

## **GSBA 690. Tutorial on the Research Process**

**Fall Semester 2017**

**Mondays 1:30 -4:20**

**HOH 114**

**Professors John Matsusaka, Oguz Ozbas, and Fernando Zapatero**

### **SYLLABUS**

#### **Overview and Learning Objectives**

The purpose of this course is to help students understand the research process in accounting, economics, finance, and related fields; develop a research process tailored to their individual needs and styles; and produce a draft of a credible research paper by the end of the semester. The paper is intended to be of sufficient quality to circulate and list on a CV. The skills developed in the class will enable students to initiate and produce research leading to the dissertation and job market paper. Students will approach their projects in a systematic way throughout the semester, with continuing advice from the instructors and other participating faculty members. Students will gain insight on: identifying a research topic, formulating a research question, collecting and organizing data, estimating results, and writing and presenting the results. With some luck, it is possible that the research paper produced in class will be the intellectual genesis of the dissertation.

#### **Course Methods**

The class meets Mondays, 1:30-4:20 on the days indicated on the schedule below. This is not a lecture class; rather, the focus is on work produced by students. The instructors will provide guidance in structuring the approach to research, and will offer ongoing individual advice each step of the way. Other faculty members in the school will be involved as appropriate. Students have target dates with well-defined deliverables throughout the semester designed to keep their research moving forward. On weeks without a formal class meeting, students are expected to meet with each other.

#### **Grades**

The class is credit/no-credit. In order to receive credit, students must satisfactorily produce each of the course deliverables: three 2-page memos, descriptive statistics and/or figures, draft of introduction, draft of 15-page paper, referee reports on

papers by other students, and other miscellaneous materials during the semester. Precise information on deliverables will be provided as the semester progresses.

### **Students with Disabilities**

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to one of the instructors as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open from 8:30 to 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

### **Academic Conduct**

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” <https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b/>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

### **Support Systems**

*Student Counseling Services (SCS)* - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call. Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/>

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline* - 1-800-273-8255. Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

*Relationship & Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP)* - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call. Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/>

*Sexual Assault Resource Center*. For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: <http://sarc.usc.edu/>

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX compliance* – (213) 740-5086. Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. <https://equity.usc.edu/>

*Bias Assessment Response and Support*. Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/>

*Student Support & Advocacy* – (213) 821-4710. Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/>

*Diversity at USC* – <https://diversity.usc.edu/>. Tabs for Events, Programs and Training, Task Force (including representatives for each school), Chronology, Participate, Resources for Students

### **Students with Disabilities**

USC is committed to making reasonable accommodations to assist individuals with disabilities in reaching their academic potential. If you have a disability which may impact your performance, attendance, or grades in this course and require accommodations, you must first register with the Office of Disability Services and Programs ([www.usc.edu/disability](http://www.usc.edu/disability)). DSP provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to your TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in GFS (Grace Ford Salvatori Hall) 120 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776. Email: [ability@usc.edu](mailto:ability@usc.edu).

### **Contact Information**

An easy way to contact the instructors is by email: [matsusak@usc.edu](mailto:matsusak@usc.edu), [ozbas@usc.edu](mailto:ozbas@usc.edu), [fzapatero@marshall.usc.edu](mailto:fzapatero@marshall.usc.edu). We are happy to schedule an appointment if you would like to speak in person.

### **Readings**

Each student will need to read key papers in the literature associated with his or her research issue. Those readings will be arranged by the students and instructors on a case-by-case basis.

## Schedule

This calendar indicates topics and tentative due dates for deliverables; actual due dates may be adjusted during the semester as appropriate. On weeks without a formal class meeting, students are encouraged to meet informally to discuss their research.

Date	Discussion Topic	Due
Aug 21	Finding a research question	
Sep 4	NO MEETING: University holiday	
Sep 18	Progress on research ideas	2-page memos due
Oct 2	Student ideas / slides	Presentation of research idea
Oct 16	TBD	
Oct 30	Initial results / presentation	Presentation of results
Nov 13	Introductions and motivation	Draft of introduction
Nov 27	Final papers	Final presentation
Dec 12	FINAL	Referee reports

### *Phase I*

*Preparation of 2-page memos.* In this phase of the project, students will identify potential research issues, gain familiarity with the existing literature, and develop three or more 2-page memos on potential research questions. Each memo should identify a research question, indicate why it is important, mention one or two key related papers, and describe anticipated research methods and results. All three memos should be on the same general topic to economize on the amount of background reading. Faculty advisors will assess the memos and advise you which of the projects is most promising in our opinion. A good research question should be (i) specific, (ii) related to a “big” question in the field, and (iii) capable of being answered in a clear way.

DELIVERABLE: Three or more 2-page research memos.

## *Phase II*

*Preparation of descriptive statistics, figures, and rough estimates of main results. In this phase, students will select one project to focus on for the rest of the class, collect and clean data, produce summary information, and begin to explore the data.*

DELIVERABLES: Table summarizing data, one or more tables or figures with an initial result, short presentation.

## *Phase III*

*Data exploration, identification of main results, and preparation of first draft. In this phase, students will identify main results, check them for robustness, and produce an initial draft of the main results and motivation.*

DELIVERABLE: First draft of introduction, no less than two pages.

## *Phase IV*

*Creation of first draft. Faculty advisors will provide feedback along the way. Revision in most cases will include returning to the data to estimate more results as well as polishing and expanding the text.*

DELIVERABLES: Final “first draft,” presentation.

DELIVERABLE: Referee report on other papers.

## *Referee reports*

DELIVERABLE: Referee reports, approximately 700 words. The heading of each report should be the title of the paper. The first part describes (i) what the paper does, (ii) what the paper finds, and (iii) states the author’s interpretation of the findings. This part of the report is not evaluative; its purpose is to provide an objective summary. The second part explains (i) explain how the paper fits into the literature, and (ii) whether and to what extent the findings are important. This part is evaluative. The referee may not agree with how the author has situated the paper in the literature, and the referee may or may not find the results important. The third part describes the main positive aspects of the paper and the main (1-3) limitations of the paper. The referee here should not dwell on small problems

but rather on large concerns. Some questions that you may want to ask yourself as the referee: Is the paper's question interesting? Are the results interesting? Is the approach appropriate? Did the paper leave out some first-order elements that might invalidate its results? Does the paper deliver what it claims to deliver? Is the empirical analysis careful? Are the results robust? Are the results new in an important way?

## **Research Projects**

Several kinds of projects might be interesting. These are only suggestions:

- *Test of an existing or new question, with convincing strategy for causal identification.* This is the most common type of project. The main innovation of such projects is typically employment of a new identification strategy or employment of an illuminating new data set. The purpose of the analysis to answer an open question in the literature, resolve a dispute, or (less commonly) provide evidence for a new theory.
- *Descriptive statistics.* Some descriptive numbers are useful to know even without compelling causal identification. In such a project, you would spend time cleaning data and presenting the summary statistics of interest. Data cleaning and organizing would be the "main job." Regressions might not be necessary. For such a project to make a significant contribution, it is usually necessary to have access to a new dataset.
- *Extend a good paper to a different setting (industry/period/country).* This sort of project involves extending an important and interesting test to a new setting. The work would involve identifying a good "replication," collecting the data, and conducting the analysis.

*At any point, please feel free to speak with any of the instructors about your project. We want to help you learn how to conduct research and end up with a compelling study!*