Proseminar in Economics

**Course Description** (GWU Bulletin) *Preparation and presentation of a research paper in any field of economics agreed upon by student and instructor. Review of selected topics in contemporary economics. Open only to economics majors in their senior year.*

**Learning Objectives:**

1. Identify an economically interesting problem or issue amenable to study using the economic analysis techniques accessible to a senior year economics major.

2. Produce a research paper applying these techniques—whether conceptual and/or analytical and/or quantitative—to analyzing the identified problem or issue.

3. Improve the economic analysis and writing quality of the research paper by presenting a first draft for the instructor’s comments and for peer review.

4. Develop additional critical analytic and evaluative skills by providing formal peer review and informal feedback on the research projects and drafts of your fellow students.

5. Effectively communicate your research and findings in formal oral presentations to the entire class.

**Pursuing these objectives will involve:**

(i) preparing a major research paper;

(ii) presenting a draft version of your research to the seminar; and

(iii) helping your fellow students to improve their research projects through a process of mutual constructive criticism.

Organization of papers will be discussed in class. However, you should read articles in professional journals such as the *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, *Journal of Political Economy*, *American Economic Review*, *Southern Economic Journal*, etc. for examples. The *Journal of Economic Literature (JEL)* is published quarterly and contains lists of articles and books organized by subject matter. Brief summaries of some articles are also contained in the *JEL*. *ECONLIT* is a search engine for economics articles and is available through Gelman. *JSTOR* (Journal Storage) is also available through Gelman and has articles from all the major journals prior to about 2012.

Grades:

Your grade is based on a score out of 100 points. The components include in-class presentations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance/Class Participation*</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Written and Oral Presentations of Interim Reports</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report on Dept. of Economics seminar**</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oral Presentation of Completed Paper***</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussant Participation***</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Paper****</td>
<td>50</td>
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*Participation*: This class meets once a week. You are expected to attend (on time) and to participate in the class discussions. For the first two-thirds of the semester, discussions will focus on research methods and tools and developing your proposal. For the final third of the course, you will be assigned as a “discussant” for two of the presentations. As a discussant, you will carefully review your assigned paper, prepare a helpful critique, and make a short presentation based on your critique. For other presentations, you are responsible for carefully listening and making informed comments. You will always prepare at least one written question on each paper, which you will transmit to me and to the author of the paper. A paper by Daniel S. Hamermesh, “The Young Economists Guide to Professional Etiquette,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 6:1 (Winter 1992), pp. 169-79 is available on JSTOR and should be read before we start discussing the papers.

**Attendance at one Department of Economics seminar** with a one to two page description of the seminar topic and what you believe was the most interesting question raised about the paper. The seminar must be attended prior to Mar. 2, as the due date for your report is Mar. 2. Attendance at the seminar and your report counts for 5% of your final grade.
***The final oral presentation:

Each student will present his/her paper (three student presentations per session will typically be scheduled).

Two students will be assigned as discussants for each paper. All other students will prepare one or two questions for each presenter based on reading the paper in advance.

Students presenting papers must have copies available by Friday noon of the preceding week of the presentation for posting on Blackboard. This can be a copy of the draft or an amended draft.

****The final paper is due Apr. 25. If you fail to turn in a final draft of the paper by that date you will lose 5 points per day on your final grade. Note that 10 points drops you by a letter grade (e.g., from an A to a B).

Assignments are due within the first ten minutes of the class (unless an earlier deadline is specified). Any assignment turned in late on the day it is due will be discounted 10%. Assignments turned in the day after the due date will be discounted 30% and two days after the due date 50%. If any assignment is not turned in within two days, you will receive a zero for that component.

G-PAC Oral Communication Requirement. This course satisfies the G-PAC oral communication requirement. Oral communication is “the effective interpretation, composition, and presentation of information, ideas, and values to a specific audience.” The learning outcomes associated with the oral communication requirement call for the student to:

- Take responsibility for a significant topic with a clear thesis and persuasive argument;
- Demonstrate facility with topical and disciplinary knowledge via well-crafted, audience appropriate language;
- Demonstrate vocal qualities and physical behaviors that augment content and maintain audience interest.

