

## *Course Syllabus*

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ECO 88000  
**Research Methods and Writing in Economics**

City University of New York – Graduate Center  
Spring 2020  
Fri 2:00-5:00, Graduate Center, 365 5th Ave, Room 4422

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### **Professor Contact Information**

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Office hours: Fri 12:45-1:45 p.m. and by appointment.

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### **Course Pre-Requisites, Co-Requisites, and/or Other Restrictions**

This course is open only for PhD students in the Ph.D. Program of Economics at CUNY who in their second year or above, have done at least some coursework in their fields of specialization, and have not yet passed their Second Examination. The course may be used to fulfill the Writing Requirement that is a part of the Second Examination in Economics.

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### **Course Description**

This seminar serves two purposes. First, it should improve your writing. This involves: (i) the art of writing effectively; (ii) the ability to conduct a useful literature survey; (iii) the art of reporting statistical information; (iv) the skill of effective presentation; (v) the role models offered by well-known economists. Students will make short presentations about these topics, summarizing material found in assigned readings.

Second, students work on a research paper on their topic of interest. There projects are not entirely solo: a series of presentations by each student will provide a forum for feedback and joint learning while at the same time polishing presentation skills. The paper must be a new project, not a continuation of a project (i.e., term paper, a literature survey or a research project) from a previous semester, although it may be related to previous work. Hence, at the start of the semester, the first order of business is to define the project. This is done in coordination with the instructor and/or a faculty member in the field under which the project is headed.

During the semester, students make three presentations about their research project, reflecting the progress made towards completion of the project, and a fourth presentation about a topic to be discussed below.

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## Student Learning Objectives/Outcomes

This course promotes student learning in various ways.

- An in-depth study of an economic topic of choice
  - Group learning in various fields of economics
  - Enhanced presentation and discussion skills
  - Enhanced writing skills
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## Required Course Materials

\*John H. Cochrane, “Writing Tips for Ph. D. Students,” June 2005 at

<http://gsbwww.uchicago.edu/fac/john.cochrane/research/Papers/>

Plamen Nikolov, “Writing Tips For Economics Research Papers,” June 2013, at

[www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~pnikolov/resources/writingtips.pdf/](http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~pnikolov/resources/writingtips.pdf/)

\*William Thomson, A Guide for the Young Economist, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2011). ISBN 978-0-262-51589-4.

John Creedy, Research without Tears: From the First Ideas to Published Output. (Northampton, Mass: Edward Elgar Publ., 2008). ISBN 978-1-84720-834-7.

\*Simon Bowmaker, The Art and Practice of Economics Research. (Northampton, Mass: Edward Elgar Publ., 2012). ISBN 978-1-84980-846-0

\*Dreyer, Benjamin, Dreyer’s English. (New York: Random House, 2019), ISBN 978-0-81299-570-1.

## Other Suggested Reading

### *Composition*

Ann Raimes, Keys for Writers, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Wadsworth (formerly Houghton Mifflin, 2008)). ISBN 0618753869.

Andrea Lunsford, The St. Martin’s Handbook, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Bedford/St. Martin’s, New York, 2011); 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (2007), 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (2003). ISBN 0-312-39828-X.

Margaret Shertzer, The Elements of Grammar (MacMillan, New York, 1986). ISBN 0-02-861449-6.

William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White, The Elements of Style, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (MacMillan, New York, 1979). ISBN 0-02-418200-1

### *Scientific writing*

Jose L. Galvan, Writing Literature Reviews, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Pyrchak Publ., Glendale, CA, 2004). ISBN 1-884585-66-3.

Jane E. Miller, The Chicago Guide to Writing about Numbers. (University of Chicago Press, 2004). ISBN 0-226-52631-3

Michael Alley, The Craft of Scientific Writing, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Corr. 3<sup>rd</sup> printing (Springer Verlag, 1998). ISBN 978-0-387-94766-2.

Deirdre McCloskey, Economical Writing, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Long Grove, Ill.: Waveland Press, Inc., 2000). ISBN 1-57766-063-3.

### *Getting things published*

Preston McAfee. “Edifying Editing.” The American Economist, Spring 2010, 55:1, 1-8.

Joshua S. Gans and George B. Shepherd, "How are the mighty fallen: Rejected classic articles by leading economists." Journal of Economic Perspectives, Winter 1994, 8:1, 165-179.

Nils Goldsmith and Benedikt Szmeccanyi. "What Do Economists Talk About? A Linguistic Analysis of Published Writing in Economics Journals." American Journal of Economics and Sociology, 66:2 (April 2007), 335-378.

### *Making presentations*

Michael Alley, The Craft of Scientific Presentations, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Corr. 5<sup>th</sup> printing (Springer Verlag, 2007). ISBN 978-0-387-95555-1.

Dona Wong. The Wall Street Journal Guide to Information Graphics: The Dos and Don'ts of Presenting Data, Facts, and Figures. (W.W. Norton & Co, 2013). ISBN 978-0-393-34728-9.

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## **Assignments & Academic Calendar**

Students will make four presentations during this semester.

