

551 Economics of Education

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Student Office Hours:

Instead of open office hours, I use Calendly.com. Students can sign up for appointments without needing to contact me first. The slots are each 15 minutes and you can sign up for 1, 2 or 3 adjacent slots depending on how long you think you'll need.

You can sign up for an appointment 24 hours in advance at <https://calendly.com/bensost>

If you need to meet with me and all the slots are full, you can email me to sign up for a different time.

Course Goals

- **Write paper**
- Improve technical reading skills
- Solidify fundamental econometric concepts
- Gain familiarity with economics of education literature

Prerequisites:

Graduate core of econometrics and microeconomics

Course Overview

Assignments:

- Read working paper and write detailed referee report. (4hrs)
- Spend 30 minutes thinking of an idea. (30 minutes)
 - Write down as many ideas as you can think of. 4-5 sentence maximum per idea and shorter is fine.
 - **You should spend 30 minutes each week listing ideas, but do not turn in your ideas each week.** Instead, once a month, turn in the idea that you think is most promising to get feedback. If you want feedback on multiple ideas, you can turn in multiple ideas. **Indicate on a scale of 1-5 how promising you think the idea is (5 is highest).**
 - The due dates for ideas are indicated on the syllabus calendar
- Read 2 published papers each week and answer questions.
 - One paper each week is a regular paper. You will submit answers to questions written in the margins for these papers. (2-3 hrs)
 - The other paper each week is an overview article, a discussion piece or something policy focused. This is meant to provide breadth but will not usually be discussed in class. Some of these are just a few researchers' take on the literature and should be

read with that caveat in mind. You will write a very brief list that summarizes the key points of these articles. (1-2 hrs)

- Work on paper (2.5hrs). Progress reports due periodically.

In class:

- Discuss working papers
- I lecture on topic
- Random quizzes on published papers (non-graded)

Final paper:

The final project is only required for PhD students.

You should mimic the structure of a typical NBER working paper. The paper must be empirical but does not necessarily have to be on education.

Without tables/figures the paper should be between 10-30 pages double-spaced. That said, it is only okay to have a short paper if it is dense with results. If you have never written an academic article before, remember that this is not a term paper or book report. You must sell your paper and the audience should be academics. **Try to mimic the conceptual structure, writing style and format of NBER working papers that we read.**

For students who struggle with English, you are expected to go to the writing center or access another source so that your writing is professional. Nobody should be turning in a 1st draft, but this is particularly true for non-native English speakers. The Academic Center for Excellence is a good resource for international students to work on improving their writing skills.

Paper structure

Assuming your paper is of the form, “How does X impact Y”, I recommend using the following sections for your paper. If your paper is of a different type, you should think carefully about how to structure the paper.

1. A very carefully written introduction that frames the question in a few paragraphs, reports main results and explains what makes the results credible.
2. A very brief lit review that explains how your paper fits in. I think it's usually better to leave out the lit review and just build the cites/discussion into the rest of the paper. If you choose to include a lit review, it should be no longer than 1 page.
3. Institutional background if necessary. If you are studying the effect of a policy, you definitely need this. It is usually a good section to have.
4. Theoretical or empirical model or both.
5. Data description (can also go before the models depending on context).
6. Results presented in a simple naïve fashion that illustrates your main point.
7. Results using a more sophisticated empirical strategy.
8. Specification tests (these should be mentioned in the introduction)
9. Extensions of main results.
10. Conclusion/Discussion

In order to be granted an incomplete, you must turn in evidence of progress at the end of this semester. You need to have a topic chosen in two weeks, as per the syllabus calendar. If you have made little progress on your paper by the end of the semester, you will not pass the course.

If you end up with an incomplete, the full paper is due on August 15th of this year. The August 15th deadline is a firm one. If you don't think there is any chance that you can complete a full paper by this date, you can propose to replicate and extend a paper of your choice (ask me if you have no ideas of what to replicate).

I encourage you to try to write the paper. If you have no ideas, ask me and I might be able to help.

Grading:

Referee Reports + Published paper question responses – 35%

Ideas – 10%

Participation – 15%

Paper (for PhD students) = 40%

Quizzes – 0%

Non-PhD students have no paper so all other categories are reweighted up accordingly.

About NBER and IZA working papers

The National Bureau of Economic Research and IZA allow its members to post working papers that are not published. In general, NBER and IZA members are very good researchers, so the average quality of working papers is quite high. Many of the papers we read will probably be published eventually. That said, the papers are not polished, and in many cases will never be published due to fundamental flaws. Because NBER and IZA working papers are not published yet, they usually follow the formatting convention of working papers in economics, namely, the tables and figures are always at the back of the article.

Answer questions for primary published papers (regular paper (RP))

You are expected to read the entirety of each published paper. After reading the article, you will answer the questions that I wrote in margins of the pdf. In most cases, there are between 2-4 questions asked for each article. In some cases, the questions will take some time to answer (e.g. write 2 pages explaining...). **You should email me your answers to the questions by Thursday night. If we don't have class 1 week (e.g. spring break), email me your answers by the second Thursday in between the classes.**

Read the secondary published paper (summary paper (SP))

Write a bulleted list of a few key takeaways. Email me this list when you email answers for the primary published papers. This should only take you 5 minutes to write once you have read the article. I do not need a comprehensive summary – just a brief bulleted list of takeaways.

Evaluating working papers

Working papers assigned for this class are in the shared box folder. **I will likely change some of the working papers as the semester develops, so please do not read ahead more than 1-2 weeks.**

If an article references an online appendix, you should follow this link and read the appendix. I did not include the appendices in the shared folder. How closely you read the appendix depends on the context. In some cases, the appendix gives extreme details regarding data construction that you may not need to read carefully. In other cases, critical empirical tests are provided in the appendix and you should read it very carefully.

