

Economics 481
RESEARCH PAPER AND SEMINAR
Fall 2009

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Office Hours **CHANGED Mon 11:30-1:00, Wed 2:30-4:00 or by appointment**

Note about e-mail: Do not send e-mail to my WLU address; please use the address above. At the WLU address I do not usually open e-mails from unfamiliar addresses. The replies from me may end up in your spam folder; please check it if you do not get an expected reply.

Course Objective:

The primary goal of this course is to allow a student to focus on the application of economic analysis to one policy issue of interest to them. A second, but not secondary, goal is a polished verbal and written presentation to accompany that analysis.

The Policy Project:

Your project should include:

1. A clear identification of your policy issue and its importance or relevance to the welfare of society.
2. A clear theoretical analysis of the issues involved. What economic theory is relevant to your policy problem? What does economic theory suggest is the appropriate policy? Is the current policy appropriate? Are there new policies which would be better? What does theory suggest are the key parameters that empirical work should provide to further analyse the issue?
3. A presentation of some type of empirical evidence. You are not required to manipulate and produce a new data set for this course. Your research must however have an empirical component. Some sense of the importance of your policy issue must be conveyed. Simple charts and graphs of basic data are extremely appropriate. A review of other empirical work related to this policy issue is also extremely appropriate. Such a review should evaluate the quality and usefulness of that work and offer suggestions for its improvement.
4. You may, if you wish, do your own empirical estimates. If you choose to conduct "original" empirical work in the policy area of your choice, then the size of the literature review and analysis is typically smaller.
5. A conclusion on the likely or appropriate path of policy in this area.

Class email list:

I will need your email address. As soon as possible, please send an email to me at eco481@gmail.com. You are responsible for checking your email address and the course website (which will be at j-k/teaching.php) regularly. This is particularly important since there are no regular lectures.

Office hours:

I strongly encourage you to come and see me during my office hours, as needed. Typically, it is difficult to answer substantive questions over email. You should keep in touch regarding your progress in the project. If you do not keep in contact, your project is not likely to get a mark that you feel adequately reflects the amount of work you put in.

Accessible Learning Statement:

Students with disabilities or special needs are advised to contact Laurier's Accessible Learning Centre for information regarding its services and resources. Students are encouraged to review the Calendar for information regarding all services available on campus.

Academic Integrity:

You are reminded that the University will levy sanctions on students who are found to have committed, or have attempted to commit, acts of academic or research misconduct.

You are expected to know what constitutes an academic offense, to avoid committing such offenses, and to take responsibility for your academic actions. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalty, please consult the relevant section of the Undergraduate Academic Calendar. If you need clarification of aspects of University policy on Academic and Research Misconduct, please consult your instructor.

Wilfrid Laurier University uses software that can check for plagiarism. Students may be required to submit their written work in electronic form and have it checked for plagiarism.

Important Dates:

September 14 – Discussion of course outline

September 28 - Outline due by 9am in drop box at Economics Department, Peters, 3rd floor.

September 30 – October 1: Appointments to discuss individual proposals.

October 31 - Interim work due by 9am to Turnitin.com, and hard copies to Economics Department drop box.

Date changed: November 9-10 Appointments to discuss interim work/progress. Please sign up by October 29.

November 25: Draft due to Turnitin no later than Noon. Hard copies not required.

November 29: Papers to be refereed handed out

December 4: Referee reports due to Turnitin by midnight.

December 8: Final papers due to Turnitin by midnight.

Points (in brackets: points lost per day late)	Work	Due date
15 (2)	Proposal for project to include (i) identification of issue (ii) reason for its importance (iii) preliminary analysis of issues at a "textbook" level. (4-5 pages)	Sep 28, 9am
15 (5)	Interim written work 5-10 pages. This should include some type of review of the literature in your area. If you are doing empirical work, your data assembly should have begun. Highlight problems and further issues to discuss. Start to structure your final report.	Oct 31, 9am
0 (15)	Draft report due to supervisors' office for pick-up by your discussant. Note the late penalty here: I will be ruthless on this, since getting this in late penalizes your discussant.	Nov 29 Noon
15 (2)	Referee report (2-4 pages)	Dec 4, midnight
55 (5)	Final report, 30 page maximum. The appropriate length is 20 - 30 pages	Dec 8, midnight

Note that I am not a page counter but great papers tend to be concise and to the point. The narrower your topic definition the shorter your paper, usually. The converse is also true.

