

Virginia Tech
Department of Economics
Fall 2024

ECON 5984: Research and Writing Seminar

Instructor: Brianna Felegi, Ph.D. (bfelegi@vt.edu)

Class Time: Tuesdays, 3:30-4:15pm

Class Location: DAV125

Instructor Office Hour Times: Tuesdays and Thursdays in 3119 Pamplin Hall

9:30 – 10:30 am, 2:00 – 3:00 pm

Or By Appointment

Course Description and Objectives

The goal of this course is to help students transition from being a *consumer* of knowledge to becoming a *producer* of knowledge. In this effort, this course aims for students to develop the skills necessary to produce high-quality research, give effective presentations, and succeed in the economics profession. The class will be a mixture of lectures, student presentations, assigned readings, class discussions, and some written assignments. Along the way, I expect students to make progressively longer presentations about the ideas they have for their third-year paper. Each student is expected to present at least once in the Applied Micro Brown Bag during the Fall semester.

Prerequisites

N/A

Course Materials

All required course materials will be provided and available on the course website.

Suggested Materials:

1. “Doing Economics: What You Should Have Learned in Grad School—But Didn’t” by Marc F. Bellemare
2. “Economical Writing” by Deirdre McCloskey
3. “A Guide for the Young Economist” by William Thomason
4. “Thriving in Economics: PhD Student Edition” edited by Tatyana Deryugina

Grading Scale

The class will be graded on a pass/fail basis.

Canvas

Our website within Canvas (<https://canvas.vt.edu/>) will have the slides class, assignment information and more. Please check the website regularly for class updates.

Academic Honesty

One of the goals of this course is to prepare you to do well in the economics profession, so it is essential that you develop a solid understanding of the material. To that end, while collaboration on graded assignments is encouraged in this course, copying is not.

Students are expected to understand and abide by the University's honor code (<https://honorsystem.vt.edu/>).

Graduate Academic Integrity Statement

The tenets of the Virginia Tech Graduate Honor Code will be strictly enforced in this course, and all assignments shall be subject to the stipulations of the Graduate Honor Code. For more information on the Graduate Honor Code, please refer to the [GHS Constitution](#).

Academic Accommodations

Virginia Tech welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. The University promotes efforts to provide equal access and a culture of inclusion without altering the essential elements of coursework. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers that may be due to disability, including but not limited to ADHD, chronic or temporary medical conditions, deaf or hard of hearing, learning disability, mental health, or vision impairment, please contact the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office (540-231-3788, ssd@vt.edu, or visit ssd.vt.edu). If you have an SSD accommodation letter, please meet with me privately during office hours as early in the semester as possible to deliver your letter and discuss your accommodations. You must give me reasonable notice to implement your accommodations, which is generally 5 business days and 10 business days for final exams.

If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning or exclude you, please let me know as soon as possible. Together we'll develop strategies to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course.

Basic Needs Statement

For any student who has difficulty affording groceries, accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and if you believe this may affect your performance in this course, you are urged to contact the Dean of Students office for support at 540-231-3787 or complete an [interest form](#) to participate in The Market at Virginia Tech. The Dean of Students, through The Market at Virginia Tech, offers food

options and other resources. There is also a [Student Emergency Fund program](#). If you are comfortable in doing so, please notify me or your departmental advisor of your situation. This will enable them to provide any resources they have access to.

Lauren’s Promise I will listen and believe you if someone is threatening or harassing you. Lauren McCluskey, a 21-year-old student at the University of Utah and the daughter of economist Jill McCluskey, was murdered on October 22nd, 2018, by a man she briefly dated. I am committed to doing what I can to make sure this does not happen again.

If you are in immediate danger, call 911. If you are experiencing sexual assault, domestic violence, stalking, or harassment you can report it to me. You should be aware that I am a mandatory reporter, which means that I am required to report these instances to the university’s Title IX Coordinator or Deputy Title IX Coordinator to investigate. **You can also learn about your options (both on and off-campus as well as confidential or not) at this [link](#).** If you need support for your mental or emotional health for any reason, you can talk to me. You can also find helpful resources at <https://ucc.vt.edu/>.

