street Journal* or *The Economist*

It is strongly recommended that you subscribe to either the *Wall Street Journal* or *The Economist* this semester.

- You can sign up for a discount subscription to the *Wall Street Journal* (\$29.95 for 15 weeks) at <http://wsjstudent.com/forum>
- To sign up for a discount subscription to *The Economist* (\$19.95 for 12 weeks), follow the instructions below.

Over the course of the semester, you will be required to keep tabs on new developments in the area(s) for which you are responsible, which will include posting relevant high-quality articles about your area to the Blackboard site and giving reports on current developments in your area in class. You can get access to these publications electronically through the AU library, but you may find it easier to stay on top of things by having a hardcopy delivered to you. Other great places to find top-notch analyses of incoming macro/financial data are the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and the *Financial Times*.

Software

It is expected that you will have Excel and PowerPoint on your computer (or could easily get access to one that does). In addition, we will be making use of the software package, Eviews, which is available on computers at the Social Science Research Lab (Hurst Hall, Rm. 202). If you like, you can order a student version of Eviews to load onto your own computer; ordering instructions are given below. On an individual basis, the cost is \$54.95 (\$39.95 plus \$15 for shipping and handling); if several students are interested, we can get a break on shipping.

Composition of your grade for the class

Percent of final grade	Item
20	Eviews assignment (due Sept. 26)
40	Fed Challenge, including weekly updates, contributions to discussions, articles and commentary posted in Blackboard, contributions to drafting the presentation, etc. -- as well as evaluation of the group's work by the Fed judges
40	Final research project (first draft due Nov. 21, final version due on the last day of class)

Attendance for all classes is required, unless you have a clear and legitimate reason for not being able to come (illness, family emergency, athletic event, etc.).

SCHEDULE (possibly subject to change)		
Class	Date	Activities
0	Aug. 29	Introduction and discussion of economics-related job options
1	Sept. 5	Overview of Fed Challenge Overview of macroeconomic data + present monetary-policy situation Discussion of students' research interests
2	Sept. 12	Weekly update by Prof. Starr Discussion of 'numbers crunching' and charts Trip to Social Science Research Lab for Eviews workshop Eviews assignment distributed Preliminary division of labor
3	Sept. 19	Weekly economic updates Discussion of the Fed and present monetary policy challenges
4	Sept. 26	Eviews assignment due Weekly economic updates Discussion of formal presentation skills (charts, delivery, Q&A techniques)
5	Oct. 3	Weekly economic updates Draw up outline of Fed Challenge presentation Work in teams + Individual consultations with Prof. Starr on research projects
6	Oct. 10	Weekly economic updates Practice with presentation skills: Monetary policy basics Bring draft sections of Fed Challenge presentation and begin putting it together
7	Oct. 17	Fall Break
8	Oct. 24	Weekly economic updates Work on the Fed Challenge presentation
9	Oct. 31	DRY RUN for the Fed Challenge, including Q&A with mock judges
10	Nov. 5 or 6	FED CHALLENGE IN BALTIMORE -- precise day and time TBA { <i>Note: class will not meet on Friday, Nov. 7 -- relax!</i> }
11	Nov. 14	Debriefing from Fed Challenge Discussion of research projects: Problems, progress, possibilities, etc.
12	Nov. 21	First draft of research project due
13	<i>Tuesday,</i> Nov. 25	First draft of project returned with comments from Prof. Starr
14	Dec. 5	Final version of project due Class presentations

Notes:

- If we are fortunate enough to win the Baltimore round of the Fed Challenge, we would advance to a District run-off in Richmond -- Tuesday, Nov. 18
- Should we also dominate in Richmond, we would advance to the national competition held at the Federal Reserve Board of Governors (here in D.C.) -- Dec. 2-3
- registered 8/8/008; timestamp 20981820088

Economist.com

Instructions for ordering *The Economist* at the academic price

- Go to <http://www.economistacademic.com>
- Along the left-hand bar, click on "Students"
- For this class, you need to order the 12-week subscription @ \$19.95 -- although you're welcome to take a longer subscription if you're interested
- Fill in the first few boxes as follows:

<u>Search for Faculty ID</u>	<input type="text" value="3480"/>	(optional)
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Professor's State	<input type="text" value="DC"/>	(optional)

- Then complete the information on yourself and your credit card.
- Click "Submit order"

The print issue will be delivered to the address you indicate. The subscription also gives you access to all the resources available at www.economist.com - including the current electronic edition, a searchable archive of articles dating back to 1997, and lots of "Backgrounder" pieces that give valuable up-to-date briefings on financial, economic and political issues.

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