Paper Guidelines

One of the requirements of this course is the completion of a paper. The main purpose of the paper is to get you started on your own research so I prefer a good, credible, proposal with future potential to a mediocre complete paper. This note provides some guidelines for the paper.

1. I prefer empirical papers. You can either add an empirical component to a paper you have previously written, or start a new project. In the spirit of the course the most important components of the paper are: (1) an interesting question, (2) a well-defined, credible “experiment” that will allow you to answer this question, and (3) the data required to answer the question.

   **Question:** Before a paper will be approved you must convince me that it examines an interesting question. Good questions can either be literature driven (i.e., you notice that there is a gap in the existing literature), or driven by observation (i.e., you notice a certain economic phenomenon and ask yourself what causes it and how you could prove that is indeed what is happening). While I prefer papers related to the topics covered in the course, I am more interested in seeing people get started on research that engages them.

   **Credible Experiment and Data:** Once you have a question, you should ask yourself how you would design an experiment to answer it. I do not necessarily mean that you should think of this as a natural or quasi experiment, rather that you think what kind of observed pattern will credibly answer your question. At first you should think about this question independently from the data you could potentially collect. Once you have realized what the ideal experiment is, you can ask yourself how to collect the data required to carry it out. In most cases the ideal experiment will have to be modified to accommodate data constraints.

   **Theory and Econometrics:** In general you want to make sure that your work is well founded on economic theory and that you are extracting the most information you can from the data. Since this is only a term paper, I will not be very demanding along these lines. For example, if your argument relies on what seems like intuitive economic principles, I will not ask that you specify a full theoretical model and solve for an equilibrium.

2. You must send me a one-page abstract of your project before Spring Break. You’re welcome to come speak to me about your paper idea either during Office Hours (Th 1-2:30) or at another time.

3. I am aware that in some cases the term might not be long enough to allow you to obtain all the data you need and perform the analysis. If the question is interesting and there is a reasonable chance you could get the data and do what you propose, then you will be allowed to work around these constraints. However, be sure to get my approval, and do not assume you will get it (especially late in the term).

The paper due date will be Thursday, May 10.