

Honors Research Information

To receive department honors:

• 3.3 overall GPA + 3.5 Economics GPA
• Enroll in 4995, Honors Proseminar – which is distinguished from the regular capstone by students doing a research project and writing a paper.

Writing the paper is a long process, especially if it’s the first time a student has done this type of project.

Students will need to select a faculty advisor for an honors research project. The Faculty List handout provides the fields for our faculty. Select one who is research active, which will generally be those who are tenure track.

The paper will need to be somewhat original. The goal is for students to get experience with research and the multiple steps involved in the process.

Economics is a broad social science, therefore some projects involve more data gathering, while others are more theoretical (approximately 8 out of 10 students end up doing empirical research). The faculty advisor will help in figuring out a manageable size topic for your research.

4995 is a research class, so it will not meet every week. The syllabus (which can be viewed online) shows a timeline for completing the steps in the process. A student cannot procrastinate in order to finish the entire project within the time frame; must stay on top of things. This course is not for everyone – the student will need to enjoy writing and not knowing the answer. The course can be fun and make a student feel like he or she is contributing new research. It requires self-organization and higher level of initiative; one cannot just respond to an instructor, as in a regular course.

Approximately 2 out of 10 students will complete the research paper within the first semester. More typically, students will spread the work over two semesters, enrolling in the fall for three credit hours, receiving an Incomplete grade for that semester, and then completing the project the following spring semester. At this point the student presents the research paper to the class and will be assigned a letter grade, which is determined primarily by the advisor.

The general quality of the research done in recent years has been quite good.

[A handout listing various undergraduate research projects has been provided to give an idea of the types of research topics that have been selected by economics students in recent years.]

Q & A

What kind of time commitment is involved?
• 10 hours per week spent on the research project is generally adequate to do a good job. If a student has experience with data programs, already has a professor selected, or the professor already has a data set that suits the project, these will all speed the process somewhat. Trying to finish the project in one semester might require a 20-hour-per-week time commitment.

**If I enroll in 4995 will I still have to take the Major Field Test in Economics?**

• Students who enroll in 4995 also enroll in 4971 in the spring semester. This is a six-week, one credit hour supplemental capstone course leading up to the MFT exam. The department wants all the majors to take this exam to measure how effectively we are doing.

**What is the procedure for selecting a faculty advisor?**

• The class will meet the first week after which the student will have 2-3 weeks to obtain an advisor and select a research topic. Even better is to get an advisor lined up in advance of the summer break so that you can begin working on the project some before the fall semester begins.

**How is this capstone different from 4970?**

• The regular capstone (4970) has a shorter research paper with less research and data manipulation and more literature review, etc.

**Will taking the honors capstone better prepare me for a masters program?**

• If a student wants a masters degree only, he or she can best prepare for this by pursuing a BS in economics and taking a lot of math courses. If the ultimate goal is a PhD, having done this type of research project would be an advantage in preparing the student for the more cutting edge research required by a doctoral program. A research paper is done for the masters, but it is not as intense.

**Does taking the honors capstone offer a benefit for being admitted into a masters program?**

• Since good letters of recommendation are required for admittance, having a professor be able to flesh out a standard letter with comments about the research project he or she advised

**Are faculty members excited to be advisors for undergraduate research?**

• Typically the faculty who teach upper level courses and those who are doing research are most likely to accept an advisee. As a rule, students do not have difficulty finding a faculty advisor. A student might even select a topic that excited the faculty advisor and add to his or her data.

**Can I combine an economics honors research project with a political science honors research project?**

• The student must make sure that both departments sign off on the project. Our only concern will be whether it qualifies as an economics research project. 

**Some of these topics seem rather large scale. What is the danger in gathering one’s own data?**

• It is paramount to have a narrow topic. The faculty advisor will help in this identification process.