Applied Microeconomics PhD Reading Group

Syllabus 2026–27

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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, economic modeling, 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.

- Thu 22 Oct, 15:00–16:30
- Thu 26 Nov, 15:00–16:30
- Thu 17 Dec, 15:00–16:30
- Thu 14 Jan, 15:00–16:30
- Thu 4 Feb, 15:00–16:30
- Thu 25 Feb, 15:00–16:30
- Thu 18 Mar, 15:00–16:30
- Thu 15 Apr, 15:00–16:30

- Thu 13 May, 15:00–16:30
- Thu 10 Jun, 15:00–16:30

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 three 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, assumptions, 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, modeling assumptions, 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 Papers

4.1 Meeting 1: Gender Inequality in Professional Settings

- Dupas, Pascaline, Amy Handlan, Alicia Sasser Modestino, Muriel Niederle, Mateo Seré, Haoyu Sheng, Justin Wolfers, and Seminar Dynamics Collective. 2026. "Gender Differences in Economics Seminars." *American Economic Review* 116 (2): 749–789.
- Benson, Alan, Danielle Li, and Kelly Shue. 2026. "'Potential' and the Gender Promotion Gap." *American Economic Review* 116 (2): 375–417.

4.2 Meeting 2: How People Process Information

- Bordalo, Pedro, John Conlon, Nicola Gennaioli, Spencer Kwon, and Andrei Shleifer. 2026. "How People Use Statistics." *Review of Economic Studies* 93 (1): 250–285.
- Serra-Garcia, Marta. 2026. "The Attention-Information Trade-Off." *American Economic Review* 116 (5): 1579–1610.

4.3 Meeting 3: Institutions, Technology, and Behavior

- Jung, Yeonha, Uyseok Lee, and Gedeon Lim. 2027. "The Green Revolution and Individualism: Evidence from Indonesia." *Journal of Development Economics* 184: 103877.
- Ash, Elliott, Daniel L. Chen, and Suresh Naidu. 2026. "Ideas Have Consequences: The Impact of Law and Economics on American Justice." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 141 (1): 845–887.

4.4 Meeting 4: Regression Discontinuity: When Is a Cutoff Credible?

- Melnikov, Nikita, Carlos Schmidt-Padilla, and María Micaela Sviatschi. 2025. "Gangs, Labor Mobility, and Development." *Econometrica* 93 (6): 2083–2121.
- Berne, Jordan S., Brian A. Jacob, Christina Weiland, and Katharine O. Strunk. 2026. "Assessing the Impact of Grade Retention: A Cautionary Tale of Exclusion Restriction Violations." *Journal of Public Economics* 253: 105534.

4.5 Meeting 5: Instrumental Variables: Application and Falsification

- Khanna, Gaurav, Emir Murathanoglu, Caroline Theoharides, and Dean Yang. 2026. "Abundance from Abroad: Migrant Income and Long-Run Economic Development."

American Economic Review 116 (4): 1540–1577.

- Danieli, Oren, Daniel Nevo, Itai Walk, Bar Weinstein, and Dan Zeltzer. 2026. "Negative Control Falsification Tests for Instrumental Variable Designs." *American Economic Review* 116 (4): 1380–1414.

4.6 Meeting 6: AI and Machine Learning in Applied Microeconomics

- Brynjolfsson, Erik, Danielle Li, and Lindsey R. Raymond. 2025. "Generative AI at Work." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 140 (2): 889–942.
- Chernozhukov, Victor, Mert Demirer, Esther Duflo, and Iván Fernández-Val. 2025. "Fisher–Schultz Lecture: Generic Machine Learning Inference on Heterogeneous Treatment Effects in Randomized Experiments, with an Application to Immunization in India." *Econometrica* 93 (4): 1121–1164.

4.7 Meeting 7: Social Constraints on Economic Behavior

- Ghosh, Arkadev. 2025. "Religious Divisions and Production Technology: Experimental Evidence from India." *Journal of Political Economy* 133 (10): 3249–3304.
- Carranza, Eliana, Aletheia Donald, Florian Grosset-Touba, and Supreet Kaur. 2025. "The Social Tax: Redistributive Pressure and Labor Supply." *Econometrica* 93 (6): 2273–2308.

4.8 Meeting 8: Education, Peers, and Role Models

- Alan, Sule, and Elif Kubilay. 2025. "Empowering Adolescents to Transform Schools: Lessons from a Behavioral Targeting." *American Economic Review* 115 (2): 365–407.
- Schaede, Ursina, and Ville Mankki. 2026. "Quota versus Quality? Long-Term Gains from an Unusual Gender Quota." *American Economic Review* 116 (6): 1996–2037.

4.9 Meeting 9: Families, Sorting, and Neighborhoods

- Agostinelli, Francesco, Matthias Doepke, Giuseppe Sorrenti, and Fabrizio Zilibotti. 2026. "It Takes a Village: The Economics of Parenting with Neighborhood and Peer Effects." *Journal of Political Economy* 134 (1): 313–365.
- Chiappori, Pierre-André, Carlo Fiorio, Alfred Galichon, and Stefano Verzillo. 2026. "Assortative Matching on Income." *Econometrica* 94 (3): 957–989.

4.10 Meeting 10: Understanding and Changing Health Behavior

- Dizon-Ross, Rebecca, and Ariel Zucker. 2026. "Mechanism Design for Personalized Policy: A Field Experiment Incentivizing Exercise." *Econometrica* 94 (4): 1409–1448.

- Finkelstein, Amy, Matthew Gentzkow, and Dean Li. 2025. "What Drives Risky Prescription Opioid Use? Evidence from Migration." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 140 (4): 3133–3189.

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
- Assess strong and weak identification strategies and modeling assumptions
- Evaluate external validity, mechanisms, and robustness
- Write professional-quality referee reports
- Present research clearly and confidently