HOW TO TURN IN YOUR WRITTEN WORK

Every written piece of work for Eco 481 has to be turned in twice:

1. Leave one hard copy print for me in the wooden mailbox across from the Economics Department office in P3082 with the course number on it. Alternatively, you can hand it to me in person.
2. Submit one electronic copy on-line using Turnitin.com. I will use this as the official time it was submitted, for the purposes of late penalties.

Please note that the figures in brackets in the table above are points deducted per day late. Points will begin to be deducted as soon as the deadline has passed (i.e., from 12.01pm). The penalties for late submission are severe: for instance, if your interim written work is handed in more than 3 days late, you will receive a grade of zero for that piece of work.

Regrade requests on any item of assessment will only be considered if submitted within one week of receipt of the mark for that item, and accompanied by a written statement of the substantive grounds for the request.

Use of Turnitin.com in EC481

You are required to submit an electronic copy of each piece of assessment (except for the paper proposal) to www.turnitin.com by the due time noted on the course outline. A copy of the draft paper should also be submitted to Turnitin by noon on the due date.

Note that this draft WILL NOT be marked: we ask that it be submitted to Turnitin to make it possible for your discussant to receive it electronically (through the Turnitin website), and to ensure that we have a record that it was handed in on time. Although it will not be marked, you will be penalised by 10 points that is, the equivalent of one letter grade on your final grade in the course if this item is even one minute late, since this makes it harder for your discussant to do their work. Please make sure it is in on time, even if it is not perfect.

The student quickstart guide is at: http://www.turnitin.com/static/pdf/tii_student_qs.pdf

The following instructions, based on that guide, give you a basic idea of how to get started using Turnitin. Please make sure that you know how to login and upload files to turnitin well before the due dates.

Go to http://www.turnitin.com/login_page.asp and create a user profile. Click on New Users at the top of the webpage To create your user profile, you need to be enrolled in at least one class: Class ID (will be announced on class website) Enrolment password (will be announced on class website).

If you have created a profile for another course, you can use the same profile. Log in first, then click on the Enrol in a class button. Each course will have a list of assessment items associated with it. To view details of any piece of assessment, click on its name. To submit a paper, click on the submit button next to the assignment. Turnitin accepts plain text (.txt), Word, WordPerfect, RTF, PDF, PostScript or HTML. We would prefer you to use text, Word, RTF, PDF or PostScript. If you are using some other word processor, please save the file in one of these formats. You must have the entire work in a SINGLE file before you submit it. (If you're worried about charts or tables, please ask me about them.)

The paper proposal will be listed in Turnitin as a piece of assessment. This is for you to practise with I will only accept hard copies of the proposals. There is no time limit on this piece of assessment, to allow you to practise.

You cannot do a trial run with other pieces of assessment they are one-shot deals.

The main reason for using Turnitin in this course is that it provides a simple way of submitting assessment electronically. We do not typically find that plagiarism is a big problem in this course. However, if we do find evidence of plagiarism, it will be dealt with according to WLU and SBE policy. Possible penalties for infringements of WLUs guidelines on academic integrity include a grade of zero on the paper or failing the course. All incidents will be noted on the permanent registry. Note that I do not consider ignorance of what constitutes plagiarism to be an adequate defence. This is a fourth year honours course, and you have been through at least one essay writing course to get here (EC381). Please also note that the argument I did the same thing in another course and I wasn't penalized is also not an adequate defence.

