

DRAFT Course Syllabus

**ECON 490: Seminar in Applied Economics –
“Answering Questions with Economics”**

*Vancouver School of Economics, University of British Columbia
2020W1 – (Fall 2020)*

Instructor: Jonathan L. Graves

Instructor Email: jonathan.graves@ubc.ca (or use Canvas)

Office Hours: TBA (or by appointment)

Office Location: via Canvas Collaborate or Zoom meeting

Lecture Times: 12:00 PM – 1:00 PM MWF

Lecture Location: Online, via Canvas Collaborate (or Zoom)

Course Website: canvas.ubc.ca

Lab Website: **URL HERE WHEN READY**

TA Office Hours and location will be provided early in the term: all sections of ECON 490 share a TA and an (optional) lab section, which are available on a weekly basis.

All students must register in the ECON 490 lab in addition to this course, even if you don't want to attend!

Prerequisites: This course is restricted to fourth year students within a declared BA non-honours major in Economics. Students must have successfully completed all of ECON 325 and ECON 326 and one of ECON 301 / 304 and ECON 302/ 305. I assume familiarity with basic econometrics, including multiple regression and statistics. I also assume you understand the basic economic models associated with intermediate microeconomics and macroeconomics.

Part 1: Key Course Details

Course Description:

This course is built around a key problem: how do we take a question and use our economic tools to answer it? This may seem elementary, but it can be surprisingly challenging! We tackle this problem in the context of applied economic research. We will do four things in this course:

- Explore the tools, models, and skills necessary for answering questions
- Discover how to formulate a good question about a topic that inspires you.
- Learn how to answer your question in a convincing way.

- Practice communicating your results through writing and speaking.

Along the way we tackle a number of important topics, like the connection between theory and applied work, causality, and building economic models. However, the focus always will be on taking an idea you care about and building a research topic around it; a process your instructor will guide you through in 1-on-1 meetings. The best ideas come about because you are passionate about them!

This section emphasizes methodology (how do we conduct and carry out research) as opposed to topic (studying economic development economic, for example). This gives you, the student, a great deal of flexibility in terms of the question and topic you tackle. Emphasis in-class will be on microeconomic applications, but students with broader interests are also encouraged to attend.

The course format will be a mixture of lectures, small-group discussions, computer labs, and presentations. We will review some necessary background in early lectures, then learn some new and commonly used models specific to your topics. We will get also get hands-on practice with real data through interaction in computer labs, and learn how to use statistical software (STATA in class, but R or Python is also OK).

We will also learn how to communicate our results clearly both in written form, and in presentations. Evaluation will be primarily based on (i) in-class participation, (ii) oral presentations, and (iii) your research paper. The paper itself has several, smaller, “lead-up” assignments to help you build up to the final paper while getting feedback and assistance along the way.

This semester will also have a community engaged learning (CEL) option, in which students undertake a project motivated by a community partner, in lieu of completing their own project. This option is will include the opportunity for a group format this term; interested students should contact the instructor for more details early in the term.

Learning objectives:

Upon completing this course, students will be able to:

- Understand the research process in the context of economics
- Create economically interesting research questions
- Identify or construct data useful in answering their research question
- Understand statistical tools suitable for answering their research question
- Assess the quality of different specifications in the context of a research question
- Apply statistical software to implement chosen specifications
- Evaluate and interpret the results of statistical software when applied to data
- Compare and integrate different results to answer the research question
- Critique research and incorporate responses to criticism
- Interact with others to communicate the results of their research project

Recommended and required materials:

We will use the software package STATA for our applied work in class; it is required that you buy a copy of STATA for this course; version IC is ideal for most projects. You can also buy a license for it online from STATA Corp at a discounted student price. A 1-year license is \$89 (US) and a 1-semester license is only \$45 (US). It's important to purchase STATA sooner rather than later; in order to get the student pricing they need to verify your student status, which can take a few business days.

- The one exception to this is if you're highly capable at using software like Python or R; in that case, talk to me instead. You may be able to get out of buying STATA, depending on your project.

The recommended textbook for this course is A.H. Studenmund's "Using Econometrics (7th edition)" which you can buy either online or from the UBC Bookstore. If you prefer a supplementary textbook, another written reference which covers many of the topics in this class can be found in Mostly Harmless Econometrics by Angrist and Pischke. You can find a link to purchase it on their website, but fortunately it is also available free as a PDF online via ResearchGate.

- An additional recommended reference is Mastering Metrics also by Angrist and Pischke. This is about \$30 online, and is a "non-technical" version of the above textbook.

Learning Online: since this semester is online, we will be conducting this course in a different format than usual. This poses some new challenges, but also opportunities!

