ECON 499: CAPSTONE
SPRING 2023

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Course Information: Wednesdays 9:00-11:50am, Smith Decision Center

Textbook: None. It's choose-your-own-adventure time, friends.

Course Description: This course offers an "in-depth analysis of an economic issue utilizing the theoretical and empirical tools developed in the required major courses. Culminates with a senior paper and a formal presentation."[1]

Course Learning Outcomes: Upon completion of this course, you will be able to:
1. Define an issue using economic concepts, tools and methods. (1,5)
2. Analyze the issue using economic concepts, tools and methods. (1,2,3,4)
3. Present analyses orally and in writing to their peers and to a larger audience. (5)[2]

Translation: According to the dictionary, a capstone is a "stone fixed on top of something." It's also a "high point", or a "crowning achievement." We're going for one of the latter two definitions here. In this class, you're going to pick your own research topic and, well, research it! You'll propose some question that implies empirical or theoretical analysis, perform a short literature review, gather data (for empirical work) or write out a formal model (for theory), and then combine all of the above into a nice paper. Finally, you'll present this paper to your class, and to other economics majors.

Grades: The grades you earn will reflect the quality of your final output—the paper and presentation. I may use the +/- system for grades, but we'll see when I'm done reading your papers.

To keep you moving toward your goal, there will be deadlines for components throughout the semester. Failing to turn in these components will reduce your grade, but ultimately, you either give me a good paper and a solid presentation, or you do not.

Paper	75%
Presentation	25%

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[1] California State University Channel Islands Course Catalog.

[2] Numbers in parentheses correspond to the following Economics Program Learning Goals: 1) Apply economic analysis to evaluate everyday decisions and policy proposals. 2) Propose viable solutions to practical problems in economics. 3) Use empirical evidence to support an economic argument. 4) Conduct statistical analyses of data, and interpret statistical results. 5) Communicate effectively in written, spoken and graphical form about economic issues.

Topics: You will come up with the topic for your capstone, unless you choose (and are chosen!) to complete one of the "consulting opportunities", as discussed below. Here are the three ways I recommend coming up with a topic:

1. You have always wanted to know how Y and X are related. It is a burning question, and you cannot rest until you know. After you confirm that others have written about Y's relationship with X, and that you personally can get some Y and X data, you attack!
2. You know broadly that you're interested in a topic, but you don't have a specific question in mind. You read through a few economics articles on the topic, and find one you think is really cool. You then (a) get the same data those authors used, plus any new data since the paper was published, (b) replicate their analyses with the "original" and "extended" data, and (c) review the literature since the publication of the original article.
3. You get together with a bunch of fellow economists and shoot the breeze until you stumble upon a neat question. You should probably come to class, since there's a group of economists already there. I am also there, and like shooting the breeze; just sayin'.

If you take the first approach, you'll require a bit more creativity. If you take the second approach, you'll have to make sure that you actually understand the techniques you need to use to replicate the analysis. But both are legitimate paths. The third path is just a way of getting on track one or two, but it's always useful! Then, there's the consulting opportunities…

Intermediate goods:

Date	Assignments Due
02/01	**Idea for a topic**
02/15	**Actual data**
03/08	**All the pieces, unassembled**
04/12	**Rough draft, paper**
05/03	**Rough draft, slide deck**
05/17	**Final paper**
TBD	**Presentation**

1. **Idea for a topic**. By the start of the second week of class (**02/01/2023**), have a sketch of two topics that might interest you. You should have read at least one paper on each topic, and have looked around for some data (or thought of a way to collect your own, fresh data) that would address your topic. Write me one paragraph on each topic, explaining what relationship you're examining, what data you will use, and what regressions you will run. I'll give you some quick feedback on this document, and let you know which idea is "better" (i.e., more likely to be a successful capstone). We will post these in a discussion thread.
2. **Actual data**. By the fourth week of class (**02/15/2023**), give me a data set, or if collecting your own data, have a plan to have your data collected over the next four weeks. The data set may not be neat and pretty yet, but you should have a start (e.g., I once collected data from the U.S. Department of State's website and merged it with data from the World Bank. I don't need the pieces put together, but I need to see that you have or can get all the pieces.). With the data, please give me the list of regressions you intend to run, and why the variables you have included are necessary. We will post these to a file folder together.