The nature of Turnitin means that students are likely to be found to have self plagiarised the final paper: this is NOT considered plagiarism for the purposes of this course. You will be able to see the originality reports of papers you have submitted. If you are having problems understanding what constitutes plagiarism, please discuss it with me at some point during the semester.

In submitting papers to Turnitin.com, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. If you have any questions or concerns over the use of Turnitin.com, please come and discuss them with me early in the semester.

WRITING YOUR PAPER

Step One: Choose a Topic

You should choose your own topic subject to my approval. The only criteria for EC481 papers are:

1. There must be an economic approach to analyzing the question;
2. There must be a policy angle; and
3. There must be some data that can be brought into the analysis.

There is no single way to choose a topic. Here are a few tips.

Try to choose a topic that genuinely interests you. You are likely to ask more interesting questions, be more enthusiastic, and come up with a better paper. Even if your interests fall outside economics, there may be economic or policy aspects to the topics that interest you. For example, if you are a sports fan, you might investigate policy decisions that cities face in deciding whether and how heavily to subsidize sports teams in attracting them to the area. If you are into psychology, there is a large literature on psychology and economics. Economic techniques have also been used to address sociological issues like crime. If you have passion for fine art, why not write something on the economics of the arts.

Your EC381 proposal topics were not picked by you, so unless you got really interested in these topics you should pick a topic of your own.

Try reading through some recent economics magazines or newspaper to see if you find anything interesting.

Try reading through some recent issues of the Economists' Voice or Journal of Economic Perspectives. These articles are often more readable and give a broader perspective than more technical economic journals.

To illustrate the range of topics that can be selected, here is a list of a few recent topics:

- Ontario's sports booking business and competition
- Immigrants and the use of social assistance
- Social assistance and its effect on educational attainment
- Monetary policy's response to inflation caused by oil prices
- Waiting lists and private health care
- Canada Student Loans and university enrolments
- Insider trading laws and crime rates
- Giving ADHD the Attention it deserves: A Cost-Benefit Analysis Approach
- Competition between Public and Private Schools in Ontario: Do we need more?

Some examples of bad topics (too general)

- Canada's Monetary Policy
- Should the exchange rate be floated?
- Inflation and interest rates
- Improving school quality

Step Two: Begin the Analysis

Some hints for the initial outline:

- Try to phrase your topic as a question
- Make it as specific as possible
- Explain clearly why it is an interesting question

Try to review your second year micro- or macro-economics courses, and figure out an appropriate economic model with which to analyse the problem. Note: you **MUST** have an economic framework to your paper. This is an honours economics paper. I am not able to mark it if the content and methodology are all taken from, say, sociology.

Some general categories of models that you might consider: basic supply/demand; choice over time; Keynesian fiscal policy; Cournot duopoly; perfect competition; political economy

Step Three: Review the Literature

A review of the literature should provide evidence that you have more than started to read, write and to think about your topic. In particular the review should be organized by topic, not by author, and have made a substantial identification of the key issues related to your policy problem. Ideally the review slides right into the final draft of the paper.

Some tips on writing a literature review can be found at:

<http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/litrev.html>

Step Four: Data analysis/Policy Evaluation

I will try to provide some tips on this as we go along. But at this point, the approach taken will depend a lot on the topic and your creativity and hard work.

Some other points (miscellaneous but important)

Do **NOT** cite Wikipedia. Any piece of work handed in that cites Wikipedia will be given an automatic grade of zero. There will be no exceptions. Ignorance of this rule does not constitute an excuse.

Any paper which has more than 30% of its cites from web pages (that are not copies of formally published/peer reviewed publications) will be subject to a 10% point grade penalty, and another 10% point penalty for each additional 10% points over the 30% limit. Working papers do not count under this limit.

You should know about ways of tracking down references, including: ECONLIT, SSCI, Google Scholar, Bibliography tracking

Data is important. If you can't get any data for your topic, do not do it.

Final note:

The difference between an excellent and an average paper in EC481 is very large. In order to get an A+, you really do have to have done outstanding analysis. In order to get a grade above a C, you should expect to have put in substantial effort into the paper.