Economics 418: Economic Analysis of Community Issues

Professors Bruce Blonigen and Bill Harbaugh.

Syllabus: Winter 2006

This is part one of a course that lasts for two quarters. The purpose of the course is to give hands on experience at economic research. This first quarter is meant to get students to the point where they have a well defined research project that they would like to work on, and a good understanding of the tools needed to complete it. We expect that students taking this course will either go on to take the spring Community Issues course (419) with Bruce and Bill, or will complete individual honors research projects under the supervision of a faculty member.

Econ 419 deals with using economics to analyze problems that face the local community. You will work with interested community groups or government agencies to define a question of interest, and your final project will be a 30 or so page research paper and a 30 minute power-point presentation. You’ll then present the research to a group interested in your topic, such as a local non-profit or governmental organization.

Both quarters of the course will be team taught by Professors Bruce Blonigen and Bill Harbaugh. The first quarter we will meet 10-12 Friday. During the second quarter we will have one scheduled meeting time per week for the class as a whole, (also 10-12 Friday) and each team will also meet separately with Bill or Bruce once or twice a week. You can take the first course and not the second, but you can’t take the second and not the first. Admission is by instructor permission.

At the first class meeting, we’ll discuss potential projects and pass out a survey form asking about your general skills and interests, and what sorts of projects interest you. For the rest of the quarter we will have a mix of speakers from community groups about various projects, and lectures from Bill and Bruce about techniques such as benefit cost analysis, regression analysis, and how to write like an economist. There will be a few homework assignments involving benefit cost analysis, and practical use of regression software (We use Stata, we’ll give you a copy.) You can also expect to do some reading about the projects, and particularly about your topic.

We’ll put you in 2 person (usually) groups, and let you know your project by the 5th week of class. Once each group has identified their project, you will spend the rest of the quarter working on your proposals and collecting your data. 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. Your grade will be based on the overall quality, and your contribution.

During the spring quarter you will work in teams to analyze the problem that you have identified and prepare your final report and presentation. This will be done with lots of help from Bill, Bruce, and in frequent consultation with people from the community organization. The 8th and 9th weeks of class will be for practice presentations to the class.

Probably the best way to think of this is to picture yourselves as consultants brought in by
the non-profit to answer the specific question you have identified. You will want to make sure that you demonstrate your ability to apply your specific expertise – economic analysis - and also that you produce an product that is as useful as possible.

**Our Contact Info:**

**Bill:** 538 PLC, Office hours: Mon 2-4, phone: 346-1244, bill@harbaugh.org

**Bruce:** 511 PLC, Office hours: Mon & Wed, 3-4 PM, phone: 346-4680, bruceb@uoregon.edu

**Readings:** These will be distributed in class. You will also need your intermediate microeconomics and econometrics textbooks.

**Grades:** For the first quarter, your grade will be based on the following:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Requirement</th>
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<tr>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Class attendance / participation (Both are required. If you are going to miss a class let us know in advance.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Preparation for your speaker. You’ll meet with us, do some background reading, prepare questions and preliminary research plan.</td>
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<tr>
<td>50%</td>
<td>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.</td>
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Second quarter grades will be based on the overall quality of your project and your contribution to it.

**Workload:** The winter course is for 2 credits. Class will meet for 2 hours a week, 10-11:50 on Fridays. You will also be expected to meet with Bill and Bruce individually and with your group. These meetings will be scheduled during the quarter.
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.