The grading rubric used to evaluate your oral presentations is posted on Blackboard and will be distributed in class.
General Administrative Matters

E-mail correspondence: All e-mails to me should begin with the title Econ 4198w and then the subject matter of the e-mail. I get many e-mails per day, and I don’t want to miss something from you that might be important and inadvertently delete it.

Naming Work Product Documents: When you have a work product that is to be turned in electronically, you should have your last name, first name, and the topic in the title. For example, your proposal should be of the following form:

    Frankenstein Victor Proposal.doc

You will lose points if you do not title your materials appropriately.

Backup Your Files: You may not use a hard drive failure, lost keychain drive, data loss, or other computer related problem as an excuse. Always backup multiple copies of your documents, data, and other working files. Send these files to yourself on one or more email accounts. Copy them to a USB drive. Set up a Google drive.

Change of Topic: If, for whatever reason, you want to change your topic after the initial topic is approved, you must talk to me and submit another prospectus as soon as possible. Depending on when you change your topic, your prospectus may have to be substantially longer than the first one. That is the later in the semester you change your topic, the longer your prospectus should be.

Office Hours:

    I have office hours from on Tuesday 1:00-2:00, Wednesday 3:30-5:00, or by appointment. I am available on most other days. You should e-mail or call to see me at other times just to make sure I am there. If you make an appointment, you should submit a write-up to me the day before the appointment detailing your problem, your thoughts, your questions, or whatever. Put down everything as logically and concisely as you can.
### Overview of Class Schedule:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Other</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 13</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 20</td>
<td>Library Research</td>
<td>Class meets in Gelman 300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 27</td>
<td>Discussion of Provisional Proposal</td>
<td>Due: Electronic version of 2 to 3 page prospectus is due by 6 pm on Jan. 25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. 28-Feb. 3</td>
<td>Meeting with Instructor to Discuss Proposal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb. 4</td>
<td>Reading and Writing Economics</td>
<td>Student discussion of McCarthy paper</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb. 10</td>
<td>Discussion of Literature Review</td>
<td>Due: Electronic version of brief literature review of 2-3 most important papers on your topic &amp; short description of data sources due Feb. 9 at 6pm.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb. 17</td>
<td>Discussion of Old Econ 4198 Papers</td>
<td>Due: A one page critique of each paper and assigned grade</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb. 24</td>
<td>Lecture on Economic Data</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mar. 2</td>
<td>Lecture on Quantitative Methods in Economics</td>
<td>Due: First draft of paper. Due: Report on a Department of Economics Seminar.</td>
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<td>Mar. 9-Apr. 13</td>
<td>Paper presentations.</td>
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<td>Apr. 20</td>
<td>Five minute in-class summary of findings.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apr. 25</td>
<td>Final Paper Due</td>
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#### Detailed Description of Class Schedule
The first eight weeks will be devoted to diverse topics related to the conduct of economic research. The schedule is as follows:

**Jan. 13: Introduction and Organization**

Greenlaw, Ch. 1 (What is Research?) and 2 (Overview of the Research Process).

Handouts, including Booth, et al. on plagiarism

You should arrange to see me in the next two weeks to discuss your potential topic - the earlier, the better. Note that you are due to give a presentation of a proposal on Jan. 27.

**Jan. 20: Library Research**

*We will meet in Gelman 300* where the library's economics specialist, Shmuel Ben-Gad, will introduce you to a variety of resources for preparing research papers.

We will also talk more about the organization of a proseminar paper.

**Jan. 27: Student Discussion of Provisional Topic Selection**

*DUE:* A two to three page prospectus describing your topic and providing the rudiments of an outline. *You should send me an electronic version by 6 pm on Jan. 25.* You should bring enough copies for everyone in the class and be prepared to talk about your potential topic for approximately 5 minutes.

