

Welcome to ECON 491 Capstone in Economics

Contact Information

Instructor: Dr. Jason Dunick

Virtual Office Hours: By appointment throughout the week. Please reach out through email.

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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 curriculum with a class size that is limited to 35 students or less and 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 in economics the details of which are provided below.

Course Components with Grade Weights:

Capstone Project: An Academic Portfolio in Economics

Part I: Demonstration of mastery of economic theory (30%)

Part II: Demonstration of mastery of statistical analysis (30%)

Part III: Culminating Research Project (40% total)

- Previous Paper Selection (5%)
- Annotated Bibliography (10%)
- Expanded and Revised Paper (25%)

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 a high-quality source and written with enough detail to be at the intermediate level or higher with the use of graphs or equations as appropriate. 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 used 3 sources or less. This could be a short-response paper, a blog post, 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 three 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.

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 or the works-cited pages). 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 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. 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 conclusion should summarize the consensus in the literature about unanswered questions and 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
June 5 th	Part I: Definitions & Applications
June 19 th	Part II: Recorded Presentation with Slides
June 26 th	Part III: Paper Selection with Justification
July 3 rd	One Make-up Submission (optional)
July 17 th	Part III: Annotated Bibliography with Reflection
July 31 st	Part III: Revised and 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.

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:

Students are expected to abide by the Honor Code in its entirety in completing all requirements for this course. The Honor Code parameters will differ depending on the assignment and will be clearly explained for each assignment. If at any time you are unsure about the Honor Code implications for a particular assignment, ask for clarification.

Important:

No person should be denied educational access because of a disability. If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS.

Grading Scale (as a percentage):

GRADE	PERCENTAGE
A +	100-97
A	96 – 93
A -	92 – 90
B+	89 – 87
B	86 – 83
B-	82 – 80
C+	79 – 77
C	76 – 71
C-	70 – 68
D	67 – 60
F	59 – 0