

Finding a Topic for an Empirical Research Paper

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Economics

This is a new activity that I have not tried in my graduate classes yet.

Learning Outcome:

Students in graduate economics courses are often required to write empirical research papers. One of the most challenging parts for students is identifying and clarifying a feasible and practical research project that can be completed in a quarter-long course.

The Goal of this assignment is to use AI, specifically a large language model (LLM), to assist students in identifying and refining an empirical microeconomics research question.

Context:

Timeframe: First 3 weeks of the quarter with final paper topic proposal to be submitted in week 4.

Course Modality: Any

Steps:

1. Learn more about prompt engineering: <https://aipioneers.org/the-prepare-framework/>
2. Think of an idea or area of interest and suggest it to your preferred LLM.
3. Use dialogue with the LLM to refine the topic until it is a specific and feasible research question relevant to microeconomics. This process will take multiple iterations.
4. Use dialogue with the LLM to discuss the types of data needed and potential sources of data for your analysis.
5. Write a paper proposal that includes the research question and data you will use for your analysis. Explain how using LLM affected your ease of finding a clear topic.

Reflection:

Students in my graduate economics class always struggle to find a feasible research topic for their required paper. Most students wait until the very end of the quarter to even begin thinking about a

topic and the end result is work of lower quality (and less learning) than would otherwise be possible if students got an earlier start.

I have no evidence to share about the success or failure of this assignment.