Arrange to meet me between Jan. 28 - Feb. 3 to discuss your prospectus. A sign-up sheet will be circulated in class. *An approved prospectus is required by Feb. 17.*

**Feb. 3: Reading and Writing Economics**

Greenlaw, Ch. 6 (Critical Reading or How to Make Sense of Published Research)

Greenlaw chapter presents an excellent treatment of how to read an economics paper. His illustration is based on an article by David Romer (“Do students go to class? Should they?”, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Summer 1993, pp. 167-74).

In class, we will analyze a paper by Patrick McCarthy, “Highway Safety and the 65 Mile an Hour Speed Limit,” *Contemporary Policy Issues, 1991*. Read this paper carefully and be prepared to discuss it. Read it after you have read Greenlaw’s examination of the Romer paper. Pay attention to the structure of the McCarthy paper. It should serve as a good model for you to follow in your own paper for this class.

**Feb. 10: Student Discussion of Literature Reviews**

*DUE:*
A brief literature review describing two or three papers that are most relevant to your work and a description of your data. **An electronic literature review/data description is due by 6 pm on Feb. 9.** Be prepared to present your literature review and data sources in class (six minute limit).

Greenlaw, Ch. 3 (Surveying the Literature on a Topic in Economics) provides a useful background for preparing surveying the literature review. Pages 236-239 cover preparation of the written review.

Copies of three old ECON 4198 papers will be distributed. You are to prepare an evaluation of each paper (to be turned in at the class on Mar. 4) and to assign a letter grade to the paper. Forms for the evaluations will be distributed.

**Feb. 17: Student Discussion of Old ECON 4198 Papers**

**DUE:** A one page critique of each paper, including a recommended grade.

**DUE:** Final version of your proposal.

Sign up for an appointment for later in the week to discuss your progress report

**Feb. 24: Data: How to Tell the Good from the Bad and the Ugly.**

**Mar. 2:** Lecture: Quantitative Methods in Economics.

**DUE:** First draft of paper.

**Due:** Report on a Department of Economics Seminar

Paper presentations will be scheduled.

**Mar. 9 - Apr. 13:** Paper Presentations.

Read Greenlaw, Chapter 12 regarding presentations.

**Apr. 20:** Five Minute Summary Presentation of Your Findings.

**Apr. 25:** **DUE:** Final draft of paper
Support for Students Outside the Classroom

Disability Support Services (DSS)

Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact the Disability Support Services office at 202-994-8250 in the Marvin Center, Suite 242, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information please refer to: http://gwired.gwu.edu/dss/

University Counseling Center (UCC) 202-994-5300

The University Counseling Center (UCC) offers 24/7 assistance and referral to address students’ personal, social, career, and study skills problems. Services for students include crisis and emergency mental health consultations confidential assessment, counseling services (individual and small group), and referrals.

http://gwired.gwu.edu/counsel/CounselingServices/AcademicSupportServices

Security

In the case of an emergency, if at all possible, the class should shelter in place. If the building that the class is in is affected, follow the evacuation procedures for the building. After evacuation, seek shelter at a predetermined rendezvous location.

All graded work must be completed in accordance with The George Washington University Code of Academic Conduct.

The Code states that “Academic dishonesty is defined as cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one's own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information.” For the remainder of the code, see: http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html

Plagiarism in any form is a violation of the Honor Code. Examples of plagiarism: if a paper is bought or borrowed; if it is copied from any source; if it is materially summarized without adequate citation; if the thoughts belong to someone else without citation; etc. It is also a violation if this research paper has been used in its entirety in another class. (A previous paper may be the basis for further research; but you must discuss this with me in advance). I take plagiarism extremely seriously in this course. In case of plagiarism, I will recommend a grade of F with a notation of academic dishonesty on your transcript. This notation remains on your transcript for at least two years.

Please read the Booth, et al. handout on plagiarism that will be distributed the first week of class.