

Winter 2008

Economics 418: Economic Analysis of Community Issues
Professors Bruce Blonigen and Bill Harbaugh.

Syllabus

Our Contact Info:

Bill: 538 PLC, Office hours: Mon 3-5pm, ph: 346-1244, wtharbaugh@gmail.com

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Overview: The primary purpose of this course is to give hands-on experience at economic research and help students develop an appropriate topic and detailed prospectus for an undergraduate honors thesis in economics. We expect that students taking this course will either go on to take “EC 419: Economic Analysis of Community Issues” with us in the spring quarter, or will go on to complete individual honors research projects under the supervision of a faculty member.

There will be two main components to this course. The first will be to meet with leaders of community organizations, primarily governmental agencies and other non-profit organizations (such as local charities) to learn more about their organizations and discuss possible thesis topics for students continuing on with our EC 419 course. These presentations/discussions will occur in the first 5 weeks of the course, after which we will survey students’ interests and determine projects and two-person teams for each topic. The goal is to find interesting, important, and tractable projects that will provide a significant benefit to the community partner. We highly encourage students to suggest potential community partners and topics!

We strongly believe that students not intending to continue on with EC 419 will gain from these community presentation experiences as well by seeing how one takes a general topic area and develops a well-defined research topic. During this period, we will also meet individually with students not intending to take EC 419 to provide them assistance in refining their own topic.

The second component of the course will be to introduce you to the elements that are important for completing a thesis, including development of a research question, reviewing prior literature, hypothesis development, gathering data, undertaking data analysis, and professional presentation of results. We will intersperse the entire course with readings and homework assignments related to this component.

With thesis topic in hand, the second half of the course will be devoted to writing a prospectus for your thesis. The proposals will be 5-10 pages, and will be handed in and also presented to the group the 9th or 10th week of classes. Part of your grade in this course will be based on the overall quality of the prospectus, and your contribution to the prospectus for those in two-person teams.

Required text: Steven A. Greenlaw. *Doing Economics: A Guide to Understanding and*

Carrying Out Economic Research. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006.

Workload: This course is for 2 credits. Class will meet for 2 hours a week, 10-11:50am on Fridays. You will also be expected to meet with Bill and Bruce individually and with your group during the second half of the course.

Grades: Your grade will be based on the following:

20%	Class attendance and participation. (Both are required) Particularly relevant for when we have community presenters in class. If you are going to miss a class let us know in advance.
30%	Homework and quizzes.
50%	A 5-10 page written project proposal and presentation (group project). Your grade will be based on overall quality, and your contribution. Details on this project will be passed out later in the quarter.

Tentative schedule:

Week 1: Introduction.

Week 2: Two community guest speakers.

Reading assignment: Greenlaw, chapters 1 & 2. Possible speaker-related readings.

Week 3: Two community guest speakers.

Reading assignment: Prior honors paper. Possible speaker-related readings.

Week 4: Two community guest speakers.

Reading assignment: Greenlaw, chapters 7 and 10. Possible speaker-related readings.

Week 5: One community guest speaker and summarize possible topics developed in first half of the course.

Reading assignment: Possible speaker-related readings.

Week 6: Thesis topics and two-person teams determined in the first part of the week. Primer on Benefit-Cost Analysis (BCA).

Reading assignment: Greenlaw, chapter 3. BCA readings to be announced.

Week 7: Benefit-Cost Analysis continued, Primer on econometric analysis with Stata software.

Reading assignment: Greenlaw, chapter 9. BCA readings to be announced.

Week 8: Individual meetings with Bill and Bruce. No regular class.

Reading assignment: Greenlaw, chapters 4 & 5.

Weeks 9-10: Group presentations of thesis prospectus.

Survey:

These survey questions are to help us match people up with partners and with projects in as productive a way as possible. Please put this under my door (538 PLC) by Tuesday 8AM.

Name:**Your skills:**

What you are particularly good at or particularly enjoy – such as writing, html, database programming, GIS, card tricks, et cetera.

Past experience:

Titles and length of previous research papers you've written:

Econometric courses and grades:

Relevant work experience?

Career plans:

Career you are interested in, grad programs, professional school.

Preferences for partners:

If there's anyone in the class that you would really like to work with / don't want to work with, let us know here.