

University of Missouri, Columbia
Economics 8085: Problems in Economics
Fall 2019

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Class description

Students enrolled in Economics 8085 will for the most part be reading economics papers (with supplemental material to be found in textbooks, as needed and appropriate) in one area of economics that interests them. Before the end of the semester, each student will submit a 15-20 page “review paper,” which will present and organize the state of economic knowledge in the area that they chose. Finally, each student will be required to present their paper to the instructor via Skype or in other manner that is mutually agreeable. (Note: since this is an internet class, and I am teaching it for the first time, this is somewhat tentative. However, it is a great skill to be able to present your work to other people, and I do want to emphasize it.)

The ideal paper would be a clear presentation of a subfield in economics, that would be understandable to a professional economist who does not necessarily work in that field or subfield. A very good model for review papers, one that every student should strive to achieve, is the papers in the *Journal of Economic Literature*. Just like the papers in that journal, your paper’s presentation, organization, clarity, and formatting, should all be done as close to a professional level as possible.

Assuming that each student will take Economics 8413 in the spring semester, ideally the paper that he or she writes in Economics 8085 should already be done in preparation that class. In Economics 8413, students will be required to write a research paper that is acceptable at the Master’s level. For the most part, each student will simply attempt to reproduce, and perhaps extend, a published empirical economics paper. Since you will be required to have a literature review in the paper you submit for Economics 8413, you can consider the paper you will be writing now as a longer and more complete version of that literature review.

Comments on instructor help, choosing your topic, use of Canvas

I am here to help you in writing the best paper you can, of course, and you shouldn’t hesitate to ask for my help. You can do so by email, by phone, etc.

That being said, a balance must be struck between two goals: 1) writing the best paper you can, and using instructor help for that; and 2) developing the skill to find the relevant research and to write a good paper independently.

One potentially great way to strike this balance is to use the discussion board on Canvas. As an experiment this semester students, should try to use the discussion board each time they have a question, and other students should try to answer the questions asked. This will count for your grade (see below). I will be monitoring the discussion board, and intervene any time that may be necessary, but please try to be as active in it as you can.

You can ask and answer different questions there:

- You can (and should) ask for feedback on the subfield of Economics that you propose to review.
- You can ask an econometrics question, or perhaps a conceptual question, if there is something you don't quite understand in a paper you are reading.
- You can ask for feedback on your writing.
- And pretty much any other question that you think would help you in the paper you are writing.

Besides providing good training on discussing economics, I am hoping that this discussion board can also be a fun way to keep students motivated and making progress in their work. Since it is an experiment, I may modify the format and requirements related to the discussion board as the semester progresses.

Grading

NOTE: grades will be awarded with + / -.

Grades for your paper will be based on your demonstrated skills in the following:

- i. Ability to find the relevant literature to review. I expect you to be critical in choosing which papers to include in your review, and which to exclude. Don't simply include all papers you find.
- ii. Ability to organize the material in a clear, understandable, and attractive way. Try to get your reader (me) excited about the area you are writing about. Try to convince me that the results in that area are important. Try to teach me something.
- iii. Ability to present your work in front of an audience. Because this is an internet class, the "audience" may end up being just me. However, we will explore the possibility of forming small groups of students, who will present to each other, potentially creating a small audience of 3 or 4 students for each presentation. This will be discussed through Canvas.
- iv. Ability to participate in a public discussion about Economics issues. As detailed above you will be asked to participate in the Canvas discussion board.

How to write your paper

Your paper should have several sections.

- i. Introduction. Explain what your chosen subfield is. Why is it interesting? Why should it interest the reader?
- ii. Literature review. This will probably be more than one section. Try to divide the material in a sensible way. Please bear in mind that a BAD literature review is, at an extreme, just a collection of abstracts of other papers. A GOOD literature review is something like a map. Just like a map locates cities and roads one in relation to another, a good literature review helps in

locating each paper reviewed in relation to the other papers that you are discussing. It will probably explain things such as “Paper X extended paper Y [in some way]”; or “Paper X disputed paper Y’s results”; or “Paper X used the empirical methodology prosed in papers Y and Z”; that is, anything that allows the reader to create a mental map of the research done in one particular area.

- iii. Conclusion. Summarize what you have found. What did you learn from your review? What can the reader learn? Is there a take-home message?

Relevant due dates

You need to announce what topic you will be writing on by Monday, September 23. Please do this on the discussion board.

Please submit a partial list (of at least 10 papers) of the papers that you will be reviewing, by Monday, October 21. Again, do this on the discussion board.

Your final paper will be due on Monday, December 2. Send it to me by email.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is fundamental to the activities and principles of a university. All members of the academic community must be confident that each person's work has been responsibly and honorably acquired, developed, and presented. Any effort to gain an advantage not given to all students is dishonest whether or not the effort is successful. The academic community regards breaches of the academic integrity rules as extremely serious matters. Sanctions for such a breach may include academic sanctions from the instructor, including failing the course for any violation, to disciplinary sanctions ranging from probation to expulsion. When in doubt about plagiarism, paraphrasing, quoting, collaboration, or any other form of cheating, consult the course instructor.

Accommodation of Disabilities

Students with Disabilities:

If you anticipate barriers related to the format or requirements of this course, if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you need to make arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please let me know as soon as possible.

If disability related accommodations are necessary (for example, a note taker, extended time on exams, captioning), please register with the Office of Disability Services (<http://disabilityservices.missouri.edu>), S5 Memorial Union, 882-4696, and then notify me of your eligibility for reasonable accommodations. For other MU resources for students with disabilities, click on "Disability Resources" on the MU homepage.

Intellectual Pluralism

The University community welcomes intellectual diversity and respects student rights. Students who have questions or concerns regarding the atmosphere in this class (including respect for diverse opinions) may contact the Departmental Chair or Divisional Director; the Director of the [Office of Students Rights and Responsibilities](http://osrr.missouri.edu/) (<http://osrr.missouri.edu/>); or the [MU Equity Office](http://equity.missouri.edu/) (<http://equity.missouri.edu/>), or by email at equity@missouri.edu. All students will have the opportunity to submit an anonymous evaluation of the instructor(s) at the end of the course.

Academic Inquiry, Course Discussion and Privacy

University of Missouri System Executive Order No. 38 lays out principles regarding the sanctity of classroom discussions at the university. The policy is described fully in Section 200.015 of the Collected Rules and Regulations. In this class, students may not make audio or video recordings of course activity, except students permitted to record as an accommodation under Section 240.040 of the Collected Rules. All other students who record and/or distribute audio or video recordings of class activity are subject to discipline in accordance with provisions of Section 200.020 of the Collected Rules and Regulations of the University of Missouri pertaining to student conduct matters.

Those students who are permitted to record are not permitted to redistribute audio or video recordings of statements or comments from the course to individuals who are not students in the course without the express permission of the faculty member and of any students who are recorded. Students found to have violated this policy are subject to discipline in accordance with provisions of Section 200.020 of the Collected Rules and Regulations of the University of Missouri pertaining to student conduct matters.