

ECONOMICS 285/296: 3rd Year Research Paper/Presentation

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Fall 2016

1 Course description

Economics 285/296 is designed to help students develop their research instincts and eventually lead to a dissertation topic. In some senses, this course and the one that follows it (in spring) are the most important courses you will take at UCSD. We say this because the ultimate goal of the Ph.D. program is to help you to produce a high-quality dissertation, and this course is designed to help you make strong progress toward that goal. When you are on the job market, potential employers will judge you on the quality of your research and how well you present it—no one asks about course grades. You should aim to create a polished paper by the end of the winter quarter next year.

The course will meet periodically throughout the quarter on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9:30 to 10:50 in Econ 300. We will enforce the following attendance policy: we expect you to attend all scheduled class and presentation sessions (see schedule in the back). We will be checking attendance during each meeting, and if you have any unexcused absences, you will fail this course. If you have to miss a session for a dire reason, please e-mail us in advance to let us know why.

1.1 Student groups

We will form four student groups according to broad areas of interest. Other students are the most valuable sources of regular feedback for your ideas. These groups will serve as a place for students to brainstorm, problem solve and give preliminary versions of their presentations. Groups should meet weekly during weeks 1-7. We expect the meetings to last at least 1 hour. As soon as you have picked a time, email econrooms@ucsd.edu to reserve a room for the entire quarter. Each week, one member of each group should email us a brief report on what took place at the meeting. You might consider taking turns serving as the group liaison.

1.2 Faculty advisors

If you do not have one already, you must find a faculty adviser. Let us know (by email or in person) who your advisor is. You should meet several times with your adviser and other faculty members with relevant research interests over the course of the quarter. These individuals will be those who are best able to guide you as your nascent ideas develop, to make sure you are heading in the most productive direction

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possible. Building relationships with faculty in your fields is another of the major goals of the course. Note: if you don't have an advisor, we can help.

1.3 Short initial presentations

Each student will give a 10-12 minute talk; there also will be time for discussion. The sessions will be as indicated on the attached schedule. We will create a sign-up sheet for these presentations. You should have 3-7 slides for your talk and they should be carefully prepared (large type, not too many words per slide, etc.). Part of the talk should be devoted to "selling" your topic, i.e., explaining why it's important and interesting. We will be strict about sticking to the schedule, so make sure to rehearse your talk beforehand, so that we do not have to cut you off at the appointed time. All students are expected to be at all of the presentations and to make (constructive) comments on the talks. A major purpose of the course is to encourage students to give each other feedback.

1.4 Short initial papers

After your initial presentation, please turn in a 1-2 page abstract/description of your topic. Indicate who your faculty adviser is.

1.5 Individual office meetings

We want each of you to schedule at least one 30-minute office meeting with one of us, depending on your field.

1.6 Longer final presentations

These will be 20 minute talks followed by 5 minutes for questions. We strongly encourage you to invite your faculty adviser to the presentation!! See the schedule for dates of final presentations.

1.7 Final papers

The final paper (20-30 pages in length depending on your progress) is due by email on Friday, December 9 at 5:00pm. There will be a 5% reduction in your grade for every day the paper is late.

2 Some advices on papers

We encourage you to be bold in your ideas. We are looking for exciting research topics rather than ε -modifications of existing work (e.g., replicating an earlier study on data from another country, unless the replication offers a new approach or some additional value added). Spend time motivating the underlying economic question and providing intuition for your approach/model/analysis. If you use data, make sure to describe in concise ways which sources you used, how you transformed the data, data samples, etc. (perhaps using an appendix for particularly tedious details). If you do theory or econometrics, try to be rigorous in your derivations but provide intuition along the way. We do not want you to produce a literature survey. At the same time, you don't want to do what others have already done, so put your analysis in context of any existing literature. It helps to ask which important sub-questions have not been answered at all. Which have been answered, but inadequately?

Several well-known economists have written up tips for finding research topics, doing research, and writing it up. Keep in mind that some people would disagree with some of the advice! Here are links to John Cochrane's,¹ Hal Varian's,² Valerie Ramey's,³ and Alexis'.⁴ Cochrane's contains references to additional papers along these lines.

3 Schedule

Below is the tentative schedule.

Week #	Date	Plan
Week 1	Sept 27	Organizational meeting
	Sept 29	Short talks on finding research topics by faculty members
Week 2	Oct 4	Lecture on toy modeling by David Lagakos and Jim Rauch
	Oct 6	Abstract presentations
Week 3	Oct 11	Abstract presentations
	Oct 13	Abstract presentations
Week 4	Oct 18	Abstract presentations
	Oct 20	No class
Week 5	Oct 25	No class
	Oct 27	No class
Week 6	Nov 1	No class
	Nov 3	No class
Week 7	Nov 8	No class
	Nov 10	Paper presentations
Week 8	Nov 15	Paper presentations
	Nov 17	Paper presentations
Week 9	Nov 22	Paper presentations
	Nov 24	No class (Thanksgiving week)
Week 10	Nov 29	Paper presentations
	Dec 1	Paper presentations

¹http://faculty.chicagobooth.edu/john.cochrane/teaching/papers/phd_paper_writing.pdf

²<http://people.ischool.berkeley.edu/~hal/Papers/how.pdf>

³http://econweb.ucsd.edu/~miwhite/ramey_tips.pdf

⁴https://sites.google.com/site/aatoda111/file-cabinet/latex_tips.pdf