

**Economics 191A: Senior Essay Seminar**  
**Winter and Spring Quarters, 2011**  
**Economics 304**  
**MWF 8:30 – 9:20**

**Roger Gordon, Economics 316**  
[rogordon@ucsd.edu](mailto:rogordon@ucsd.edu) 534-4828

The Senior Essay Seminar (Econ 191A-191B) is for those of you with superior records in the Economics Department who would like to build on your training in economics to pursue research on a topic of your choice. This research is likely to be the most engaging, stimulating, and memorable part of your undergraduate training. These two courses are also two of the required classes for Economics and Management Science majors wishing to graduate with the phrase “with highest distinction” on their diplomas.

Economics 191A is Part I of the Department's Senior Essay Seminar. Part II, 191B, is given in Spring Quarter. Admission is subject to the approval of the instructor, and is normally limited to students with a GPA of 3.5 or better in upper division Economics and Management Science courses.

The main requirement of Economics 191AB is to complete a well-researched 25-35 page essay on an economics topic (approved by the instructor) by a deadline near the end of spring quarter. But to satisfactorily complete 191A a first draft of the essay must be turned in near the end of winter quarter. Often, the first draft contains the essay's theoretical analysis and a preliminary description of its empirical content; but other arrangements are possible, depending on the topic. As part of the course sequence, you will also be expected to present your research at various stages.

Your work for Economics 191A can be divided into three parts:

- (1) selecting your topic, finding sufficient reference and source material, and writing a short description of your topic, including at least three references
- (2) formulating an outline
- (3) writing a first draft (or the first sections) of your paper

You should think of 191A's goal not necessarily as completing a rough draft of your full essay, but of making enough progress to write up at least half of it. You are strongly encouraged to give me drafts for comment and ask me questions throughout the quarters, and to come to see me as often as you find it helpful. My office hours are W 12:30-3:30 or by appointment.

### **How to Find a Topic**

At the start the main problem is deciding on your topic: something original, not too small or irrelevant, but not too big and complicated. Even more important is that the topic should be something that genuinely interests you, because otherwise you will be very tired of it by the time you write your final draft! A good topic often has two parts, the first theory and the second empirical. Areas of research can be found in the leading general economics journals and specialty journals, and in publications of the regional Federal Reserve Banks, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Brookings Institution, environmental organizations such as Resources for the Future, and so on. One strategy is to take a good paper published six to ten years ago in a good journal and ask how well the results hold up now; or to find a good paper based on one country or data set, and

extend it to another country or data set. Another is to look for the economic underpinning of observations from your daily life.

## **Readings**

The following books (on reserve in Geisel Library unless noted) may help suggest topics:

Jacqueline Brux and Janna Cowen, *Economic Issues and Policy*, 2nd edition, Cincinnati, OH: South-Western College Pub., 2002

Edwin Dolan and John Goodman, *Economics of Public Policy: The Micro View*, St. Paul, MN: West Pub. Co., 1982

Thomas Swartz and Frank Bonello, editors, *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Economic Issues*, Guilford, CT: Dushkin/McGraw-Hill, 2000

Steven E. Landsburg, *The Armchair Economist: Economics & Everyday Life*, New York: Free Press, 1993

Paul Krugman, *The Age of Diminished Expectations*, 3rd edition, Cambridge: MA, MIT Press, 1997

Joseph Stiglitz's and George Akerlof's Nobel lectures (both in the June 2002 *American Economic Review* are helpful (and inspirational) on how to turn observations about the world into economics.

## **Searching for prior research on a topic**

I presume you are all familiar with searches on Google! Google also has a specialized website [www.scholar.google.com](http://www.scholar.google.com) which provides links to past academic papers on a topic, ordered largely by the number of citations to each paper. This helps you locate the original paper in a literature. Google then links this paper to the more recent work citing this original paper. Another place to look for past work on a topic is EconLit <[www.cdlib.org/services/collections/choosecampus/econlit2.html](http://www.cdlib.org/services/collections/choosecampus/econlit2.html)>. This website allows you to search a huge database of journals, books, and working papers, and then to link to the papers you select.

## **Computing and information sources**

To facilitate communication and gain access to many useful resources, you must get a personal computer account from Academic Computing Services (<http://www-acs.ucsd.edu>). If you have any questions, Kimberley Newmark ([knewmark@ucsd.edu](mailto:knewmark@ucsd.edu)) should be able to help you. This will give you access to the Social Science Database and many useful internet sites, including those linked on the course web site on [webct.ucsd.edu](http://webct.ucsd.edu). See also the very useful links at Harold Colson's (the Economics Librarian at Geisel Library) page, at <http://weber.ucsd.edu/~hcolson/econbib.html>

## **Presentations**

I will be asking you to present to your classmates your initial idea for your paper topic and then your subsequent work on the topic. The advantages to you of these presentations are several. For one, putting together a presentation helps you organize your thoughts, and forces you to think through carefully the key proposed steps in your project. Through the presentation, you should also get helpful feedback both on how best to frame the project and on more detailed aspects of its

implementation. In addition, learning better how to present your ideas effectively to an audience will be of great value to you in your future career.

I have scheduled the first presentations starting on January 18 and continuing on January 20, and 23. I'll allocate ten minutes for each of you. You should aim at presenting your initial ideas for about seven to eight minutes, leaving a couple of minutes for further discussion. While two to three weeks may seem little time to organize your paper and to put together a presentation, it is important that you learn quickly whether your initial ideas for a paper topic are workable and remain exciting to you. By the time of this presentation, you should have searched the prior literature and put together a tentative outline of your project.

The final presentations for this quarter will be during February 21, 23, 25, 28, and March 2. By then, you should have made serious progress on your topic, giving you a chance to advertise your progress but also to describe the difficulties you're running in to, in order to get feedback and suggestions. You should aim at presenting for about twelve minutes, leaving a few minutes for discussion, and should focus on what you've learned since your initial presentation. You can then use this feedback to revise the version you submit at the end of the term.

### **Paper deadlines**

In order to keep you on track, I am asking you to submit a detailed outline for your paper by 5:00 PM on January 28. The first draft of your paper is then due by 5:00 PM on March 11. In each case, I will provide you feedback to aid you in your further work on the project.