

University of California
Department of Economics
Fall 2005

87 Evans Hall
2-4 Friday

Economics 195A
Senior Honor's Thesis Seminar
Professor Roger Craine

Description: H195A is for senior Economic Majors who meet the GPA requirements of 3.3 overall and 3.5 in the upper-division economics courses and that plan to write and honors thesis. The goal of the seminar is help you choose a thesis topic, get data, write a prospectus, get an advisor, and start on your thesis. That's a lot for fifteen weeks.

Independent research is very different from taking a lecture class. In lecture classes you can be passive. To do research you must take the initiative. My experience is that some students love research, some students hate research, but almost none are indifferent. If you love it then writing a thesis is a lot of work, but fun. If you hate it then drop the course because a thesis is a lot of work and not fun for you.

Required Text

Freakonomics, 2005, Steven D Levitt and Stephen J Dubner
Harper Collins Publishers

Assignments: This class has team projects and individual assignments that must be turned in on time. The goal of the team projects is to get you to do small structured quantitative research projects. The team projects are problem sets for a thesis. The individual assignments are steps to constructing your thesis.

Team projects: The team is responsible for the exercise.

Team: Three students make up a team.

Team Projects: I give you a simple economic model and the null hypothesis. Your team's project is:

- (1) get the data and test the hypothesis
- (2) write a short (2-3 pages) paper that (a) specifies the model (b) clearly states the null hypothesis (c) and explains the results of your test.

Individual projects: Each student is responsible for individual assignments. Individual assignments focus on your thesis.

Grades: Grades are pass/not pass. Three late individual assignments and you *do not pass*. There are no excuses. If you are out of town—many of you may go on recruiting, or other, trips—email your assignment.

Time Line

September 2 Introduction

- September 9 Due:
 (1) Introduce yourself to me in 300 words—background, interests, whatever you think is relevant.
 (2) Three ideas for a thesis--each with a 200-300 word description.
- My Lecture (you can be a passive for another week)
 I explain the first Team project: Random walk model of stock prices—due September 27.
- September 16 Class discussion *Freakonomics: 4 Where have all the criminal gone?* Be prepared to discuss: what's the economic model? what's the hypothesis, evidence, and test?
- September 23 Library tour—we meet at Haas Library for a demonstration on finding data and tracing articles. This looks like another easy passive day—passive yes, easy no! Online access is the path to your thesis and maybe your career—be a sponge, absorb everything.
- September 30 No class
- October 7 Team Random Walk project due. Each team turns in a 2-3 page write up of their project. Be prepared for a 10 minute class presentation. Have your presentation on flash memory. I will select 3 teams to present.
- I explain the second team project: Forward Discount Puzzle—due October 18.
- Individual Project: Write two pages describing your idea and a summary of an article you found on the topic using EconLit. Be prepared to explain both to the class.
- October 14 Individual Project: (1) Rewrite your thesis idea and summarize another article, or choose another idea and summarize an article on this topic. (2) Formulate an idea as a testable hypothesis and list potential data sources. (Getting the data comes next week.) Explain the hypothesis and how the data might be used to test it two pages or less. As always, be prepared to discuss your project, relevant papers, and potential data sources in class.
- October 21 Forward Discount Puzzle team project due: Same format as project one—two-five page write up and be prepared for a class presentation.
- Individual project: Retrieve some data that you could use to test the hypothesis. Compute summary statistics (means, variances, covariances, etc) and graph the data. Do a two page write up of the data.
- October 28 Those that think they have a thesis topic: Write a three or four page paper presenting (1) the idea (2) why it is interesting (3) ways to test the idea—econometric or some other way to reject it (4) data sources, and (5) an annotated bibliography showing where your idea fits in the literature.
- Those that don't have a topic: Choose three ideas and write a one page essay for each—explain — (1) why they are interesting and (2) how they could be statistically tested or falsified some other way.
- November 4 If you have a topic you are working on your prospectus. If you don't have a thesis topic pick one and start your prospectus.

Class discussion *Freakonomics: 2. How is the Ku Klux Klan like a group of real-estate agents?* Be prepared to discuss: what's the economic model? what's the hypothesis, evidence, and test?

November 11 First draft of your prospectus is due. This is an 8-10 page paper that says (1) what the economic question is (2) why it is interesting (3) how it fits in the literature and (4) how you intend to answer the question.

November 25 Thanksgiving Holiday

December 2 Final draft of your prospectus is due. This paper must have (1) a clear exposition of the focus of this thesis (2) why one should care (3) empirical, or other (although I can't imagine what they might be) ways to test the main hypothesis.

Class presentations.

December 9 More class presentations.