Tentative Course Outline

Dates	Lecture Topics	Assignments and Readings
Week I: August 26 th	Introduction to the Class	Verbal Presentation (no slides)
Week II: September 2 nd	What is a Good Research Idea?	Davis (2001) Pischke (2012)
Week III: September 9 th	How to Get Started on a Research Agenda	
Week IV: September 16 th	Data Visualization and Constructing Tables	Schwabish (2014) Schwabish (2020)
Week V: September 23 rd	How to Structure an Academic Paper in Economics	Bellemare (2020) Cochrane (2005) Goldin and Katz (2009) Shapiro (2022) Board and Meyer-ter-Vehn (2018)

Week VI: September 30 th	How to Structure an Academic Presentation	Meager Presentation Shapiro Presentation
Week VII: October 7 th	Student Presentations	
Week VIII: October 14 th	Student Presentations	
Week IX: October 21 st	Student Presentations	
Week X: October 28 th	Getting Published in Economics	Edmans (2023)
Week XI: November 4 th	How to Write a Referee Report	Berk et al. (2015)
Week XII: November 11 th	How the Job Market Works	Cawley (2018)
Week XIII: November 18 th	Student Presentations	
Week XIV: November 25 th	No Class – Thanksgiving Break	
Week XV: December 2 nd	Student Presentations	
Week XVI: December 9 th	Student Presentations	

Course Readings (* Indicates Required Reading)

Building a Research Agenda

1. Chesa-Llorens, Anna and Lin, Mengwei. 2025. "The BESTEPS Guide: 7 Lessons towards Effective Economics PhD Research" Volume 1
2. Davis, Don. 2001. "Ph.D. Thesis Research: Where do I Start?"*
3. Finklestein, Amy. 2006. "Most projects fail... and other things I've learned from (trying to do) empirical work" PowerPoint Presentation
4. Niehaus, Paul. 2019. "Doing Research"
5. Pischke, Steve. 2012 "How to get started on research in economics?"*

Data Visualization and Constructing Tables

1. Schwabish, Jonathan A. 2014. "An Economist's Guide to Visualizing Data". *Journal of Economic Perspectives*. 28(1):209-234*
2. Schwabish, Jonathan A. 2020. "Ten Guidelines for Better Tables". *Journal of Benefit Cost Analysis*. 11(2):151-178*

How to Write an Academic Paper

1. Bellemare, Marc F. 2020. "How to Write Applied Papers in Economics"*
2. Board, Simon, and Meyer-ter-Vehn, Moritz. 2018. "Writing Economic Theory Papers"*
3. Cochrane, John H. 2005. "Writing Tips for Ph.D. Students"*
4. Feld, Jan, Lines, Corinna and Ross, Libby. 2023. "Writing Matters"
5. Goldin, Claudia and Katz, Lawrence. Undated. "The Ten Most Important Rules of Writing Your Job Market Paper"*
6. Shapiro, Jesse M. 2022. "Four Steps to an Applied Micro Paper"*
7. Thomson, William. 1999. "The Young Person's Guide to Writing Economic Theory"

How to Structure an Academic Talk

1. Shapiro, Jesse M. Undated. "How to Give an Applied Micro Talk" Presentation*
2. Meager, Rachael. 2017. "Public Speaking for Academic Economists" Presentation*

Publishing in Economics

1. Bellemare, Marc F. 2017. "How to Publish in Academic Journals" Presentation*
2. Berk, Jonathan B., Harvey, Campbell R., and Hirshleifer, David. 2015. "Preparing a Referee Report: Guidelines and Perspectives"*
3. Depken II, Craig A. Undated. "Tips on How to Get Published"

4. Edmans, Alex. 2024. “Learnings from 1,000 Rejections”*

How the Job Market Works

1. Cawley, John. 2018. “A Guide and Advice for Economists on the U.S. Junior Academic Job Market: 2018-2019 Edition”*
2. Healy, P. J. 2025. “The Backwards Induction Approach to Grad School... and other random advice” Presentation