- The first is a short presentation of 8 (min) to 10 (max) minutes about the topic that you will work on. It should cover how you found this topic, what you know about this topic, what interests you in this topic, how you define the research question, who the "big names" are in the literature, and so forth. In the minutes that you have, you might introduce key ideas in the literature that form the foundation for your work. This presentation (from all students) will take place February 14. Presentation order on that day will be from a randomized list.
- The second is a presentation of about 30 minutes about a **seminal paper** related to your topic. It should be a paper that has brought a key insight to the literature, something someone must read if he/she wants to become a specialist on the topic of your research paper. It might be theoretical or empirical. If you like to frame your presentation such that it covers more than one paper, that would be fine; for example, the key insight might be more clearly explained by discussing several papers, one of which is theoretical and another that is empirical. NOTE: let the instructor and the class know as soon as possible (i.e., at least one week ahead of time) what paper you will be presenting.
- The third is a presentation of 30 minutes about your paper. (i) If your paper is complete, show what you have done and what you learned from this research. If your paper is not yet finished, show what you have accomplished so far, what you learned from this research so far, and what your aim is for the final product. (ii) Assume that the audience consists of PhD economists who are generally unfamiliar with your topic. Thus, define the research question carefully, and outline your contribution. (iii) The presentation may draw from other published articles, e.g., as a brief literature survey underlying the topic of choice, or as a way to show how other researchers have addressed related issues. (iv) The nature of the presentation varies according to whether the paper is a literature survey or represents original research.
- The fourth presentation is on one of the economists interviewed in Simon Bowmaker's book, *The Art and Practice of Economics Research*. There will be one of these presentations per class session. The suggested length of these presentations is 5 to 10 minutes; the presentation should cover the accomplishments of the selected person and the "three" (or four) most important lessons that he/she offers in the interview. Students select their favorite chapter on the first day of class. **Note: as of this semester, if you have an economist you would like to review, you may write an imaginary interview with that economist based on other information you collect. Even if an economist you've chosen is already interviewed in Bowmaker, feel free to speculate how it would go now.**

The following table indicates a tentative schedule.

Dates for materials to be handed in are fixed. Student presentations will be scheduled in advance on 31 January (“fourth presentation”), 14 February (second presentation) and 3 April (third presentation) Volunteers will have a chance to sign up ahead of time; others (and scheduling conflict among volunteers) will be scheduled in random order. Details follow in the schedule table below.

Week	Date	Topic & Readings (chapters)	Research presentation
1	Jan 31	Getting started (Cochrane), (Creedy 1-2 + Thomson 1 + Bowmaker various) Plagiarism (Raimes 9 resources <sup>a</sup> )	(Schedule 4 <sup>th</sup> presentation) <b>Hand out</b> >>>Two forms
2	Feb 7	References (Raimes 11-19); finish Cochrane. Literature surveys, sources (Galvan)	(Schedule 1 <sup>st</sup> presentation) <b>Hand in</b> >>> Two forms
3	Feb 14	Making presentations (Thomson 3 + AlleyP)	2: First presentation: Topic (8-10 min.) (Schedule 2 <sup>nd</sup> presentations)
4	Feb 21		5: Second presentation (30 min)
5	Feb 28		5: Second presentation (30 min)
6	Mar 6		5: Second presentation (30 min)
7	Mar 13	LaTeX demonstration, Beamer <sup>b</sup> (by Pablo Lara Hinoj) Organization (Raimes 1-5 + AlleyW 1-2 + Creedy 3)	
8	Mar 20	Style (Raimes 29-34, 36 + AlleyW 4-10 + Thomson 2)	
9	Mar 27	Common writing problems (Raimes 37-46 + Lunsford 31-47)	
10	Apr 3	The little things (Raimes 47-58 + Raimes 59-64 + AlleyW App A + Lunsford 48-62) Writing about numbers, Visuals, Illustration (Miller + Raimes 21 + AlleyW 10-11)	(Schedule 3 <sup>rd</sup> presentations)
	Apr 10	Spring Break	
11	Apr 17	Writing in context (AlleyW 12-13 + Raimes 20-28)  Words to avoid (McCloskey 28) Writing and polishing (AlleyW 16-17)	<b>Hand in</b> >>> Progress report
12	Apr 24	Publication (Creedy 5-6 + Thomson 1) Referee reports (Thomson 4) Editor’s perspective (McAfee) (In)Famous rejections (Gans & Shepherd)	
13	May 1		4: Third presentation (30 min)
14	May 8		5: Third presentation (30 min)
15	May 15		4: Third presentation (30 min) <b>Hand in</b> >>> Paper due <sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> [unitproject.library.ucla.edu/col/b Bruinsuccess/03/01.cfm](http://unitproject.library.ucla.edu/col/b Bruinsuccess/03/01.cfm) and other online resources

<sup>b</sup> [www.tex.ac.uk/tex-archive/macros/latex/contrib/beamer/doc/beameruserguide.pdf](http://www.tex.ac.uk/tex-archive/macros/latex/contrib/beamer/doc/beameruserguide.pdf) and other online resources

<sup>c</sup> We recognize that the paper may take more time than a single semester. If a final draft is not yet available, a preliminary/incomplete draft is due. Still, do aim for completion at the end of the semester. A grade will be assigned only upon completion of an acceptable paper.

