

Outline of the first year course on:  
How to conceive, write and publish  
a paper in economics  
(starting from the summer report)

March 15, 2019

## Main goals

This course has three main goals:

1. To explain what the faculty expects from the summer report that first year students have to write in order to be admitted to the second year.
2. To provide guidance, beyond the summer report, on how to start a thesis project, and specifically on how to conceive, write and publish a paper in economics.
3. To provide information on how the economics profession works and on how to prepare for the Job Market during the PhD.

After a first introductory lecture specifically focused on the summer report requirement, the next three lectures will move to the second goal from the perspectives of Macroeconomics and Microeconomics, with a particular attention on how to integrate theoretical and empirical work. The third goal will be approached in the last lecture.

## Lecture 1: The summer report requirement

This year the lecture will be given by Andrea Ichino who will touch on the following topics with specific reference to the summer report:

- Deadlines, grading rules and format
- How to find an interesting research question
- How to relate it to the existing literature
- Theory Component
  - What do we expect?

- How can you develop (find) the appropriate theoretical framework
- Empirical Component
  - What do we expect?
  - Where you can find appropriate data?
  - What are the right methods for working with the data?
- How you should report your results
- How to avoid that a reader stops reading your paper after the first page: the difficult task of writing clearly
- Searching for advise from faculty members

These issues will be discussed with specific reference to the summer report, helping to clarify that requirement. But most of them are relevant for any paper and in particular the Job Market paper.

## Lecture 2: The macro perspective

This year the lecture will be given by Russell Cooper who will go over the structure of the summer report presented in the first lecture from the perspective of macroeconomics. Starting from specific examples of papers, he will cover topics like how to:

- use some variant of the standard RBC model to address a data puzzle
- use a search model to evaluate a policy proposal, say UI benefit modification
- use an OG model to look at the effects of health insurance, retirement policy etc.
- use an OG model to study a question about education policy
- study the effects of bankruptcy laws in an Aiyagari model

## Lecture 3: The applied micro perspective

This year the lecture will be given by Michele Belot who will similarly go over the structure of issues presented in the first lecture from the perspective of applied micro, with specific examples. She will also delve explicitly into how to write each specific section of an applied micro paper

*Part 1: How to conduct an applied project*

- Finding a research question
- Relationship with theory: Reduced form vs structural approaches in applied work
- Structure of an empirical component
- Pre-Analysis Plan and Ethical issues

*Part 2 : Writing an applied micro paper*

- Title, abstract, introduction
- Theoretic framework and hypotheses
- Data, identification and empirical strategy
- Results
- Robustness checks
- Conclusions

## Lecture 4: Integration of theoretical and empirical work

This year the lecture will be given by David Levine who will focus on what the point of a theoretical model is, with specific reference to the theoretical interpretation of results from causal econometric analysis based on natural experiments. Specifically his lecture will illustrate that:

- Without a model the intuition of the researcher isn't tested, and intuition may easily be wrong or overlook important issues.

- Measurement in general isn't very interesting unless we know that the researcher is measuring something useful, and measures are only useful in the context of a model.
- A model directs the attention of the researcher to particular aspects of data.
- Without a model we have to guess what assumptions the researcher made.
- After we guess what assumptions the researcher made we may well conclude they weren't very sensible.
- When we make sensible assumptions we may discover that the researcher found the opposite of what she/he claims to have found.

The lecture will walk students through how to start with a question and get to a model and results. In the process it will explain how to write it up. Moreover, some subsidiary points will be made about the need of a good notation, of identifying what are the essential elements of the model without including complicated and unimportant stuff to be “realistic”. Finally, students will be reminded about the importance of organising and reorganizing results so as to highlight what is important and increase the likelihood of being understood by other people.

## **Lecture 5: The economics profession and the job market**

This year the lecture will be given by Andrea Ichino. Starting from the results of a recent internet-based survey of EUI alumni, the lecture will describe how the economics profession currently works and what are the options that the labor market currently offers to EUI PhDs. Then the lecture will focus on how to prepare for the job market and on other relevant information to become an economist, touching specifically on the following topics

- Timing of the preparation for the job market: it is never too early to start preparing!
- What makes a good job market paper
- Academic and non-academic job markets
- Should a PhD student work on many different projects?

- Reference letters and how to find them
- Interviews and fly-outs
- The process leading to publication of a paper (including the JM paper).
- How to write a referee report.