

Time: Fall 2022: W 10:45am–12:00pm
Spring 2023: M 2:30pm–3:45pm

Location: Fall 2022: Calhoun 209
Spring 2023: Buttrick 302

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Introduction and Course Structure This course is one component of the Honors Program in Economics, complementing the ongoing work that you will be doing with your advisors. This course two main goals. The first is to provide you with checkpoints and feedback as you work on your thesis. The second is to help you to develop the skills needed to carry out a substantive original research project and to otherwise participate in a community of scholars. To this end, we will host seminars by Vanderbilt faculty members, comment (formally and informally) on each others' work, and practice presentation skills. Ultimately, this course and the broader thesis experience mark the culmination of the economics major and an introduction to the world of scholarly research.

Until now, your academic career has been focused on consuming knowledge. You will now use what you have learned to advance the frontiers of knowledge. This will be a very rewarding experience, during which you produce a product of which you can be proud, and will become the campus expert on your topic. But it will also be a challenging one. Keep the following in mind as you work.

- Although it seems like a long time, one academic year is a relatively short time in which to write an academic paper. You do not have time to waste.
- Thesis work is often a staggered start, some of you may be well on your way; a few may need to step on the gas. If you are behind, you need to catch up quickly. If you are ahead, do not let up.
- Writing is hard. Do not treat the writing-up of your thesis as an afterthought, to be completed when the analysis is done. Make sure you leave yourself plenty of time to write carefully and thoughtfully, and to revise repeatedly. The process of writing is likely where you will find some of the greatest challenges to your argument and analysis, and so it is important to start the process early so that you have enough time to take on these challenges.
- Persistence is the most important ingredient into a successful senior honors thesis.
- You should be in regular contact with your advisor and with me. I do not have much experience with undergraduate theses, but graduate students sometimes hesitate to meet with their advisors, worrying that what they have is not “good enough” to discuss with faculty. The result is that they often work on something fruitless for a long time when they could have been redirected earlier if they had been in touch with their advisors. It is always better to be told sooner rather than later that you need to change course.
- You will get suggestions on your thesis from me, from your classmates, from your advisors, and from many others. In many cases these suggestions will conflict with one another. But nobody will have thought about your thesis as much as you and your advisor. Your advisor's advice should always get the highest priority.

- I **strongly** recommend that you keep a detailed research notebook in whatever form is most convenient for you. This will be very helpful in organizing your work and in memorializing what you are doing and why you are doing it in case you ever need to look back.

Each week of the semester will consist of one of the following:

- Presentations by students. The goal of these is for you to practice your presentation skills (both as general practice and in preparation for your defenses) and to receive feedback from me and from your colleagues.
- Presentations by visitors, usually Vanderbilt faculty. The goal of these is for you to get a glimpse at the research process in action and to learn about what our faculty are doing. Depending on your preferences, we may also schedule some speakers with whom you can discuss career considerations or who may be useful in some other ways.
- Working days, on which we do not meet. These are mostly in the spring. During these weeks, you should be working on your theses and checking in with your advisors and me as needed.

We will also begin each class with each student giving a brief weekly report. You should talk for about 2 minutes about what you've been working on. This is also a good opportunity to bring up any issues that you are stuck on. The main intention of these is to create some accountability to make sure that you are continuously making progress (this is a tool that we use with our graduate students as well). Currently, I am not planning to do these in weeks during which we do not meet, but if we think it would help we can do a quick "zoom huddle" version of this.

Office Hours My office hours in Fall semester 2022 will be Wednesdays, 8:45-10:45am, in my office (Calhoun 420). You can show up to these without making any advance arrangements. Note that these are also the office hours for my European Economic History course, so there may be a line. If you wish to meet outside of these office hours, you can make an appointment. Office hours in Spring semester 2023 will be by appointment.