- Lectures, reading discussions, and some labs will be conducted synchronously (i.e. live) online via Collaborate Ultra (or Zoom, as a backup) as scheduled on the SSC. My expectation is that students will attend the live lectures, unless there is a compelling reason not to.
 - Many of these sessions include small group work; you don't want to miss out on this part of the course.
 - In order to support students who can't make this time due to illness or other challenges, we will also record the lectures. However, this is not a good substitute for attending synchronously; it's a last resort.
- To supplement for the lack of in-person meetings, there will be at least two 1-on-1 meetings (about 10-20 mins, usually) where we can talk about your research ideas, progress, and challenges – and also so I can get to know you a little bit more.
 - There will also be some informal "hang-out" and "discussion" spaces on Canvas and during class time where you can meet with and chat to other students in the class and hopefully form some connections.
- We will have a number of classes which are "flipped" in which you will complete an exercise on your own, then we will follow up with a discussion later in the week. The goal here is to try and make some parts of the course more flexible.
- All of the assessments in this course are conducted online, and will be handed in via Canvas. This isn't new, but it's good to know! You can see below for descriptions.

To answer a common question, you don't have to be in Vancouver to take this course... but it helps if you are on a time zone that is reasonably aligned.

Tips for Students: learning online is hard. You probably already knew this – but there are some simple things you can do to make it easier.

1. Set a schedule and follow it: attend lectures like normal, and if you can't set a regular time where you watch the lecture as if you were attending.
2. Find a "study buddy": be diligent about networking with other students in your class and find someone you can talk to on a regular basis about the course. Set a schedule to meet with them, and keep at it.
3. Attend office hours: it can be hard to ask questions online, so office hours become even more important. If you're struggling or unsure how to proceed, ask for some help getting back on track.
4. Keep yourself organized: use a calendar or planner to keep track of deadlines and meetings. Try to centralize information, so you only have to check one place.
5. Treat your classes like a job: that means not only taking them seriously (and not blowing off lecture, for example) but also scheduling regular breaks and time off to collect yourself.
6. Be kind to yourself: if you're struggling or encounter challenges, seek help. There are resources to support you!

I think that ECON 490 moves fairly well online, but it still requires discipline to be effective in an online environment. You can do it!

Suggested Schedule: This course is largely self-directed; we will proceed through the material as necessary. However, a good rule of thumb is that you should have your topic identified by the end of the first month, and your data secured by the end of the second month. The remainder of the course should be devoted to doing your analysis and writing your paper. In terms of lecture, we will spend the beginning of the course covering different topics of interest, then move on to focus more on assisting with your specific projects.

- Early in the semester, and again at the mid-point, we will have some 1-on-1 meetings to discuss your progress. Of course, you can also schedule other meetings outside of this time!

Communication: I welcome emails from my students, but please ensure they are coherent, respectful and appropriate to a business setting. All emails should be prefaced with [ECON 490] in the subject line. Emails that do not adhere to this guideline may not reach my inbox, and so you may not receive a reply. I get a lot of spam emails, so if you don't hear from me in a timely fashion (1-2 business days), please send a follow-up email.

- There is a limit to what can be discussed through an email, so longer discussions should be taken up in my office hours.
- If appropriate, I may also post replies to student questions to the entire student body. If, for whatever reason, you do not wish your question to be posted, please indicate so in the email.

Assessment:

The final course grade will be determined according to the following weighting:

Final Paper	80%
○ 70% final submission	
○ 10% intermediate submissions (*but see below)	
Presentation	15%
○ 10% your presentation	
○ 5% your peer evaluation of other presentation	
Participation	5%

Final Paper Description: The final paper is really the point of the course: a professional piece of scholarly work, covering your research project for the semester. It's like a mini-thesis. This is composed of two parts:

- 1) Final paper submission: You can find a detailed rubric on Canvas for the paper, along with tips and resources for writing it (including some templates). We will also devote time in class to understanding how to write a good final paper. This is graded primarily on the quality of your research (not on the "quality" of the results), along with your ability to communicate your findings.
 - The final paper is graded in detail by the instructor, based on the rubric, and forms the basis for the majority of your grade in this course.
- 2) Intermediate submissions: to help us produce the final paper, you will complete a number of shorter exercises during the semester to help develop your paper. You can find a detailed list of these on Canvas.
 - These are primarily formative in nature, and are graded by the instructor but on a 100%/D/F scale; while you will receive detailed feedback, the goal is primarily to develop your thinking, not to evaluate its quality.
 - If you receive a D or F-grade, indicating some part is not of sufficient quality, you will have an opportunity (within two weeks of receiving the grade) to re-write the assessment, provided it was submitted on-time and shows a good-faith effort to complete the assessment.

Intermediate Submissions: Critically, you must complete all of the intermediate submissions to complete the course. You cannot avoid submitting them; failure to submit any of these submissions will result in failure of the course.

