EC402 Honors Thesis II

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Course Description

EC402 is the second semester of the Department of Economics honors thesis program. Building on the foundation established in EC401—where students developed research questions, began data collection, and drafted preliminary sections—this semester focuses on completing the empirical analysis, writing the full thesis, and preparing for the oral defense. Students will continue to work under the guidance of their primary faculty advisor while participating in this seminar, where they will present their work at various stages of completion, provide substantive feedback to peers, and develop professional presentation skills.

Note that students will only be awarded departmental honors if they successfully complete both EC401 and EC402 and pass the oral defense. The thesis will be evaluated by a committee of three faculty members: the primary advisor and two additional readers.

BU Hub Learning Outcomes

This class fulfills three Hub capacities. First, *Toolkit: Critical Thinking*. Building on skills developed in EC401, students will refine their ability to evaluate evidence, identify limitations in their own work and that of published scholars, and construct rigorous arguments. The peer review process and defense preparation will sharpen students' capacity to anticipate and respond to scholarly critique.

Second, *Toolkit: Research and Information Literacy*. Students will complete the full research cycle: finalizing data analysis, synthesizing findings with existing literature, and assembling all components into a coherent thesis that advances understanding of their subject area.

Third, *Communication: Oral and/or Signed Communication*. The oral defense is a substantial assessment of students' ability to present complex research clearly and respond to questions from experts. Students will develop these skills through in-class presentations, practice defenses, and observation of professional seminars.

Prerequisites

Successful completion of EC401 Honors Thesis I with a grade of B or higher.

Grading

The grade for EC402 will be determined by the thesis advisor in consultation with the course instructor, based on the following components:

- Progress presentations and class participation
- Peer feedback on colleagues' work

- Seminar observation write-up
- Draft submissions and revisions
- Final thesis
- Oral defense

The final thesis grade incorporates evaluations from all three committee members. A student must pass the oral defense to receive departmental honors.

Academic Integrity

All members of the University are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity, and the CAS Academic Conduct Code will be strictly enforced. The Conduct Code can be found at http://www.bu.edu/academics/policies/academic-conduct-code/.

Disability Statement

Boston University is committed to providing equal access to coursework and programs for all students, including those with disabilities. Students should submit their accommodations letter to the EC402 instructor and their thesis adviser as early as possible. Contact the Office of Disability Services (access@bu.edu) with any questions.

Seminar Observation Assignment

Purpose: To observe how professional economists present research and engage with critical feedback, providing a model for your own thesis defense.

Logistics: Between Weeks 2 and 6, attend one research seminar featuring an external speaker. Eligible seminars include the Department of Economics seminar series and the Applied Microeconomics lunch on Mondays. Email the instructor your planned seminar by Week 3.

Write-up (2–3 pages): Your write-up should address four components. First, summarize the research: What question did the speaker address? What was the identification strategy or main methodological approach? Second, evaluate the presentation: How did the speaker structure the talk? What worked well? What would you have done differently? Third, analyze the Q&A: What kinds of questions came up? How did the speaker handle pushback or skepticism? Was there a question you found particularly effective or unfair? Fourth, reflect on your own thesis: What will you take away for your own presentation or defense?

Due: Week 10. Graded credit/no credit.

Readings

There is no required textbook. The following resources may be useful:

1. Cochrane, J. "Writing Tips for Ph.D. Students." Available here.
2. Shapiro, J. "How to Give an Applied Micro Talk." Available here.

3. Bellemare, M. "Doing Economics." Paper-writing section available here.

4. Chaubey, V. "The little book of research writing." Available here.

Tentative Course Outline

Attendance in the seminar is strictly required. Seminar meetings do not replace individual meetings with your thesis adviser, which should be scheduled by mutual agreement. The schedule below is subject to adjustment based on class needs and progress.

Part I: Analysis and Drafting

Week 1 — Status Check and Semester Planning (Tuesday, January 20)

Brief presentations from each student: Where does your thesis stand? What are the remaining gaps between your current progress and a completed thesis? Discussion of semester timeline and expectations for the defense.
Activity: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly.
Seminar observations.

Week 2 — The Reseach Process in Economics (Tuesday, January 27)

AI: What are good and bad uses of AI in research? How can AI help your research project? What uses of AI are problematic? Literature: What is the publishing landscape in economics? What are the key journals? What is the typical structure of a paper? Find 3 top 5 papers that are more relevant to your research project.

Week 3 — Individual Meetings (Tuesday, February 3)

No class meeting. Individual meetings with the instructor to discuss thesis progress, remaining analysis, and writing plans. Seminar observation selection due by email.

Week 4 — Writing your Introduction (Tuesday, February 10)

Discussion of common writing challenges and how to overcome them. How to structure an introduction. How to discuss prior literature. What is the typical structure of a paper?

Note: No class - Monday schedule.

Week 5 — Individual Meetings (Tuesday, February 24)

No class meeting. Individual meetings with the instructor to discuss thesis progress, remaining analysis, and writing plans.

Part II: Full Draft Development

Week 6 — Writing your Results Section (Tuesday, March 3)

How do you present regression output? How do you narrate your findings without simply describing tables? Balancing technical precision with readability. What are the key tables and figures you need to include? Provide Feedback to each other.

Note: No class - Spring Recess.

Week 7 — Individual Meetings (Tuesday, March 17)

No class meeting. Individual meetings focused on the overall argument of the thesis. Is the "so what?" clear? Does the paper hold together as a coherent whole?

Week 8 — Writing Conclusions: The "So What?" (Tuesday, March 24)

Workshop on writing conclusions that go beyond summarizing results. Articulating your contribution. Discussing limitations honestly. Suggesting directions for future research.

Week 9 — Full Draft Workshop I (Tuesday, March 31)

Full drafts due at beginning of week. Each student is assigned 1–2 papers to read in depth. Class time devoted to substantive discussion of half the class's drafts.

Part III: Defense Preparation

Week 10 — Structuring a Defense Presentation (Tuesday, April 7)

The anatomy of a 20-minute research presentation. What to include, what to cut. Designing effective slides. Anticipating questions. Students prepare presentation outlines for peer feedback.

Week 11 — Individual Meetings (Tuesday, April 14)

No class meeting. Individual meetings with the instructor to discuss defense preparation, including strategies for handling questions during your thesis defense.

Week 12 — Practice Defenses I (Tuesday, April 21)

Half the class gives practice defense presentations (20 minutes + Q&A). Full participation from all students as audience members asking questions. Feedback from instructor and peers.

Week 13 — Practice Defenses II (Tuesday, April 28)

Practice defenses for remaining students. Final discussion of revisions and defense preparation.

Final Thesis and Defense

Final thesis due one week before the scheduled defense. Defenses are scheduled individually during the final exam period and consist of a 20-minute presentation followed by approximately 30 minutes of questions from the three-member committee.

Key Dates Summary

- Week 4: Seminar observation selection due
- Week 5: Draft methodology/results due for peer review
- Week 9: Full thesis draft due
- Week 10: Seminar observation write-up due

- One week before defense: Final thesis due
- Exam period: Individual thesis defenses