

Research Methods in Economics

Econ 3220 - Spring 2023

Course information

- Coordinator – Luca Rigotti
- Meeting time and place: Wednesdays, 3-4:15pm in room WW Posvar 4519.
- Reading materials – All reading materials are available online.

Objectives

This is a mandatory course for second-year PhD students. The course introduces students to strategies for identifying interesting research ideas, to determine whether the idea is worth pursuing, to effectively review the literature, to write a research proposal, and to plan how to conduct their research. Insights into how these strategies change across fields within economics are provided by relevant faculty guests. Other topics discussed in the course include the typical difficulties involved in conducting research, and how to address them; how to deal with advisors; academic etiquette; techniques for presenting work in progress at seminars; and how to write and submit academic papers. Requirements include the drafting of the second-year paper proposal (PhD Comprehensive Research Paper) and the selection of two faculty readers.

Course organization

We will hold weekly meetings dedicated to assist students in drafting the second-year paper proposal in a variety of ways including: (1) student presentations of research ideas, the progress they have made, or the feedback they have received from potential faculty readers or from senior students; (2) small-group discussion of research ideas; (3) critique of written proposals; presentations by faculty in all areas. The schedule of presentations is:

February 1st – 2023

Mahrad Sharifvaghefi (Econometrics)
Andreas Ferrara (Applied Micro)

February 8th – 2023

Luca Rigotti (Micro Theory)
Daniele Coen-Pirani (Macroeconomics)

January 15th - 2022

Osea Giuntella (Labor and Development)
David Huffman (Experimental)

Important dates

Dates to keep in mind for this course are:

- March 20th, 2023 – due date for first draft of 2nd-year research paper proposal to be used in application to summer fellowship.
- April 3rd, 2023 – due date for summer research fellowship proposal (see details below). You will need one faculty signature.
- May 1st, 2023 – due date for final 2nd-year research paper proposal with signature from two faculty readers (see details below).

Summer research fellowships

Second-year students are particularly encouraged to apply to our summer research fellowships. The application deadline is generally at the end of the third week of March. The timing is great, as you can use the March 20th draft of your 2nd-year paper proposal to apply to the summer fellowship.

The summer fellowship application requires submitting a 2-3 pages research proposal including:

- A clear statement of purpose of the research.
- A statement about the importance of the research within economics (e.g. use relevant information in order to motivate the importance of the research, and talk about how this project is going to advance the knowledge within the discipline).
- A detailed description of the methodology that will be used in executing the research proposal.
- A statement about how the fellowship funds will be used. Possible uses of the fellowship include but are not limited to: writing a new research paper, presenting work at conferences, traveling to gather data, conducting a laboratory experiment, etc. Students using fellowship funds to pay experimental subjects must obtain IRB approval in advance. Failure to comply with IRB approval will render your research unusable either as part of your dissertation or for any type of publication.

Second-year paper proposal

The final version of your second-year paper proposal should expand on the March draft by providing more details on how you plan to execute your research. Instructions on required content for the final second-year paper proposal are provided in a separate memo (see attached file 2nd-year-paper-proposal.pdf). It is essential to secure two faculty readers. It is best to solicit feedback from the two potential readers using your March draft and incorporating their comments in the final draft due in early May as indicated above.

Reference books

The following books are useful for students starting independent research:

- Weisbach M 2021. *The Economist's Craft*. Princeton University Press.
This book is a guide for PhD students in economics who are getting started with the research process. It discusses the process of selecting a research topic and a research agenda, writing a paper, making presentations, and getting your papers published in academic journals.
- Creedy, J. 2008. *Research without Tears: From the First Ideas to Published Output*. Edward Elgar: Cheltenham, UK.
This book provides an overview of how to start, plan and write a first research paper; what to expect from the relationship with a PhD supervisor; and the process of publishing a paper in a journal or a book. Most of the contents overlap with papers written by the same author in 2001 and 2006 (Australian Economic Review), and a 2007 manuscript available on-line.
- Hillmon, S. 2014. *Getting a PhD in Economics*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
This book was written by a Stuart Hillmon, the pseudonym for an academic economist who recently graduated from a top-five PhD program in economics. It covers a broad range of topics, from the real purpose of a PhD in economics, to applying to graduate school, the first-year "boot camp," the transition into the second year, finding a research topic, how to relate to your advisor, TAing, RAing, and getting a job. There is also a chapter discussing topics specific for women and international students. Chapters 4 through 9 are particularly interesting for students in years 2+.
- McCloskey, D. 2019. *Economical Writing*, 3rd ed. University of Chicago Press.
This book is a classic on good writing rules for economists. The book is short and the rules are really useful. Reading this book early on is a good idea, since mastering the rules of good writing in economics takes practice. This book was recommended by Tom Rawski.

- Strunk, W. and E.B. White. *The Elements of Style*, 4th ed. Longman Publishers.
This book complements well McCloskey (2000). It contains more specific tips on grammar and style. It is a useful book to have around while writing papers.
- Thomson, W. 2011. *A Guide for the Young Economist*. 2nd ed. MIT Press.
This book offers an overview of being a graduate student in economics, how to effectively write papers, how to give talks and tips for writing referee reports. The longest section of the book is that on writing papers, and it is particularly relevant for papers containing models, lots of notation, and proofs.

These are posted on Canvas

The research process:

- Creedy, J. 2001. "Starting Research," The Australian Economic Review.
- Creedy, J. 2007. "A PhD Thesis without Tears," Manuscript.
- Davis, Don. 2001. "PhD Thesis Research: Where Do I Start?" Manuscript.
- Finkelstein, Amy. 2006. "Most projects fail....and other things I've learned from (trying to do) empirical work." Slides.
- Finkelstein, Amy. 2007. "An unofficial guide to trying to do empirical work." Slides.
- Varian, H. 2009. "How to Build an Economic Model in Your Spare Time," Manuscript.
- Cochrane, J. 2005. "Writing Tips for PhD Students," Manuscript.
- Cox, D. 2000. "The "Big 5" and Other Ideas for Presentations," Manuscript.

Writing:

Some economists have provided suggestions on how to write an effective introduction to a paper in various blogs and online postings. Here are a few names (links to their posts on Canvas):

[Keith Head](#)
[Timothy Taylor](#)
[David Evans I](#)
[David Evans II](#)
[Claudia Sahn](#)

Publishing papers:

- Choi, K. 2002. "How to Publish in Top Journals," Manuscript.
- Creedy, J. 2006. "From Manuscript to Publication: A Brief Guide for Economists." *Australian Economic Review*, 39 (1), 103–113.

Moving forward:

- Cawley, J. 2014. "A Guide and Advice for Economists on the US Junior Academic Job Market," 2014-2015 edition. Manuscript.
- Hamermesh, D. 1992. "The Young Economist's Guide to Professional Etiquette." *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 6 (1), 169-179.
- Hamermesh, D. 1993. "Professional Etiquette for the Mature Economist." *American Economic Review Papers and Proceedings*, 83 (2), 34-38.
- Hamermesh, D. 2004. "An Old Male Economist's Advice to Young Female Economists," Manuscript.
- Hamermesh, D. 2012. "Maximizing the Substance in the Soundbite: A Media Guide for Economists," Manuscript.