- In order to ensure that you are completing the course at an appropriate pace, I will not accept any intermediate submissions after more than 2 weeks following the deadline.
- If you fail to submit an intermediate submission within 2 weeks of the deadline, you must meet with the instructor to discuss your submission.
 - I reserve the right to not accept an intermediate submission (and subsequently fail you for the course) if it is submitted outside this window (unless for a justifiable reason, as outlined below).

- Please take these submissions seriously; one of the strongest indicators of success is timely and quality completion of the intermediate submissions. You cannot “make up for them” at the end of the semester.

Presentation Description: The presentation is a short oral discussion of your work. This semester, this will be carried out online, using short video recordings. This semester, we may also provide a poster session option – more information will be communicated later in the course.

- The presentation is reviewed both by your peers, and the instructor. You will find a rubric for the presentation on Canvas.
- Part of your presentation grade will also come from your peer review of another student’s presentation; you will find this rubric on Canvas as well.

Participation Description: The grade for participation comes from a number of readings, reflections, and activities we will do as a class during the semester. These can include online discussions, in-class discussions, reflection exercises, and other items.

Policy on attendance and participation: Since this course is a mixture of lectures and hands-on work, it’s important that you stay engaged and attend. I don’t take attendance, but I expect it unless you have a compelling reason not to attend. Some classes will be explicitly optional; for example, when we cover a topic not relevant to all students. This will be communicated on a weekly basis, as we progress through the course.

Policy for late work and regrades: Late work will be penalized at a rate of 2% per hour late, rounded up to the nearest hour. For example, if you have in an assignment 1 minute late, it will be penalized at $1 \times 2\% = 2\%$. If you hand in an assignment 4 hours later, it will be penalized at $4 \times 2\% = 8\%$.

- There is one major exception to this, which concerns the final paper. Usually, I try to make this due as late as possible – therefore, I will communicate late penalties once the deadline for the paper is set (which depends on the final exam schedule). Generally, they are much stricter than above!
- Remember, all intermediate submissions for the final paper must be completed, even if you’re not going to get any points for them; see the above for cut-offs for late work.

Regrades can be requested by asking, in writing, for a regrade communicating clearly the rationale for the regrade; a better rationale is more likely to result in a better regrade. The deadline for such a request is 2 weeks following the grade, or 2 weeks following the publication of grades if the item is a final paper.

Policy for Academic Concessions: sometimes, things happen during the course of a semester that can affect your ability to succeed. There are three main categories:

- Medical – i.e. you got sick and missed class or a chronic illness got worse

- Compassionate – i.e. a friend or close relative had something bad happen to them, or something bad happened to you.
- Conflicting Responsibilities – i.e. something happened in your personal life which is affecting your ability to do the work, like childcare falling through

You can read more about specific examples and the whole policy at:

<http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,48,0,0>

In all of these cases, UBC's policy is to allow you to request an academic concession. My policy is that all requests for academic concession should be handled through your faculty Advising office (unless your office advises otherwise). This is so that we can centrally track requests for concession and ensure they are fairly administered; it also helps protect your privacy. You can find the procedure here, for Arts:

<https://students.arts.ubc.ca/advising/academic-performance/help-academic-concession/>

If you need a concession, you should immediately speak to Advising, who will follow-up with me to handle the academic side of things. In-term concessions, which handle things like missed assignments or deadlines, are handled usually by extending the deadline or adjusting the final grading of the course (e.g. omitting an assessment). Alternative forms of assessment may also be used if suitable and recommended by Advising.

- Concessions need to be made in a timely fashion, which I will define as “within 2 weeks of the missed assessment” unless this is not reasonable.

You are also welcome to speak to me regarding your issue; I'm here to support you and help you get through things and be successful. If you're not sure if it's something you should/could get a concession for, I can also give you a quick sense of what Advising will likely suggest if you're unable to make an appointment immediately.

Respect and academic misconduct: It is very important that every student be treated with respect and given due courtesy by others in the classroom environment. If you feel uncomfortable with the behaviour of another person in the classroom, please bring it to my attention.

In addition, basic workplace etiquette is required of everyone. Treat this class like you would a meeting with your colleagues at a (future) job. This includes:

- Attending all class meetings, if possible
- Avoiding texting, playing with your phone, Facebook, email, chatting or other electronic distractions during class.
- Raising your hand if you have a question or comment, and not interrupting others when they are speaking.

Seriously disrespectful or inappropriate behaviour will not be tolerated, and may result in a student being asked to leave the class or even withdraw from the course.