Pre- and co-requisites In order to have been accepted into the honors program, you will have already completed your core economics courses with an A- average or better, have a GPA of 3.3 or better in general and in economics, have completed ECON 3698 (*Junior Honors Research*) under your advisor's supervision in the spring of your junior year, submitted an honors proposal, and had this proposal approved. You should be concurrently enrolled in ECON 4998 (Fall) or ECON 4999 (Spring), *Senior Thesis* with your advisor. You should also be enrolled in whatever courses you need in order to complete your economics major.

Course Materials Nothing is required, but there are a few potential resources that you may find helpful:

- Greenlaw, Steven A. (2006). *Doing Economics: A Guide to Understanding and Carrying Out Economic Research*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- McCloskey, Deirdre N. (2019). *Economical Writing: Thirty-Five Rules for Clear and Persuasive Prose*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

I will also circulate some handouts that may be useful.

Note Everything on this syllabus is subject to change. Note also that I am expecting a child in late December 2022. I may therefore be somewhat difficult to reach around this time and might have to reschedule some aspects of the course around then.

Evaluation You will receive three forms of grades during your experience in the honors program this year.

1. Most importantly, your final thesis and defense will be evaluated to determine whether you ultimately graduate with honors. Three outcomes are possible—fail, pass with honors, or pass with high honors. The typical distribution across these categories is 0%/67%/33%.
2. You will receive a grade for 4998 and 4999 from your advisor in the spring. Grades for those courses are determined entirely by your advisor.
3. You will receive a grade for each semester of this seminar (4981 and 4982) at the end of each semester. These grades will be based more on the progress that you make during each semester and the degree to which you engage with the seminar, rather than strictly on the quality of your thesis. Specifically, the weights are as listed below, and differ by semester. The course does not work without your engagement. For this reason, attendance at all class meetings is required, and attendance and participation are in the most highly weighted category for each semester.

Category	Fall 2022	Spring 2023
Attendance, Participation, & Weekly Reports	50%	35%
Short Presentations	10%	0%
Long Presentations	15%	25%
Referee Report & Discussion	0%	15%
Paper Drafts	25%	25%

Due Dates of Milestone Drafts You will submit four (and potentially five) “milestone” drafts of your thesis during the course of the year. The due dates are as listed below. Except for truly exceptional circumstances, no extensions will be granted. Late submission will negatively affect your grade in this course and potentially in other aspects of the honors program.

- **December 16, 2022.** Submit a first complete draft of your thesis to me and to your advisor. A complete draft is one that includes all of your main results, has all sections written, and has all necessary footnotes, tables, figures, references, etc. There will still be a lot of revising happening after you complete this draft; the purpose of this draft is to be able to circulate a free-standing version of your work to faculty so that you can start to get detailed feedback. This is important for two reasons. First, in actually writing up a paper, you will find weak points in your arguments, missing analyses, etc. that you might not notice when you present or just look at results. Second, it is a lot easier for faculty to give you feedback once a paper is written as compared to when you just meet with us to discuss what you’re doing. I will comment on the draft and send the comments to your advisor, who will combine them with their comments and send them all to you.
- **February 6, 2023.** Submit a second complete draft of your thesis to me and to the classmate who has been assigned to referee and discuss your paper.
- **February 24, 2023.** Submit a penultimate draft of your thesis to your complete thesis committee (me, your advisor, and your second reader). The goal of this draft is to give your committee an opportunity to point out to you any changes that need to be made before you are ready to defend your thesis. Ideally this version will have been effectively completed in time for the February 6 deadline, and revisions between February 6 and February 24 will reflect suggestions arising from the referee report and discussion.

- **April 3, 2023:** Submit the final version of your thesis to your complete thesis committee. This version will be used to determine the winner of the T. Aldrich Finegan Best Dissertation Prize. It will also give your committee something to read in preparation for the defense. You may still wish to make some minor changes to the thesis between submitting this version and your defense, but everything should be essentially complete by this point. Your committee will determine your grade (fail, honors, high honors) based on this version and your defense. **It is possible that you will be asked at your defense to make some more changes to your thesis; if so, you will be given a due date for the revised version at that time.**

Other Due Dates I have tried to make this list as comprehensive as possible, but I may have missed something. Of course, you should continuously be working with your advisor on your thesis, and producing results, drafts, etc. More details on the expectations for each of these milestones will be discussed in class.

