Applied Microeconomics PhD Reading Group

Syllabus 2025–26

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Office Hours: By appointment

1. Course Description

The Applied Microeconomics PhD Reading Group is designed to expose students to cutting-edge research across subfields of applied microeconomics. Through reading, presenting, writing referee reports, and structured discussion, students will deepen their understanding of empirical methods, research design, and the evolving standards of credibility in economics.

The reading group emphasizes:

- Critical engagement with contemporary applied microeconomics research
- Breadth beyond students' dissertation areas
- Development of argumentation, presentation, and academic writing skills
- Understanding of methodological frontiers

Active preparation and participation are essential.

2. Meetings

We will meet ten times during the academic year for 90 minutes each. Exact timing may be subject to change.

- Mon 20 Oct, 14:00–15:30

- Fri 21 Nov, 11:00–12:30

- Fri 5 Dec, 11:00–12:30

- Fri 9 Jan, 11:00–12:30

- Fri 6 Feb, 11:00–12:30

- Fri 6 Mar, 11:00–12:30

- Fri 27 Mar, 11:00–12:30

- Fri 24 Apr, 11:00–12:30

- Fri 22 May, 11:00–12:30

- Fri 12 Jun, 11:00–12:30

Most work occurs outside meetings: reading, preparing presentations, formulating discussion questions, and writing referee reports.

3. Requirements

3.1 Presentations

Each session covers two papers. Students will present approximately two papers over the year. Presentations should be 15–20 minutes, followed by 25–30 minutes of discussion.

Presenters should:

- Summarize the paper's motivation, contribution, methods, and findings
- Explain why the question matters
- Critically evaluate identification, robustness, and external validity
- Highlight open questions or potential extensions

3.2 Referee Reports

Presenters must submit a 1.5–3 page referee report within two weeks of their presentation. Reports should include:

1. Summary and contribution
2. Strengths of the paper
3. Major concerns (identification, theory, empirical design)
4. Minor comments (clarity, exposition)
5. Relevant omitted literature

Reports may incorporate insights from in-class discussion.

3.3 Discussion Questions

All students must prepare **two original discussion questions** for each paper before the start of the session. Questions may address:

- Identification and research design
- Interpretation of results
- Alternative mechanisms or models
- External validity
- Links to broader literature

3.4 Reading Expectations

Students are expected to read all assigned papers for every session.

4. Topics and Example Papers

The final reading list will include roughly 10 papers for the first half of the year and 10 papers for the other half. Papers will be selected from the list below and from student suggestions.

4.1 Observational, Panel, and Survey Data; Experiments

- Armentano, Niehaus, Vogl (2025)
- Banerjee & Duflo (2007, JEP)
- Stancheva (2021, QJE)
- Alesina, Stancheva, Teso (2021, AER)

4.2 Replication, Credibility, and Research Transparency

- Vlassopoulos et al. (2024, AEJ:AE)
- Brodeur et al. (2025, OSF)
- Open Science Collaboration (2015, Science)
- Camerer et al. (2016, Science)
- Brown, Imai, Verdier, Camerer (2024, JEL)
- Asad Islam case materials

4.3 Pre-Analysis Plans and Their Limits

- Olken (2015, JEP)
- Coffman & Niederle (2015, JEP)
- Chang & Li (2017, AER)

4.4 Difference-in-Differences and Event Studies

- Baker et al. (forthcoming, JEL)
- Card & Krueger (2000, AER) — background
- Borusyak, Jaravel, Spiess (2024, REStud)

4.5 IV Dialogues and Spatial Concerns

- Acemoglu, Johnson, Robinson (2001, AER)
- Albouy (2011) — comment
- Acemoglu, Johnson, Robinson (2012) — reply

- Conley & Kelly (2025, JIntlEcon)

4.6 Persistence and Regression Discontinuity

- Yanagizawa-Drott (2014)
- Blouin & Mukand (2019, JPE)
- Dell (2010, QJE)

4.7 Mechanisms and Experimental Evidence

- Bohren, Hull, Imas (2025, QJE)
- Karlan & Zinman (2009, ECTA)

4.8 Inequality and Generalizability

- List (2020, NBER)
- Chetty, Hendren, Kline, Saez (2014, QJE)
- Chetty et al. (2017, Science)

4.9 Macro–Micro Interactions

- Egger, Haushofer, Miguel, Niehaus, Walker (2022, QJE)

5. Student Suggestions

Students may propose additional papers. Proposals should address:

- Relevance to applied microeconomics
- Fit within broader empirical and methodological debates
- Value for the group's intellectual development

The final selection will be used for paper assignments on a first-come, first-served basis, with opportunities for trades.

6. Assessment

This is a pass/fail course. Evaluation is based on:

- Quality of presentations
- Referee report submissions
- Prepared discussion questions
- Active participation and attendance

7. Learning Goals

By the end of the year, students will:

- Engage critically with modern applied microeconomics research
- Recognize strong and weak identification strategies
- Evaluate external validity, mechanisms, and robustness
- Write professional-quality referee reports
- Present research clearly and confidently