Econ 4903: Undergraduate Seminar

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Schedule: M W 12:30 – 1:45p.m. CBC 241 Spring 2020

Office Hours: M W 1:50 – 2:50pm (immediately after class). If you need to contact me, please include “ECO 4903” in the email subject.

Course Objectives: The main objective of this senior seminar is to introduce and develop among participants the experience needed to critically read, evaluate, present, and discuss primary research in the field of Economics.

How to do Well: As you know, most of the problems that economists consider interesting are analyzed using some math. However, most of these interesting problems are initially thought about by using words, and words are essential in conveying why they are interesting.

A critical part of presenting your ideas is being able to describe the important features of the issue and analysis using words. Working to be able to explain intuition for economic questions and analysis will be very helpful for your success in the course, and for your career. Further, I suggest trying to find ways to be excited about both the research ideas we will cover this term, and communicating about them. Additionally, making an effort to participate each class ensures that you obtain participation points.

Grading: based on the following: (Failure to complete any of these will prevent you from passing the course.)

1. The completion of a literature review summarizing the readings for the course (20%). The literature review should critically analyze the body of work covered throughout the semester. It should thoroughly summarize, classify, and compare the articles covered in the course. This will be due on April 15th. I’ll provide information on how to submit it. It’s likely that this will be done electronically.

2. The team presentation of several (typically 3 or 4) journal articles from the reading list below (30%). Each presentation is 30 minutes, with 5 minutes for questions. These are to use a computer and projector, and are to
be polished. Presentations should cover the assigned reading in depth. The teams and presentation dates will be assigned after January 13th, the last day to drop/add. This is so that those enrolled in the course will be finalized before making these assignments.

All presentations will be graded based on how well they answer the following questions:

- What is the main issue? Why is it interesting?
- What new does this paper attempts to bring to the topic? Is it a new method? Or is it a new data set? Or is it a new way to examine the question?
- What are the main results? What is the key intuition for the main result? Is there a simple example that provides the insights of the main result? What are the key assumptions necessary for the results? Are these assumptions testable? Do you have issues with these assumptions?
- What are the implications of the results?
- Do you have any critical comments about the paper?

3. **Active participation** during class (15%).

Grading of participation will inevitably have a fairly coarse scale. During class discussions, there will be ample opportunity for all members of the class to fully participate. Students who are not participating will be invited to contribute by means of direct questions about the paper(s). If you have read the papers, and thought seriously about the implications of the work, you will have no problem with this part of the requirements.

Being a passive observer will earn you zero credit. Missing more than 3 classes may prevent you from passing the class.

4. **One homework assignment** (10%). This will cover the material presented in class prior to the start of the team presentations. This will be due in class on **February 3rd**.

5. An **exam** that covers the course readings (25%). This will be on **April 15th**.

**Learning Outcomes:** By the end of this course you will be able to describe some area of recent research in law and economics. Specifically, you will be able to summarize intuition for some result in recent papers. Additionally, you will be able to describe the implications of these findings for practical issues.
Schedule:

This (and perhaps the course requirements) will be modified depending on the number of students enrolled in the class. It also includes some extra space near the end of the semester in case we end up off schedule. However, I do not expect that we will need those.

The schedule below is based on 20 students and presentation teams of two. On days with only one presentation, we will discuss the general themes covered in the corresponding general area. Note, if there are fewer students, we may have more presentations. Again this will be finalized after the drop date.

1/6: Class does not meet


1/15: Bayes’ rule – lecture and problems

1/22: Bayes’ rule and information disclosure – lecture and problems

1/27: Bayes’ rule and information disclosure – lecture and problems

Crime


Group 2: Mastrobuoni, G. and D. Rivers, Criminal Discount Factors and Deterrence, working paper.


Contracts


Torts


Procedure, Evidence, Information, and Other


4/15: Exam and paper due.

Some other possible papers


