

## Senior Seminar in Economics - Economics 486 Syllabus, Spring 2012

Section 1, 2:00-3:15 p.m. MW (CRN 22285)

**Prof. Estelle's Senior Seminar** for Spring 2012 will require from each student a thorough research proposal that convinces the reader of the importance and feasibility of the project. Necessary components of such a proposal include motivation for the research question, an appropriate theoretical framework, and a plan for data use and obtaining empirical results. While we will not actually estimate any models using STATA, you will be expected to propose a project that could, given current technology and the state of economic knowledge, be estimated. A good proposal will require a full semester's diligent effort. The ultimate goal of this course is to provide students with the individual experience necessary for starting a quality empirical research project. Just as a skyscraper is only as strong as its footings and skeletal structure, applied economic research is only as enlightening as the foundations of that work.

Each student, in consultation with the professor, will choose his/her own topic for the project. Topics must belong in "applied microeconomics" and should fall within the fields of labor or public economics. Students are encouraged to consider topics that are especially "policy relevant." Within these specifications, students may choose to pursue research questions related to health, families or household production, education, cash welfare, employment, government transfer programs, social insurance, discrimination, or any number of other topics that require careful application of microeconomic theory, available data, and econometric techniques to answer an important question.

**Instructor:** Sarah M. Estelle, 315 Buckman Hall  
**Office Hours:** Mondays and Wednesdays 12:30-1:30 p.m., and by appointment  
**Email:** estelles@rhodes.edu

**Course Objectives:** This course will give you the opportunity to apply your training in economic theory to applied economic research. We will develop the tools that economists use to explore those topics and you will apply these tools to a new research question. You will learn the steps involved in conducting economic research. You will select a research question, formulate a theoretical model and hypothesis(es), identify and describe a plausible source of data, and propose an appropriate econometric model.

**Course Goals:**

- To apply economic theory to real world situations and to utilize economic theory to frame analysis of research questions.
- To recognize the vast array of information available to economists over the internet and in the library, and to learn where resources and data can be found.
- To understand how statistical analyses can be used to test economic theory and address policy issues.
- To gain an appreciation for the value of economic reasoning and research, and how to communicate the same.

**Plagiarism:** According to the Honor Council Constitution, "Plagiarism is an act of academic dishonesty. A student must not adopt or reproduce ideas, words, or statements of another person without appropriate acknowledgment." Please consult the staff at the Writing Center or me if you have questions on citing sources in your coursework. Please do not make the mistake of assuming you are a good enough writer for plagiarism to go unnoticed.

**The Honor System:** I take the Honor Code seriously. I trust that students in this class will be truthful in their dealings with me and will not cheat on their assignments. In the event that one of you observes an incidence of cheating, I assume you will report the violation to a member of the Honor Council.

**Course Communication:** All course materials will be available on the course Moodle site. Please get in the habit of checking that site regularly and your email daily.

**Class Attendance and Appointments:**

Class attendance is required. We will not meet all together at each scheduled class period because much of the work you must complete before the end of the semester will require independent focus and effort and will benefit from my feedback through one-on-one consultations. To that end, you will be required to schedule frequent appointments with me to discuss your progress, pose questions, and receive feedback and direction. An online process will be provided to make appointment scheduling flexible and efficient. Appointments should be rescheduled at least 24-hours in advance except in the direst circumstances. No-shows will not be tolerated.

**Grading Policy:**

There are no exams in this course. Your course grade will be based on:

Oral and Written Assignments	60%
Final Paper	25%
Final Presentations	15%

**Assignments:**

The assignments in this class are designed to clarify and solidify what is expected of you in completing your final project. If you choose not to complete the assignments on time, you run the risk of falling behind and never really catching up. This is not the type of class that you can put on the “back burner” while you cram for your other classes, so the assignments are designed to drastically reduce your ability to follow this tempting strategy.

Unless directed otherwise, assignments should be submitted via email as Word documents *before* the stated deadline. I will provide feedback verbally in our meetings and/or using the comment tool found on Word’s review menu. You should retain the commented versions of your assignments and reflect on them throughout the semester as you finalize your paper and presentation. Late assignments are not accepted, in-class assignments cannot be made up, and no assignments are dropped since each is of critical importance to your overall research project.

**Substantive Research Proposal:**

Your work in this course will culminate with a final research project. Each student will complete a lengthy paper (probably about 20 pages) and a 15-minute in-class presentation that together will constitute the proposal. Even though the finished project will involve you clearly and concisely conveying the feasibility and appropriateness of the specifics in your proposal, **you will be required to demonstrate consistent progress** on this project over the course of the semester. “Consistent progress” will affect all aspects of your final course grade; such progress will enable you to be a better class participant, will be a large part of your assignment grade, and will obviously influence the quality of your final paper and presentation.

**Paper:**

**Your final paper will be due Monday, April 23 by 5:00 p.m.** (along with the entire binder of previous assignments). Your paper will consist of the following sections:

- (I) An introduction that motivates your research question
- (II) A review of the scholarly literature relevant to your question
- (III) A description of your theoretical model and the hypotheses to be tested
- (IV) A description of your data and sources
- (V) A presentation of your empirical model(s)
- (VI) A conclusion summarizing your proposal, policy implications, and issues for future research

**Presentation:**

Your final oral presentation will be given to an audience of your classmates and others in attendance at the **Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity Symposium (URCAS) on Friday, April 27**. You will be required to present a dry-run of your talk in class earlier in April in order to receive feedback from me and your classmates before the public presentation. Your presentation grade will be based in part on both your in-class and URCAS presentations, but prizes will be awarded to the best two in-class presentations as determined by your peers.