

Welcome to ECON 491 Section DL1, CRN: 15764 Capstone in Economics

Contact Information

Instructor: Prof. Jason Dunick

Course Mode: Online asynchronous

Virtual Office Hours: By appointment throughout the week particularly on Mondays, Thursdays, and Fridays from 1pm-3pm. Feel free to send an email to book an appointment.

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Course Overview

Description

This is a project-based course where students will develop an academic portfolio to demonstrate their mastery in economic theory, statistical analysis, and critical thinking in the discipline of economics.

Learning Outcomes

This course is designed to meet the learning objectives of a capstone course as well as the program-level learning goals of mastery in microeconomics, macroeconomics, statistical analysis, and effective communication using the tools of discipline. This course is designed to be taken towards the end of a student undergraduate degree and the course has a class size that is limited to 35 students or less. This environment will provide an opportunity to integrate economic theory from different fields as well as demonstrate level of mastery in critical thinking skills and research skills. These objectives will be achieved through the completion of an academic portfolio the details of which are provided below.

Course Components with Grade Weights:

Capstone Project: An Academic Portfolio in Economics in Three Parts

Part I: Demonstration of mastery of economic theory (100 points)

Part II: Demonstration of mastery of statistical analysis (100 points)

Part III: Culminating Research Project (300 points)

- Previous Paper Selection (25 points)
- Annotated Bibliography (75 points)
- Expanded Research Paper (200 points)

Assignment Descriptions

Part I: Students will demonstrate their mastery of economic theory by defining, and applying four economic concepts. Students will be assigned the concepts by the instructor. Definitions must be paraphrased from high-quality sources and written both at a beginner level so an audience without prior knowledge could understand and at an advanced level with enough detail to be appropriate for an upper-level course in economics. The use of graphs or equations as appropriate will be expected. Students will provide illustrative examples of these concepts using observed human behavior or real-world examples found in popular press sources. This assignment will be evaluated for accuracy, written communication skill, effectiveness in the application of theory, and source quality. In-text citations and a works-cited page are required.

Part II: Students will demonstrate their mastery of statistical analysis by summarizing an influential piece of scholarly research that uses econometric methods. This research paper will be selected for the student. Students will prepare an oral presentation of this research and find at least three additional examples of scholarly research to illustrate its influence. Students will be evaluated on their oral presentation skill, accuracy of their content, and quality of the sources used. Students will submit a recording and a copy of the presentation slides with in-text citations and a works-cited page.

Part III: Students will demonstrate their mastery of critical thinking and research skill in the discipline by revising and expanding a paper from a previous course. For this project, students must complete the following three tasks:

- **Submit and justify an original work from a previous course** that will be revised and expanded into a literature review. The original paper must address a topic related to economics and it must have been 3 pages or less and have used 3 sources or less. This could be a short-response paper, a blog post, or an essay exam answer. Ideally, the paper has been written during your first or second year of college. In your justification, reflective on why you chose this paper and why the topic is a good fit for a literature review in economics (1-2 paragraphs).
- **Submit an annotated bibliography with a reflection.** The bibliography should summarize 6 new sources of high-quality information from economics on your topic. Each entry must include a complete citation using a standard form (APA or MLA) and a summary of the source. The summary should cover the research question, method, main results, and unanswered questions or avenues for future research identified in the source (2 -3 paragraphs for each entry). No more than 3 sources can come from grey literature (think tanks, government reports, or books). All other sources should be scholarly sources from peer-reviewed journals in economics. This assignment should also include a reflection at the end about how your approach to research has changed compared to the original work you submitted (1-2 paragraphs).

- **Submit a revised and expanded research paper.** This paper should provide a more complete explanation of the scholarly conversation in economics about your original topic. The paper should discuss the important economic concepts and theories relevant to your topic, the types of research questions and methods used by economists to study the topic, and the unanswered questions and areas for future research.

The expanded research paper should have a title page with your title and name so the content of the paper begins on the first line of the second page. This paper should be at least 10 pages of written texts in length using standard 12-point font and double-spacing (not counting the title page, the works-cited pages, or any tables, figures, or graphs). Also, the paper should use at least 10 high-quality sources with at least 6 scholarly sources from peer-reviewed journals in economics with in-text citations and a works-cited page.

