

Economics 480
Senior Research Seminar
Professor Mary Hansen
Fall 2008

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Fall 2008 Office Hours: Monday 10-11am and 1:30-3:30 pm; Thursday 1:30-3:30 pm; by appointment.

You will find a copy of syllabi on my home page:
<http://academic2.american.edu/~mhansen/>

Those who can neither do reliable research nor reliably report the research of others will find themselves on the sidelines of a world taht increasingly lives on information.

--Booth, Colomb, and Williams, *The Craft of Research*. p. 6.

Course Objectives:

In this course you will develop the skills necessary to conduct original research in economics. We will work together as a learning community.

Specifically, you will:

- develop a clear and specific research question,
- do a literature search in economics,
- analyze a problem using an economic model,
- develop a testable hypothesis from the model,
- find and collect economic data,
- use statistical analysis to test the hypotheses,
- offer constructive criticisms to peers,
- write a paper in economics, and
- communicate findings orally.

These elements are linked together through the completion of a semester-long economic research project.

Course Requirements: Your final grade will be based on your performance in the following three areas:

Assignments	50%
Final Paper	20%
Final Presentation	30%

A typewritten copy of each assignment is due at the *beginning* of the class period on the day it is due. (Exception to typewritten rule can be made for first drafts of figures and equations.) All assignments must be completed in order for you to pass the course. In the event that you must be absent from a class, you should arrange for me to receive the written assignment—preferably prior to the start of the class period. In addition to a written copy, all assignments must be backed up electronically by uploading to the Blackboard Digital Dropbox. Trust me, even though you will be irritated by having to make the backup, should you have computer problems, you will be grateful I made you do it!

No grades of “incomplete” will be granted for the class.

A Few Thoughts about the Research Process

Research is a form of conversation. Always keep in mind your goal is to persuade others. You are trying to contribute in an interesting way to a conversation. What has been said already? What is missing from the conversation, or what does not make sense to you? What do you want to say? Who are you talking to? (audience) How do you want them to see you? (voice or persona) How can you persuade them that you are right?

Pick a question that interests you. If you are not interested why on earth would anyone else be? “Questions are crucial, because the starting point of all good research is *what you do not know or understand but feel that you must.*” (Booth, Colomb and Williams)

Write throughout the process. Do not wait until the end to start writing.

Research is a social activity. No good piece of research is the result of an individual setting alone in an ivory tower. People who do research are always talking to other people about their research, presenting it at conferences and asking their friends to read what they have written. Pick up a copy of the *American Economic Review* and examine the acknowledgements for any article.

Most professional researchers follow the maxim: “It’s better to get it written than to get it right.” This does not mean that you should sloppy, but there comes a point when you have to stop looking for one more piece of evidence.

Edit. Edit. Edit.

Be brave.

Some Useful References

Becker, H. *Writing For Social Scientists* (University of Chicago Press, 1986).

Booth, W. and M. Gregory *The Harper and Row Rhetoric: Writing As Thinking/ Thinking As Writing* (Harper & Row, 1987).

Graves, R. and A. Hodge. *The Reader Over Your Shoulder* 2nd Edition, (Random House, 1979).

Horner, W.; S. Webb and R. Miller. *Harbrace College Handbook* 12th Edition (Harcourt Brace, 1994).

Mc Closkey, D. *Economical Writing* (Waveland Press, 1999).

----. *The Rhetoric of Economics* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

Pindyck, R. and D. Rubinfeld. *Econometric Models and Economic Forecasts* 4th Edition (Irwin, McGraw Hill, 1998).

Turabian, K. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 7th edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). If you buy a copy of this classic, do buy the 7th edition; it has been substantially revised by Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams.

Strunk, W. and E. B. White. *Elements of Style* 3rd Edition (Macmillan, 1979).

Thomson, W. *A Guide for the Young Economist: Writing and Speaking Effectively about Economics* (MIT Press, 2001).

Williams, J. *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace*, 2nd Edition (Scott, Foresman, 1985).

Wyrick, T. *The Economist’s Handbook: A Guide To Research and Writing* (West Publishing, 1994).

Course Schedule:

Date	Reading
Week 1 8/25-8/28	What is economic research? Brainstorming topics
Week 2 9/4	Dissecting an empirical paper in economics 1 st Assignment due: Preliminary bibliography
Week 3 9/8	Reading statistical output (no class meeting 9/11)
Week 4 9/15-9/18	Brainstorming on your research questions 2 nd Assignment due: Annotated bibliography
Week 5 9/22-9/25	The role of economic models in empirical research; testable hypotheses 3 rd Assignment due: List of proposed research questions
Week 6 9/29-10/2	Brainstorming on economic models 4 th Assignment due: Statement of your research question
Week 7 10/6-10/10	Brainstorming on economic models 5 th Assignment due: Draft of literature review
Week 8 10/13-10/16	Finding data Meet in the Social Science Research Lab (2 nd floor of Hurst)
Week 9 10/20-10/23	In the lab: finding and formatting data 6 th Assignment due: Your model and ideal data set
Week 10 10/27-10/30	In the lab: finding and formatting data 7 th Assignment due: Example table of statistical results and graph
Week 11 11/3-11/6	In the lab: Finding and formatting data; econometric modeling Professor Hansen demonstrates a presentation (also in the lab) 8 th Assignment due: Your actual data
Week 12 11/10-11/13	Presentations 9 th Assignment due: Summary of your data and draft of results
Week 13 11/17-11/20	Presentations
Week 14 11/24	Individual meetings with Hansen in her office as needed. 10 th Assignment due: Rough draft All rough drafts are due by Monday 11/24 at 3:35.
Week 15 12/1-12/5	Presentations
12/11	Final draft due by 2:10 p.m.

Assignments

1st Assignment: Preliminary bibliography

Preliminary Bibliography: Search EconLit, ArticleFirst, Aladin Library Catalog and working papers at www.ssrn.com (Social Science Research Network) and NBER.

2nd Assignment: Annotated bibliography

Write a one-paragraph summary of each source on your current bibliography. These papers do not all need to be the same as the ones on your preliminary bibliography. In fact, you should have found some new sources during this week, and you may have decided some of your preliminary stuff wasn't so useful after all.

3rd Assignment: List of proposed research questions

You should have one or more research questions floating in your head by now. Write a few versions. Use the following format:

I am studying _____ (your topic)
because I want to find out _____ (your question)
so that I will be able to understand _____. (the motivation for your research)

4th Assignment: Statement of your research question

Revise and refine the one statement you will write on. No changes in topic from here on.

5th Assignment: Draft of literature review

Literature Review. Your literature review must tell the story of the conversation that has taken place so far on the topic you are researching.

6th Assignment: Your model and ideal data set

Present a graphic version of your model and a one page written explanation of the model.

Also, imagine that because you have been very good Santa Claus is going to bring you exactly the evidence you want. What will he bring you and why?

7th Assignment: Example table of statistical results and graph

Use the style sheet to produce a graph and table of statistical results using data I provide. More detail on the specifics will be given with the data.

8th Assignment: Your actual data

What data can you find that will come closest to your ideal data?

9th Assignment: Summary of your data and draft of results

Turn in drafts of some of the tables and figures that will be part of your final paper. Be sure to use the style sheet. Note that there are likely to be revisions necessary after we look at these results together.

10th Assignment: Rough draft

Combine your literature review, statement of question, model, and results. Be sure to follow the style sheet.