Econ 700: Applied Microeconomics Reading Group (section 26293D)
Fall 2022

Thursday 2-3:20PM, KAP 319

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Office hours: by appointment

Course Overview and Requirements

This reading group will help students advance their research from the idea-generation phase to the paper-writing phase. The group will meet once a week and students will present their research in a short presentation format. Presentations will be scheduled ahead of time using a google spreadsheet (link) where students will update their titles as their presentation slots approach. Individual presentations will be followed by questions and feedback from faculty and students. The format of presentation and feedback will change over the course of the semester as each student identifies a promising research idea that merits further development.

Presentation Format

Students will present approximately either every other week or every third week. Please make sure to carefully read and adhere to the following presentation guidelines:

- **Stick to the time limits described below.** In order to do this, you need to practice your talk and time yourself prior to our meeting. If you don't get to the punchline on time, we'll have to skip to the next person due to time constraints. Time keeping duty will rotate among participants in the order they appear in the spreadsheet.
- **Prepare and share slides ahead of time.** You may have slides prepared to aid your presentation of the idea (especially if in Phase 2). See more specifics on presentation format for each phase below.

Phase 1: Idea Generation

Students will present a new idea or a reformulation of a previous idea every meeting. The purpose of this stage will be to tease out promising ideas from non-promising ideas. Ideally, the idea will consist of

a) A research question
b) A brief motivation (including key papers in the literature if relevant, as well as a clear statement of the contribution).
c) A proposed empirical strategy
d) A description of an existing data source that could be used to estimate (c).

In this phase, students may also choose to present (a) + (b) + (c) and a description of an ideal data set (even if they do not know of its existence), a description of a novel data set w/o a research question, or an innovative research question that they would like advice on how to address.

Students will get a maximum of **10 minutes** (presentations may be shorter) to discuss their idea and will receive feedback for **5 minutes** for a total of **15 minutes** per student. It is not necessary to use slides in Phase 1. If you want to use slides, you will be allowed a **maximum of 6 slides**. There is no need for more slides while in Phase 1. A decision will be made on whether the idea is promising or not or on whether the student needs to approach the idea from a different angle. The student will be committed to bring a new idea or improve upon that idea (if some aspect of it was promising) by the following presentation time.

The first time you present an idea, the presentation should start with the research question and a brief motivation. It may be helpful to explain how your idea builds upon the existing literature, but you should be brief in the link with the literature. The explanation of the empirical strategy should start by a statement of what the identification challenge is (e.g. an unobserved determinant of treatment variable *x,* such as *w*, may also be causing outcome *y*). Then state to what extent the empirical strategy and data you have considered addresses this challenge. At this stage, we expect the empirical strategy to be work in progress, so it does not need to be perfect.

If you present the same idea more than once, the follow-up presentations will be slightly different depending on the feedback you receive. If the feedback was to reformulate the research question, then the presentation should have a similar format to the first time you presented it. If the feedback was on reformulating the empirical strategy or looking for additional data or a different context, then the presentation should only state the research question, give a brief explanation of context, and quickly move on to whatever is new.

To progress to Phase 2, you should settle on a clear and well-defined project that you intend to focus on. If your project isn't working out, you can go back to Phase 1 at any time. The most important thing is to be in the phase that uses your time most efficiently.

Phase 2: Idea Advancement

Phase 2 will consist of longer time slots every third or fourth week. Presentations will be scheduled according to time constraints and student input. You should plan to talk for up to **15 minutes** including clarifying questions from the audience, as well as having a **10 minute** "big picture" discussion at the end of the presentation, for a total of **25 minutes** per student. Feedback will have the purpose of defining what the next steps are. Students should take note of these steps and restate them (along with progress made) during the next presentation.

Presentations will have roughly the following structure:

a) State research question/goal (this should take a minute maximum).
b) Discuss empirical results so far.
c) Discuss challenges and pose questions to the audience.
d) Get feedback and establish new set of goals for next week.

During follow-up presentations, you should spend little time covering material you have already presented. However, it may be useful to restate key facts or challenges to refresh everyone's memory. In Phase 2, your goal should be to establish a narrative for your paper by refining the research question, data, and empirical strategy. Then try to develop a set of tables and figures that provide the backbone to your results. Next you should push to interpret your results and address loose ends.

Grading will be based on participation.