

Junior Seminar

Course Content: This course will prepare students for thesis research in their senior year. The course will focus on selecting a research question, conducting a literature review, locating and collecting data, economic theorizing, writing, research design, hypothesis testing and presentation skills.

Office Hours: Office hours will be held in Vollum 227 on Mondays and Wednesdays from 10-11am and on Thursdays from 3-4pm. Students who are unable to come during these times are encouraged to make an appointment.

Text and Required Reading: The textbook is *Doing Economics: A Guide to Understanding and Carrying Our Economic Research* by Steven A. Greenlaw. Other useful texts on 2-hour reserve include:

- Booth, Wayne C., Joseph M. Williams and Gregory C. Columb. 2003. *The Craft of Research* (2nd edition). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- McCloskey, Deirdre N. 1998. *The Rhetoric of Economics* (2nd edition). Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- McCloskey, Deirdre N. 1999. *Economical Writing* (2nd edition). Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.
- Thomson, William. 2001. *A Guide for the Young Economist: Writing and Speaking Effectively about Economics*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Tufte, Edward R. 2006. *Beautiful Evidence*. Cheshire, CT: Graphics Press.
- Turabian, Kate L. 2007. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (7th edition) Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Evaluation: Evaluation will be based on class participation, several assignments, and a formal research proposal and presentation. Late assignments will not be accepted although exceptions will be made for illness or personal emergencies.

Course Outline and Readings

I. Introduction: What is Research? (January 28)

Greenlaw, Chapter 1 and Appendix

Assignment: Come to class prepared to discuss a question (or questions) that you are considering for your thesis. Read the department's web page "Writing a Thesis" http://academic.reed.edu/economics/theses/thesis_writing.html

II. Steps in the Research Process (February 2)

Greenlaw, Chapter 2 and Appendices

Assignment (due by 5pm on February 1st): Post answers to the following questions on Moodle and review other postings before class on February 2nd.

Part I: Interview a second-semester economics senior about his/her thesis (the names and thesis topics of second-semester seniors are posted on the board across from my office). Make sure you include an appropriate citation for the interview¹.

1. What question is being researched, i.e., what is the thesis of the thesis?
2. How is the thesis question related to previous research?
3. What is the primary theoretical argument?
4. Is empirical evidence being used? If so, what is the major data source?
5. Are preliminary results available? If so, how do the results compare to other studies?
6. What advice does the thesis student have for identifying and successfully researching a thesis question?
7. What, if anything, would the thesis student have done differently during the first semester of thesis research?

Part II: Read a recently completed economics thesis and answer the questions listed below. Make sure you include an appropriate citation. Titles of recently completed theses are on the department's web page "Titles of Past Theses" http://academic.reed.edu/economics/theses/thesis_titles.html The following theses, which are on 2-hour reserve, have been recommended for this assignment. Contact me if you would like to review a different thesis or would like recommendations for a thesis written on specific topic. .

Chalier, Annick Elisabeth. 2000. "Which is the fairer sex?: gender-based behavioral differences in a bargaining experiment"

Dorobantu, Cosmina L. 2003. "The effects of the European Union enlargement process on foreign direct investment in Central and Eastern Europe"

Findley, Timothy Devon. 2003. "Property Rights, efficiency, and transaction costs: the role of law and markets in western water allocation"

¹ See Appendix 3A in Greenlaw, the Turabian book on reserve and the Economics Department's Citation Guide available on the department's website.

- Hoel, Jessica B. 2005. "Testing the effects of U.S. presidential election expectations on exchange rates"
- Teele, Dawn Langan. 2006. "Child labor and the minimum age to work convention"
- Savoir, Yves Alexandre. 2005. "A hedonic analysis of transportation accessibility and its effect on housing prices in the Portland metropolitan area"
- Stephenson, Phillip D. 2005. "An empirical analysis of the relationship between telecommunications and economic growth, 1981-2000"

Answer the following questions:

1. What is the thesis of the thesis?
2. How is the thesis question related to previous research?
3. What is the primary theoretical argument?
4. Is empirical evidence used? If so, what is the major data source?
5. What are the major results and conclusions?
6. What additional research could be conducted on this topic?

III. Endnote and Literature Searching Sessions with Dena Hutto in Library 17 (February 4 and 9)

Greenlaw, Chapter 3 and Appendix

Assignment (due at the start of class on February 11th): Select a research question and use the search strategy outlined in Greenlaw's Table 3.4. Create an Endnote database using results from searching appropriate literature databases. Post your research notes on Moodle. These should be detailed enough to allow me to replicate your search strategy and your Endnote database.