Rationale for working papers

The purpose of reading and evaluating working papers is two-fold.

1. Develop critical reading skills.
2. Learn about current developments in a variety of areas in the economics of education.

While some of the working papers you read might be garbage in terms of empirical methodology or contribution, the literature reviews will probably be reasonable.

There is an example of a working paper referee report in the referee report guidelines document in the shared folder.

Course Biases:

- Strongly US centric
- Mostly reduced form rather than structural.
- Emphasis on recent research
- Others?

Late Work Policy

Work is considered late if it is turned in after class. Please ask me ahead of time if you need to turn in something late. Unless you ask me ahead of time, late work will only get half credit.

Cell phones and Computers

I find phone use in class to be disrespectful. Please don't do this.

Cheating Policy

Please do not cheat. You are welcome to work with your peers on out of class work, but you should write up assignments individually. Plagiarism of any assignment will result in a **zero for the assignment** as well as having your **semester grade** lowered by one full letter grade (e.g. A to B).

Attendance Policy

You should attend all classes. If you cannot attend a class, please let me know ahead of time.

Academic accommodations

If you have a documented learning disability, please provide me with an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services as soon as possible. Students are expected to give at least two weeks' notice of the need for accommodations. If you need immediate accommodations, please arrange to meet with me within the first two class meetings. I encourage you to meet with me early in the term so that we can discuss strategies for a successful experience in this course.

If you have a disability and have not registered with Student Disability Services, I encourage you to do so.

Empathy and communication

It is particularly important to treat everyone in our class with empathy and understanding. I try to treat everyone with the understanding that they may be facing serious challenges in their life and I hope that you follow a similar approach with your classmates and with me. That said, I cannot make accommodations if I am not informed about the issue. If you let me know at the end of the semester that you have not turned in any assignments because your family member has been sick, it is too late at that point. When an issue arises, let me know ahead of time. If you cannot let me know ahead of time, email me as soon as you can. Whatever your situation, the sooner you let me know, the sooner we can work together to make sure you are successful in the course.

BRING THE ASSIGNED WORKING PAPERS TO CLASS EITHER IN DIGITAL OR PHYSICAL FORM.

Working papers referee reports should be emailed before class starts.

The assignments for RP and SP should be emailed by the Thursday before class.

If you need an extension on any assignment, please email me to ask. Please prioritize reading the working paper before class because an important component of class each week is a careful discussion of the working paper.

Date	In Class Topic	Due
Key: RP = Regular paper SP = Summary or discussion paper WP = NBER Working Paper		
1/13	Syllabus / Project management / Data Sources /US Ed Overview	Work hard on applying for restricted data or coming up with a topic.
1/20	No Class	
1/27	Educational production (Models, assumptions, tests) Value-added day 1	RP1: Todd and Wolpin (2003) <i>Economic Journal</i> SP1: Black and Sokoloff (2006) <i>Handbook Chapter</i> WP: #1 Turn in brief description of final project topic.
2/3	Value-added modeling day 2	RP2: Rivkin et al. (2005) <i>Econometrica</i> SP2: Lang (2010) <i>Journal of Economic Perspectives</i> WP #2
2/10	Teacher quality	RP3: Chetty et al. (2014b) <i>AER</i> SP3: Koedel et al. (2015) <i>Economics of Education Review</i> WP: #3 Ideas list due. Do not include the final project topic
2/17	Pay for Performance / Accountability	RP4: Fryer (2013) <i>Journal of Labor Economics</i> SP4: Allan and Fryer (2011) <i>Hamilton Working Paper</i> WP: #4
2/24	Educational Production (spending, class size)	RP5: Hoxby (2000 QJE) SP5: Jepsen (2015 IZA) WP: #5
3/3	Peer effects	RP6: Sacerdote (QJE, 2001) SP6: Sacerdote 2011 <i>Handbook Chapter</i> WP: #6
3/10	Peer effects / Tracking	RP7: Carrell Hoekstra and Kuka (<i>AER</i> 2018) SP7: Betts (2011 <i>Handbook Chapter</i>) WP: #7 Ideas list due
3/17	Charter Schools, Vouchers	RP8: Angrist et al. <i>AEJ: Applied</i> 2013 SP8: Bettinger 2011 (<i>Handbook Chapter</i>) WP: #8 Turn in evidence of progress for final paper
3/24	Spring break	
3/31	Returns to Schooling	RP9: Oreopolous, (<i>AER</i> 2006) SP9: Deming (<i>JEP</i> 2022)

		WP: #9 Ideas list due
4/7	Higher education – Returns to College	RP10: Zimmerman (2014) <i>Journal of Labor Economics</i> SP10: Barrow and Malamud (2015) <i>Annual Review of Economics</i> WP: #10
4/14	Higher education – parental income, financial aid and credit constraints	RP11: Manoli and Turner (AEJ Policy 2018) SP11: Avery and Turner (2012) WP: #11
4/21	Higher education – major choice	RP12a: Butcher McEwan and Weerapana (2014 JEP) SP12b: Webber (IZA 2014) WP:#12
4/28	Higher education – financial aid and wrap up	RP13a: Bettinger, (QJE, 2012) SP13b: Dynarski and Scott-Clayton 2013 WP:#13 Ideas list due

The working papers and published papers are all posted on blackboard.

Final project is due by the end of finals week (5:00 pm on Friday). If you want an incomplete, you must turn in evidence of reasonable progress. Reasonable progress will vary by person and there is no objective metrics that I am looking for. I will not grade your reasonable progress check-in.

Things might change.