3. **All the pieces, unassembled.** By the seventh week of class (**03/08/2023**), give me an annotated bibliography of the literature you're citing into[3], a clean and pretty dataset (and, if assembled from many sources, the code and "raw" pieces you used to assemble it), and a .py or .do file of your initial regressions and descriptive statistics. This will also go in our shared digital space.
4. **Rough draft, paper.** By the twelfth week of class (**04/12/2023**), please turn in a rough draft of your paper. It should have all sections written, all tables or figures in the back, and a bibliography. You will save a document that is "<Lastname Rough Draft>" and email it to me.
5. **Rough draft, slide deck.** By the fourteenth week of class (**05/03/2023**), please give me a draft deck of slides for your presentation. Your presentation will be roughly 15 minutes, so plan on no more than 17 slides (including a title slide). Your deck should incorporate edits I give you on your paper. We will practice this deck in class; I will give you feedback on the slides and delivery.
6. **Final paper**. You will hand in a final paper on **05/17/2023** by 11:59pm. We will also do our presentations online; some of you will present the last week of class, and some during our designated exam time.

Attendance: Please come to class each week; we may all immediately go to the library to start getting work done as need be, but it helps if we meet face-to-face and check in.

Office Hours: My office hours are listed at the top of the syllabus. Do come visit; unvisited online office hours are *boring*. Also, while I'm no great scholar, I too write papers—I can probably help you write yours!

Disability Accommodations: CSU Channel Islands is committed to equal educational opportunities for qualified students with disabilities in compliance with Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. The mission of Disability Accommodation Services is to assist students with disabilities to realize their academic and personal potential. Students with physical, learning, or other disabilities are encouraged to contact the Disability Accommodation Services office at (805) 437-8510 for personal assistance and accommodations.

Academic Honesty: Do not plagiarize! Plagiarizing includes taking long sections from a paper and changing them minimally without attribution. I can tell when this happens; very few of us (myself included) can faithfully take another's words and seamlessly work them into our own. Note that I trust you not to do this knowingly (you're all good folks according to the rest of econ!), so I'm more worried about accidental lack of attribution.
1. Academic dishonesty includes such things as cheating, inventing false information or citations, plagiarism and helping someone else commit an act of academic dishonesty. It usually involves an attempt by a student to show possession of a level of knowledge or skill that he/she does not possess.
2. Course instructors have the initial responsibility for detecting and dealing with academic dishonesty. Instructors who believe that an act of academic dishonesty has occurred are obligated to discuss the matter with the student(s) involved. Instructors should possess reasonable evidence of academic dishonesty. However, if circumstances prevent consultation with student(s), instructors may take whatever action (subject to student appeal) they deem appropriate.

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[3] An annotated bibliography is a list of articles using a consistent citation format (either APA or Chicago style formatting), where each citation includes a paragraph describing the paper's main question, the methods it employs to answer the question, and the paper's findings. This serves as the material from which you will craft your lit review, and also motivates your new regression or regressions.

3. Instructors who are convinced by the evidence that a student is guilty of academic dishonesty shall assign an appropriate academic penalty. If the instructors believe that the academic dishonesty reflects on the student's academic performance or the academic integrity in a course, the student's grade should be adversely affected. Suggested guidelines for appropriate actions are: an oral reprimand in cases where there is reasonable doubt that the student knew his/her action constituted academic dishonesty; a failing grade on the particular paper, project or examination where the act of dishonesty was unpremeditated, or where there were significant mitigating circumstances; a failing grade in the course where the dishonesty was premeditated or planned. The instructors will file incident reports with the Vice Presidents for Academic Affairs and for Student Affairs or their designees. These reports shall include a description of the alleged incident of academic dishonesty, any relevant documentation, and any recommendations for action that he/she deems appropriate.

4. The Vice President for Student Affairs shall maintain an Academic Dishonesty File of all cases of academic dishonesty with the appropriate documentation.

5. Student may appeal any actions taken on charges of academic dishonesty to the "Academic Appeals Board."

6. The Academic Appeals Board shall consist of faculty and at least one student.

7. Individuals may not participate as members of the Academic Appeals Board if they are participants in an appeal.

8. The decision of the Academic Appeals Board will be forwarded to the President of CSU Channel Islands, whose decision is final.