IV. Critical Reading (February 11)

Greenlaw, Chapter 6 and Appendix

Leavitt, Steven D. 1996. How Do Senators Vote? Disentangling the Role of Voter Preferences, Party Affiliation, and Senator Ideology *American Economic Review* 86(3) 425-441.

Assignment (due by 5pm on February 10th): Write answers to the questions listed in Greenlaw's Tables 6.1 and 6.2 and write an abstract and critical review of Leavitt's article. Post your work on Moodle and review other postings before class on February 11th. Make sure you can derive equation (2) in Leavitt's article; be prepared to explain your derivation and analysis to the class.

V. Theory (February 16)

Greenlaw, Chapter 7

Posner, Richard A. 2006. The Economics of Capital Punishment *Economists' Voice* (March)

Becker, Gary S. 2006. On the Economics of Capital Punishment *Economists' Voice* (March)

Donohue, John J. and Justin Wolfers. 2006. The Death Penalty: No Evidence for Deterrence *Economists' Voice* (April)

Rubin, Paul H. 2006. Reply to Donohue and Wolfers on the Death Penalty and Deterrence *Economists' Voice* (April)

Rubin, Paul H. 2006. Reply: The Death Penalty Once More *Economists' Voice* (April)

Donohue, John and Justin J. Wolfers. 2006. A Reply to Rubin on the Death Penalty *Economists' Voice* (April)

Assignment (due at the start of class): Write a short (1-2 page) paper with another student in the class (I'll assign partners) that develops a theoretical model to complement the arguments developed by Posner or Becker. Are your models based on optimizing behavior or are they ad hoc? Draw at least one graph to complement an argument made in one of these papers.

Arrive prepared to discuss Donohue and Wolfers (2006) statement that "[t]he view that the death penalty deters is still the product of belief, not evidence."

VI. Finding Data - Session with Dena Hutto in Library 17 (February 18)

Greenlaw, Chapter 8 and Appendix

VII. Creating a Data Set (February 23)

Greenlaw, Chapter 9 and Appendices

Assignment (due by 5pm on February 22nd): Complete exercises 1 and 2 in Greenlaw's Chapter 9. Post your answers to the questions asked in these exercises and your *Excel* spreadsheet on Moodle and reviewing postings by other students before class. Provide complete citation information and your research notes.

VIII. Writing (February 25)

Greenlaw, Chapters 4 and 5 and Appendices

Assignments (due at the start of class):

Part I: Post a one-paragraph summary of your original research question on Moodle. Your summary should concisely and clearly state your research question and why it is feasible.

Assignment (due at the start of class):

Part II: Write a brief (1-2 page) paper that critically evaluates a paper you have written for another class and provide me with either a hard or electronic copy of that paper. Is the thesis clear? Can you underline the thesis sentence in the paper's introduction? Does the thesis sentence also appear in the paper's conclusion? Is the paper well organized? Are your main points supported by evidence? Can you identify ways to improve the clarity, conciseness, and precision of your writing? Did you use appropriate citations?

IX. Presentation (March 2)

Greenlaw, Chapter 12

Tufte, *Beautiful Evidence*, "The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint: Pitching Out Corrupts Within," pages 156-185.

XI. Research Proposals and Presentations (March 4, 9 and 11)

Raidenburg, Michael. 2005. Snooze Alarm! Avoiding PowerPoint Perils. *Fisheries* 30 (5) 34-38.

Assignment (posted on Moodle by 5^{pm} on March 3rd):

Greenlaw (2006, 26) describes a research proposal as "an exercise in persuasion." He is right. Your goal should be to persuade the reader of the importance of your proposed research. You should consult the guidelines for writing a research proposal in Greenlaw (2006, 26-27). Above all else, aim for clarity in your writing.

Requirements

Your proposal should include:

1. A statement of the nature of the problem and the research question;
2. a brief survey of the literature;
3. a tentative plan for research (research design);
4. a list of references;
5. one table of data;
6. annotated bibliography.

The statement of the nature of the problem and research question should be stated clearly and concisely. Your research question should be original. You should explain why your question is problem-oriented, analytical, interesting, amenable to economic analysis, and feasible (Greenlaw, 17-18). The literature review should be brief and refer only to the most important studies relevant to your research question. Be sure to explain, however, the relationship of your research to the existing literature. To the extent possible, your proposal should also include a tentative plan for research. This would include a brief description of an analytical framework (which will lead to a research hypothesis), possible data sources, and how you propose to test your research hypothesis. The proposal must also include

one table containing data relevant to your research question. Be sure to indicate clearly the source of the data.

The proposal should be 4-6 pages (not including the table or annotated bibliography), clearly and concisely written, free of spelling and grammatical mistakes, double-spaced, and typed in 12-point font.