The introduction should be a reflection on how you completed this assignment differently than your original paper in terms of your approach to research and your current level of economic fluency. Very little of the original paper should remain in the final submission. Subsequent section sub-headings should highlight the content requirements (e.g. Relevant Economic Concepts or Common Research Questions & Methods). The body of the paper should be a synthesis (not simply a summary) of the sources so that you explaining how the sources are in conversation with each other. The conclusion should summarize the consensus in the literature and the unanswered questions to show areas of future research on this topic.

Students will be evaluated on their written communication skill, the ability to synthesize sources, effective understanding of economic theory or statistical analysis, and the quality of the sources used.

Course Schedule

Due Date* (on or before)	Assignments Due
February 6th	Part I: Definitions & Applications
February 27th	Part II: Recorded Presentation with Slides
March 5th	Part III: Paper Selection with Justification
April 2nd	Part III: Annotated Bibliography with Reflection
April 16th	One Make-up Submission (optional)
April 16th	Draft of Expanded Research Paper (optional)
May 7th	Part III: Expanded Research Paper

*Due date is 11:59pm on the date provided

Course Policies

Course Mode

This course is delivered in an asynchronous online format. Students will view the syllabus, assignments, and policies and submit all work through Blackboard. An occasional synchronous session may be offered through Zoom prior to the due dates of each major assignment. Any Zoom sessions held for the course will be recorded so everyone can view these sessions at any time. Attendance at synchronized sessions is not required.

Communication

Students must use their MasonLive email account to receive important University information, including messages related to this class. Students should expect a response within 48 hours Monday - Friday.

Make-Up Work

Late work for Part I, II, and the first two parts of Part III will be accepted but with a grade penalty. There is a 10-point deduction for each day an assignment is late (weekends count as one day). The maximum penalty is 50 points and no feedback is available on an assignment if it is submitted after one week without prior arrangements.

There is a single opportunity to revise and resubmit one of the first three assignments (Part I, II, or the annotated bibliography of Part III). This revised grade will be the average between the original grade and the revised grade. The revision is an optional assignment and must be completed by the deadline listed. No late work will be accepted.

The final submission for Part III must be completed on the deadline because final grades will be submitted on that day.

If a student is facing extraordinary circumstances outside of their control, then the due dates for assignments can be adjusted *but only if arrangements are made with the instructor before the due date of the assignment*. No late work is accepted once final grades are submitted for the course and no prior arrangements were made. Final grades are submitted as early as the last assignment due date of the course.

Honor Code

Mason is an Honor Code university; please see the Office for Academic Integrity for a full description of the code and the honor committee process. Students are expected to abide by the Honor Code in its entirety in completing all requirements for this course. If at any time you are unsure about the Honor Code implications for a particular assignment, ask for clarification. Violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee. Any student use of Generative AI tools should follow the fundamental principles of the Honor Code.

Important Statement

Disability Services at George Mason University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students by upholding the laws that ensure equal treatment of people with disabilities. If you are seeking accommodations for this class, please first visit <http://ds.gmu.edu/> for detailed information about the Disability Services registration process. Then please discuss your approved accommodations with me. Disability Services is located in Student Union Building I (SUB I), Suite 2500. Email: ods@gmu.edu | Phone: (703) 993-2474

Enrollment Statement

Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class and for being aware of all academic deadlines and academic policies towards enrollment. Academic calendars are published by the Registrar's Office (registrar.gmu.edu).

Recommended Reading

While no books are required for the course, below is a list of recommended reading that will help with the assignments for the course.

McCloskey, Deirdre N., and Stephen Thomas Ziliak. *Economical Writing : Thirty-Five Rules for Clear and Persuasive Prose*. Third edition. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019. Print.

Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *The Craft of Research*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008. Print.

Grading Scale

Below is a table showing how grades are determined using total points.

GRADE	TOTAL POINTS
A +	500 - 485
A	484 - 460
A -	459 - 450
B+	449 - 440
B	439 - 410
B-	409 - 400
C+	399 - 390
C	389 - 350
C-	349 - 340
D	339 - 300
F	300 - 0