

G31.3002: Seminar in Article Preparation

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Class hours: Wednesday, 10-12

Class room: 19 W. 4th Street, room 736

Course Description

This course is for third year PhD students beginning dissertation research. The purpose of the course is to help you begin and complete a third-year paper and to give you feedback on research ideas.

1. Course Requirements

Requirements for credit include (1) regular class attendance, (2) two presentations, one in fall term and one in spring term, and (3) obtaining an official advisor. You are allowed one inexcused absence per term without penalty to your grade. After that, the grade will be lowered by one notch for each inexcused absence.

2. Reading and Reference Materials

- (a) William Strunk, Jr., and E.B. White, **The Elements of Style**, 4th Edition, Allyn & Bacon, 2004.
- (b) George D. Gopen and Judith A. Swan “The Science of Scientific Writing,” *American Scientist*, Volume 78, November-December 1990. *This article will be handed out in class.*

3. Structure of Course and Detailed Requirements

- (a) **Advisor.** By **September 24**, each student must tell me the name of her/his principal advisor. That means you must approach a faculty member who is working in an area in which you intend to work and ask them to consider taking you on as an advisee. You may have to approach more than one person, but you *must* find someone. This person should be made aware that they will be requested to come to your presentations and give feedback. If you

have more than one advisor, it would be great if they all came, but you must choose a principal advisor responsible for coming to your presentations.

- (b) **Coordinate your presentation times with the advisor.** You must make at least two presentations. Since your advisor should also attend, you need to coordinate with your advisor on a time slot and make sure that he/she is committed to attending on the day and time of your presentation. Students may feel free to trade slots among themselves if scheduling conflicts arise. In some situations, students who have not yet started a research topic may make three presentations, with the first one an outline of one or more ideas.
- (c) **Presentations.** Prepare *no more* than 45 minutes of remarks. You should shoot for 20 slides or less. Presentations should be directed to general economics audience, not to specialists! Your presentations must state clearly the motivation for the research undertaken, and the gaps that, if successful, it would fill in the literature. No one should be left wondering about the question you are addressing or the reasons why such an investigation is important/useful/novel. Do not spend the first half-hour talking about what others have done—tell us what you are doing and why in the first 5 minutes. More on presentation style below.
- (d) **Seminar room equipment.** It is *your responsibility* to insure that the seminar room has the needed equipment for your presentation (e.g., laptop, projector). Please coordinate with Betty the Friday before your presentation to make sure you will have access to the equipment in advance of class on Wednesday.
- (e) **Paper due date.** The paper is due on **May 7th** by 5 PM. You are responsible for handing it in to your advisor via email with a CC to me, and he/she is responsible for assigning it a grade, to be reported to me.
- (f) **Required reading.** The reading listed above is required. You should read these in order to properly write your paper.
- (g) **Calendar management.** An initial schedule of presentations will be made by the end of the first day of class. Inevitably, some students will need to change the dates of their presentations at

some point after the initial schedule is set and throughout the course of the year, depending on their advisor's schedules. *It is your responsibility to agree upon a mutually acceptable date for your presentation with your advisor and to remind him/her of the date as the time approaches.* You should remind the advisor several times in the week before the presentation. *It is your responsibility to make sure your advisor attends your presentation.* Should the initial date you are assigned be unsuitable for your advisor, you will need to change your presentation date. Do not come to me and tell me this. Instead, take the most recent calendar (note the date in upper left corner), which will have the dates of student's presentations marked on it, and approach, on your own, your fellow students to ask them to switch presentation dates with you. The fellow student will have to get approval from his/her advisor to make the switch. When all parties (students and advisors) are in agreement about the switch, send me an email (CCing the relevant parties), to confirm the switch. I will then edit the calendar and redistribute the updated calendar to the class.

- (h) **Third-year paper prize.** There will be a prize for the best third-year paper. The prize will be accompanied by a modest monetary award, and is determined in consultation with the third-year advisors.
- (i) **Some sound advice from John H. Cochrane on presentations (via sydney):** "As in writing the paper, your main objective is to get to the #1 important contribution as fast as possible. Most seminars are a disaster. They start with pointless motivation and policy implications, which the audience can't follow since we don't know the result. Then we get a long literature review, which is even more boring since we don't know the point of this paper much less what everyone else did. Then we get a results preview. Usually, the presenter says I'll preview the results now because I may not have time to get to them all, a strangely self-fulfilling prophecy. Since showing the main results is the only reason you came, why not just start right now! Worse, the reason we run out of time is because we wasted half an hour on the stupid preview! The seminar then bogs down as people start asking ques-

tions about the previewed results; most of the questions are dumb (I measure the demand elasticity at 0.3. But how did you identify supply shifts?) since they will be explained in a proper presentation of the results. But the questions are totally reasonable since the claim with no documentation is meaningless. Next, we get (in empirical papers) some theory that is really beside the point and only serves to provoke more needless argument (no, there really is no way to distinguish the behavioral and rational explanation. Clever audience members will come up with stories that reverse all the signs.) Then we get some distracting preliminary results and tables and graphs of unrelated observations. More pointless discussion erupts; people don't know what point the speaker is trying to make and the discussion goes off in to tangents. Finally the speaker sees there is only 10 minutes to go, tells people to be quiet, and the main results go by in a big rush. Everyone is tired and confused and doesn't follow anything. I timed the finance workshop last winter quarter and not one paper got to the main results in under an hour! Listen to the questions, all the way to the end, then count to three before answering. Yes, you're in a rush, and yes, you think you can guess what the question will be and you know the answer. This isn't a game show, and much of the time you actually don't know what the question will be. Keep a sheet of paper handy. You may not have a quick answer to every question, and some questions may point to good things to change in the paper. You cannot make it too simple. Most presenters, especially PhD students, overestimate dramatically how much theory people can digest in one sitting, and how quickly they can memorize and digest models and results. Speak loudly, slowly and clearly. There's nothing wrong with ending early!"