BROWN UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS

Economics 1940
Current Research in Economics: Undergraduate Seminar

Spring 2015

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Teaching assistant: Jeongbin Kim, jeongbin_kim@brown.edu

Meeting time: Wednesdays 3:00-5:30 PM
Prerequisites: ECON 1110 or 1130, ECON 1210, ECON 1620 or APMA 1650, and ECON1629 or 1630.

- Important: Although the seminar counts as one of the 30 courses that a student at Brown needs in order to graduate, it does not count toward concentration requirements. In this sense, it is similar to thesis preparation courses.

- The purpose of this seminar is to bring to the undergraduates concentrating in economics, applied mathematics-economics, mathematics-economics, and computer science-economics a taste of the first-rate research that is being done in the economics department at Brown. Each weekly meeting will consist of a research paper presentation by either a Brown economics faculty or a Brown economics advanced graduate student (75 minutes), followed by discussion on the paper presented (60 minutes). The presentation will feature research conducted by the speaker and the idea is to make the presentation accessible to advanced undergraduate students in the concentrations afore mentioned. The discussion will begin with a formal discussant every week (the instructor, the teaching assistant, and occasionally a student in the class will act as discussants).
• The seminar is primarily intended for senior concentrators, but it will also be opened to juniors. Students that are planning to work for faculty as research assistants or planning to go to graduate school in economics are especially encouraged to take this seminar. Enrollment will be limited to 30 students, although attendance is encouraged even if a student is not enrolled. Such participation of students is welcome, as the whole point is to contribute ideas to the discussion of research.

• Students enrolling in the course are required to attend at least 75% of the sessions. Attendance will be taken (a student signing up for an absent friend will be considered a violation of the academic code). In addition, each enrolled student must submit four essays, in pdf, each of them about one of the papers presented in the course. Each essay should be at most five pages in length. These essays must be submitted according to the following deadlines (February 15, March 15, April 15, and April 30). Of course, turning papers in early is always allowed. The essays will be read and evaluated by the instructor or by the teaching assistant, who, after providing comments, may ask for at most one resubmission in each essay.

• In this format, this seminar course qualifies for the Brown general writing requirement and hence, it has been included in the WRIT-designated category of courses by the university.

• This course qualifies as a capstone experience for the economics and economics joint concentrations. Thus, if a student is not writing a senior thesis (which of course already qualifies as a capstone), but would like to have a capstone to his or her econ studies, the student is welcome to use this course for it. Logistically, all that is required is for the student to print out the form that can be found on the department website, fill it in, get it signed by the instructor at the end of the course, and hand it in to the student affairs manager (in Robinson 103).

• The role of the instructor consists of: (a) lining up the list of speakers and making sure that each speaker is available for the date of his or her talk; (b) introducing the speaker and leading the discussion at each seminar meeting, often being the main discussant for the paper; and (c) reading and evaluating essays submitted in the course.
• The role of the teaching assistant consists of: (a) taking attendance at each meeting; (b) making sure that the necessary hardware and software for each presentation are working properly, and maintaining the course webpage; and (c) participating in the research discussions, occasionally being the main discussant for the paper, and reading and helping evaluate essays submitted in the course.

• After taking this seminar, the student will have been exposed to a selection of pieces of current research in economics. This will complement the knowledge acquired in the concentration courses and will give students a good idea of what economics research is all about. In addition, active discussion between the speaker and the audience will encourage the student’s critical thinking, and the brief essays will give students an opportunity to express their critical writing. Reading assignments are, on the other hand, not required, as the research papers will likely be too hard for many undergraduate students. Nonetheless, papers will be posted on the course website for those interested in more detail, along with questions to help frame the discussion after each presentation.