All submissions in this course (including assignments) are governed by the UBC policies on Academic Misconduct. Cheating and plagiarism will be dealt with by the

department or dean, and results in penalties as outlined in the calendar (including, but not limited to, failure of the course or submission). Given the importance of this course to your degree, these are likely to be very serious. For example, plagiarism on the final paper is likely to result in an automatic failure, and subsequent inability to graduate.

Publication in the IONA Journal: As part of this course, you should seriously consider publishing your research! Here's a blurb from our VSE Student journal:

"The IONA Journal of Economics is a UBC student-led academic journal that features outstanding economic-focused research papers written by UBC undergraduate students. Students of all faculties and any year level may submit their work to the journal by January 11th 2021. We request that all research papers submitted are at least 1,500 words in length and have received a grade of 80% or higher. Submissions and questions can be sent to editor@ionajournal.ca."

Part 2: Policies and Important Links

This course is governed by all standard UBC policies and guidelines, as outlined by the UBC Senate as follows:

UBC provides resources to support student learning and to maintain healthy lifestyles but recognizes that sometimes crises arise and so there are additional resources to access including those for survivors of sexual violence. UBC values respect for the person and ideas of all members of the academic community. Harassment and discrimination are not tolerated nor is suppression of academic freedom. UBC provides appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities and for religious and cultural observances. UBC values academic honesty and students are expected to acknowledge the ideas generated by others and to uphold the highest academic standards in all of their actions. Details of the policies and how to access support are available here:

<https://senate.ubc.ca/policies-resources-support-student-success>

You should read and be familiar with the preceding set of policies. These include specifically (but are not limited to) the following, which are included here for your reference:

VSE Statement on Academic Honesty

It is the policy of the Vancouver School of Economics to report all violations of UBC's standards for academic honesty to the office of the Dean of Arts. Those standards can be found here: (<http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,286,0,0>). In addition to the explicitly stated violations in that document (for example, plagiarism), any student who hires a tutor/editor to help with any portion of their work will be given an automatic grade of zero on their final paper. Additionally, students who falsify their references, or act in any such dishonest manner, will also be given a grade of zero on their final paper. Further penalties may be levied by the President's Advisory Committee on Student Discipline. Those further penalties could include a notation on your transcript indicating that you have committed an academic offence, failure of the course, a grade of zero in the course and/or suspension from the university. Speak to your instructor in person if you have any questions regarding the standard for academic honesty at UBC.

Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities: Academic accommodations help students with a disability or ongoing medical condition overcome challenges that may affect their academic success. Students requiring academic accommodations must register with the Centre for Accessibility (CA). CA will determine that student's eligibility for accommodations in accordance with Policy 73: Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities. Academic accommodations are not determined by your instructors, and instructors should not ask you about the nature of your disability or ongoing medical condition, or request copies of your disability

documentation. However, your instructor may consult with CA should the accommodations affect the essential learning outcomes of a course.

Conflicting Responsibilities: UBC recognizes that students may occasionally have conflicting responsibilities that affect their ability to attend class or examinations. These may include: representing the University, the province or the country in a competition or performance; serving in the Canadian military; or observing a religious rite.

They may also include a change in a student's situation that unexpectedly requires that student to work or take responsibility for the care of a family member, if these were not pre-existing situations at the start of term.

Students with conflicting responsibilities have a duty to arrange their course schedules so as to avoid, as much as possible, any conflicts with course requirements. As soon as conflicting responsibilities arise, students must notify either their instructor(s) or their Faculty Advising Office (e.g. Arts Academic Advising), and can request academic concession. Instructors may not be able to comply with all such requests if the academic standards and integrity of the course or program would be compromised.

Varsity student-athletes should discuss any anticipated and unavoidable regular-season absences with the instructor at the start of term, and provide notice of playoff or championship absences in writing as soon as dates are confirmed.

Religious observance may preclude attending classes or examinations at certain times. In accordance with the UBC Policy on Religious Holidays, students who wish to be accommodated for religious reasons must notify their instructors in writing at least two weeks in advance. Instructors will provide an opportunity for such students to make up work or examinations missed without penalty

UBC Early Alert: University students often encounter setbacks from time to time that can impact academic performance. If you run into difficulties and need assistance, I encourage you to contact me by email or phone during my office hours, before or after class, or by dropping into my office (IONA 158). I will do my best to support your success during the term. This includes identifying concerns I may have about your academic progress or wellbeing through Early Alert. With Early Alert, faculty members can connect you with advisors who offer students support and assistance getting back on track to success. Only specialized UBC advisors are able to access any concerns I may identify, and Early Alert does not affect your academic record.

For more information, visit earlyalert.ubc.ca.

For information about addressing mental or physical health concerns, including seeing a UBC counsellor or doctor, visit students.ubc.ca/livewell

Course schedule subject to change: This schedule is tentative and subject to change as we progress through the term.

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