- **August 24, 2022.** Please bring your thesis proposal to our first class. This should be updated relative to what you submitted in the spring to reflect progress that you have made over the summer. I will provide written feedback on each of your proposals, and will also send my comments to your advisor.
- **August 31, 2022.** Come to class prepared with a 10-minute presentation (clarifying questions only) in which you will explain your thesis idea and report any progress you have made since last spring.¹ Plan your presentation carefully. Cut to the core of your question without a rambling introduction. Identify your question, how you propose to answer it, the information you have gathered so far, and what you have learned to that point. I am looking for evidence that you know where you are headed and that you have continued work on your thesis since you submitted your proposal. Slides are expected.
- **October 12, 2022.** Repeat of the short presentations (as on 8/31) in 15-minute format (clarifying questions only), reporting on progress so far.
- **November 9/16, 2022.** Come to class (we will discuss in class which students will present on which dates) prepared with a 30-minute presentation (with questions) reporting on the progress of your thesis. This will be the last formal opportunity to solicit the group's feedback before you prepare the first complete draft of your paper. Slides are expected.
- **TBD, likely March 2023.** Georgetown University holds an undergraduate economics conference, the Carroll Round, every year. The conference is held in Washington, DC in April (tentatively scheduled for April 20–23), bringing together undergraduate researchers from around the world. The conference generally covers all travel and lodging expenses. You are all strongly encouraged to apply. Keep an eye on <https://sfs.georgetown.edu/carroll-round/> for details on the application deadline. I will also circulate whatever information I receive.
- **February 13, 2023.** Come to class with a referee report on the paper of the classmate to whom you were assigned and a 10-minute constructive discussion (with slides) of the paper. More details of how to prepare a referee report and discussion will be circulated in class.
- **February 27/March 6, 2023.** Repeat of the long presentations (as on 11/9 and 11/16). This will be the last formal opportunity to get feedback on your paper and practice your defense before you prepare your final version.

Schedule of Meetings

¹One ironclad norm of academic economics is that you **never** exceed the time allowed in which to give a presentation. A 10-minute presentation is 10 minutes long or less. It is also not a 15- or 20-minute presentation delivered quickly enough to fit in 10 minutes.

Week	Fall 2022		Spring 2023	
	Date	Topic	Date	Topic
1	Aug. 24	Introduction	Jan. 9	No class: One-on-one meetings
2	Aug. 31	Short presentations	Jan. 16	No class—MLK Day
3	Sep. 7	Faculty: Greg Leo	Jan. 23	No class: work on theses
4	Sep. 14	Faculty: Andrew Dustan	Jan. 30	No class: work on theses
5	Sep. 21	Faculty: Joel Rodrigue	Feb. 6	Economics in the Private Sector
6	Sep. 28	Faculty: Michelle Marcus	Feb. 13	Discussant presentations
Extra	Sep. 30	Faculty: Andrea Moro		
7	Oct. 5	No class—Yom Kippur	Feb. 20	Economics in Government
8	Oct. 12	Short presentations	Feb. 27	Long presentations
9	Oct. 19	Faculty: Adam Blandin	Mar. 6	Long presentations
10	Oct. 26	Faculty: Ariell Zimran	Mar. 13	No class—Spring break
11	Nov. 2	Faculty: Myrna Wooders	Mar. 20	No class: work on theses
12	Nov. 9	Long presentations	Mar. 27	No class: work on theses
13	Nov. 16	Long presentations	Apr. 3	No class: theses due
14	Nov. 23	No class—Thanksgiving	Apr. 10	No class: prepare for defenses
15	Nov. 30	Faculty: John Siegfried	Apr. 17	Defenses
16	Dec. 7	No class: work on theses	Apr. 24	Defenses