ECON 640: Ph.D. Research Seminar

Instructor: Thomas Lemieux (Thomas.lemieux@ubc.ca)

Office hours: by appointment

Objective:

The goal of this seminar course is to assist students in identifying a viable research topic for a Ph.D. dissertation. Students who have passed the comprehensive examinations must be registered in Econ 640 until a dissertation prospectus has been successfully presented. 2nd and 3rd year students need to make a presentation in each semester in which they are enrolled in 640. Attendance is mandatory.

Meeting time (Winter 2015):

Our regular meeting time is 2:00-3:30 pm on Friday in the Economics Conference room. We may also have a few additional meetings on Tuesdays (2:00-3:30 pm) depending on scheduling issues. A detailed schedule will be posted on my website a bit later in January. In most cases we will schedule two 45 minutes in each of our meetings.

I should stress that, except for 4th year students in the Fall semester, all students are expected to attend and participate in all classes. This may sound a bit undignified for an advanced PhD class, but I will take attendance at each and every meeting. If you are unable to attend just drop me an email at thomas.lemieux@ubc.ca

Presentation guidelines

In the Fall 2014 semester all presentations are expected to be seminar-style presentations of research papers, typically the summer paper (for 3rd year students) or a paper that is part of the prospectus (for 4th year students who wish to present). Prepare material for about an hour so that we also have plenty of time for comments and questions. All third year students need to present during the semester. The instructor will also meet with students right after the presentation or during office hours to do a bit of a debriefing and discuss where to go next.

In the Winter 2015 semester presentations by 2nd and 3rd year students will typically be shorter (about 45 minutes). 2nd year students are not expected to have already produced a full-fledge research paper yet, so 45 minutes should be enough to present an idea they are considering working on. This is a good time to think seriously about the summer paper, and one of the goal of 640 is to help you get started on this. While it is OK to talk about the existing literature during the presentation, you also need to present an idea of your own even if you are not completely sure this is what you want to work on this in your summer paper (or for another research project). You should prepare a presentation for 30-35 minutes so that we have plenty of time for discussion.
In the case of 3rd year students you should already be hard at work to prepare your prospectus. So the 45 minutes presentation gives you a great opportunity to get feedback on something you plan to work on as part of your thesis. I am also happy to arrange longer presentations for students who already have a paper ready to present and need a little more time than the typical 45 minutes.

**Tips for presentations**

If you google something like “presenting paper economics” you will find a number of tips or presentation guidelines written by experienced researchers (Matt Jackson, Tim Kehoe, etc.). I am not sure I would take these suggestions too literally, but would suggest you take a look at this material since it will help make you think about what you should do while preparing your presentation.

Perhaps the most important thing to keep in mind is that to do a good presentation you need to be well prepared. Some people are more naturally gifted than others at oral presentations, but I believe that you can all be effective presenters provided that you are well prepared and organized. Doing a practice talk with a few of your classmates in an excellent way of getting yourself ready for a 640 presentation.

Otherwise keep in mind that in the market for ideas/research, you both need to produce research and “sell” it. Presentations are the key opportunity to make your sales pitch. Why is your research interesting and innovative? How is it different from what is already out there? Why should anybody pay attention? When in doubt don’t hesitate to do a bit of overselling… It is better to have people pay attention but conclude there is not quite as much as claimed then have them pay no attention because you fail to make a case that your research is useful and interesting.