General comments about the presentations:

- Let the instructor and the class know as soon as possible (i.e., at least one week ahead of time) what paper you will be presenting.
- Titles of papers to be presented for the second presentation will be distributed ahead of the class session. Even if you do not have a lot of lead time, take time to read and study these papers: it is part of the teaching method of this course. “Cross-fertilization” will become fruitful over time.
- Strive to be professional, as if participating at an ASSA, EEA or SEA conference seminar.
- Similarly, professionally collegial participation is expected from the audience.

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## Assessment

Evaluation will be based on three components:

- Completion of the project and quality of the paper; the weight on this component will be 65%.
- Quality of the presentations made; the weight on this component will be 25%.
- Quantity and quality of general participation in the classroom; the weight on this component will be 10%.

See details in the following section on grading policy.

## Grading Policy

If you are taking this course to satisfy one of the Second Examination requirements, you must take this course for a letter grade. Otherwise, you may consider taking this course on a P/F grading scale.

Acceptance of the paper is conditional on the student discussing the topic of the paper with a faculty member during the first two weeks of the semester. This faculty member must be in the field that covers the topic of the paper and might be the instructor of this course.

The many directions that a research paper can take make it difficult to indicate precisely what the progress reports should reflect. For a typical paper that does some empirical work, the April 17 progress report must include a review of the main literature, a brief discussion of the theory behind the empirical work, and an outline of the rest of the paper. As for the paper that is due at the end of the semester, even if the paper is not yet complete, the May 22 submission must add a full discussion of the theory and some sort of a description of the data to the earlier April 17 draft. Writers of a different type of research paper should set similar targets for themselves.

There is no set length for the paper (or, for that matter, for the progress report). It is expected that the paper is 15 pages or longer, but the more important consideration is whether the paper has sufficient substance.

The submitted final draft must be a polished product. Typos as well as substantial and systematic errors in grammar and style that violate principles of writing that were discussed in class will reflect poorly on the quality of the paper.

The final draft will be evaluated by (i) the instructor for this course, and (ii) a second reader, namely the faculty member in the field under which the project is headed who was consulted at the beginning of the semester (or an acceptable substitute, if needed). The evaluation process is the following. The final draft

will first be evaluated by the instructor. If there are no major issues to be addressed immediately, the draft will be forwarded to the second reader. The draft with its comments will be returned to the student who must be addressed the issues raised during the process of evaluation. But if the instructor does find major issues in the final draft, this draft will be returned to the student, who must revise the paper and submit a revised final draft to the instructor, who will then evaluate whether this draft is ready for forwarding to the second reader. [In the case that the instructor is the appropriate faculty member in the field of the project, he may take on the second reader's advisory role as well; for the purpose of final evaluation, any other faculty member may assist in evaluating the paper.] For those students taking this course to satisfy one of the Second Examination requirements, a copy of the accepted draft will be added to their student file.

Students are encouraged to complete the paper during the course of the semester. If you need more time, an "incomplete grade" will be submitted at the end of the semester. However, the **absolute last deadline for handing in the final paper is August 1, 2020, in order to allow time for evaluation and revisions prior to the beginning of the Fall semester.**

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## **Course & Instructor Policies**

**If a student cannot present at a scheduled session,** he/she (actually "they" as will be discussed in the course) must find a substitute and inform the instructor and scheduled discussant of the change. Do this as early as possible, so as to be fair to the substitute and the discussant (and the rest of the class, which as always is reading the paper ahead of time).

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### **Academic Integrity**

The faculty expects from its students a high level of responsibility and academic honesty. Because the value of an academic degree depends upon the absolute integrity of the work done by the student for that degree, it is imperative that a student demonstrate a high standard of individual honor in his or her scholastic work.

Scholastic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, statements, acts or omissions related to applications for enrollment or the award of a degree, and/or the submission as one's own work or material that is not one's own. As a general rule, scholastic dishonesty involves one of the following acts: cheating, plagiarism, collusion and/or falsifying academic records. Students suspected of academic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary proceedings.

Plagiarism, especially from the web, from portions of papers for other classes, and from any other source is unacceptable and will be dealt with under the university's policy on plagiarism.

### **Email Use**

I recognize the value and efficiency of communication between faculty/staff and students through electronic mail. At the same time, email raises some issues concerning security and the identity of each individual in an email exchange. For this reason, I will consider email from students official only if it originates from a CUNYGC student account. This allows me to maintain a high degree of confidence in the identity of all individual corresponding and the security of the transmitted information.

### **Withdrawal from Class**

The administration of this institution has set deadlines for withdrawal of any course. These dates and times are published in the academic calendar. Administration procedures must be followed. It is the student's responsibility to handle withdrawal requirements from any class. In other words, I cannot drop or withdraw any student. You must do the proper paperwork to ensure that you will not receive a final grade of "F" in a course if you choose not to attend the class once you are enrolled.

***These descriptions and timelines are subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.***

