GUIDELINES FOR ADVISORY OF BACHELOR AND MASTER THESES

FEBRUARY 2020

JULIE CHYTILOVÁ

CHYTILOVA@FSV.CUNI.CZ

This document provides guidelines to BA and MA students who are interested in the applied microeconomics topics and would like to write their thesis with me as an advisor. It describes the structure of the whole process of preparation of your thesis and our cooperation. Having this process clear will give you better opportunity to get the advice when you need it and, ultimately, to write a better thesis.

Research topics: The document lists examples of topics you might be interested to study (in particular, but not limited to, development and behavioral economics). It also provides several specific examples of topics which were studied in bachelor/master theses by your older colleagues. These topics may give you an idea how a research question suitable for a thesis looks like and give you an inspiration for your own research topic.

Data sources: To analyze your research question, you will need to analyze (a) an existing dataset with individual-level data, or (b) survey or experimental data which you will collect on your own. The document also provides several links to the existing datasets you may find useful.

Before you contact me, the following steps need to be taken on your side (stage 1):

- Think about and articulate a specific research question you want to study and why it is important.

- Read the relevant literature and formulate the contribution of your thesis relative to the existing scientific knowledge.

- If you want to use an existing dataset: Search for a dataset which will allow you to study your research question. Make sure that it contains the variables you will need for the analysis.

- If you want to collect your own data: Think about the main features and manipulations of your questionnaire/experiment as well as about the relevant sample and how you will access the respondents.

- Send me a short summary (approximately a half-page) of the above-mentioned points (research question, contribution, methodology).

Applied microeconomics

Process of writing/our co-operation

Stage 1: as described at the beginning of this document

Stage 2
- Learn the data well by reading the questionnaires and supplementary materials.
- Learn the techniques that you would like to use.
- Run preliminary analysis, think about the results and possible interpretations.
- Send me the main results presented in a concise way – a few tables with clear labels of the variables and a short (max half-page) summary of the results.
- At this point it will be useful for us to meet and discuss the results and their interpretation.

Stage 3
- Finalize the data analysis.
- Write down the first draft of your thesis.
- Send it to me at least five days before we meet so that I can read it.
- Get comments and finalize the thesis.

If you find it useful to discuss with me a part of your thesis any other time, always send it to me at least five days before we meet.

Data sources

The hyperlinks below will lead you to datasets, most of which are publicly available. You might be surprised how detailed the data are and how many interesting questions one can explore by using them.
- Demographic and Health Surveys:
  http://www.measuredhs.com/
- Humanitarian Data Exchange
  https://data.hdx.rwlabs.org/
- Poverty Action Lab (MIT):
  http://www.povertyactionlab.org/evaluations/data
- List of development micro data sets on BREAD webpage
  http://ipl.econ.duke.edu/dthomas/dev_data/index.html
- International Food and Policy Research Institute (Washington, D.C.)
  http://www.ifpri.org/datasets
- US National Longitudinal Survey (NLSY): https://www.nlsinfo.org/
- US Health and Retirement Study (HRS): http://hrsonline.isr.umich.edu/index.php
- US Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID): http://psidonline.isr.umich.edu/default.aspx
- US National Longitudnal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health:
  http://www.cpc.unc.edu/projects/addhealth/documentation
- US Early Childhood Longitudinal Program (ECLS):
  http://nces.ed.gov/ecls/birthinstruments.asp
- UK Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children
  (ALSPAC): http://www.bristol.ac.uk/alspac/
- LISS Panel Data (Netherlands): https://www.lissdata.nl/lissdata/
- German Socio-Economic Panel Study (G-SOEP): http://panel.gsoep.de/
- Integrate Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS):
  https://international.ipums.org/international/

- European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC): http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/microdata/european-union-statistics-on-income-and-living-conditions
- European Social Survey (ESS): http://essedunet.nsd.uib.no/

Research topics

In general, you can work on any topic in applied microeconomics. Topics related to poverty and health, education, financial behavior, gender differences and intra-household decision making are particularly welcome.

Here are a few examples of the research questions studies in a bachelor/master thesis in the past:
- The Effects of Siblings' Composition on Child Labor and School Attendance
- AIDS and polygamy in Sub-Saharan Africa
- Gender Differences in Education: Structure and Comparison of Countries
- Do Determinants of Happiness Vary across Demographic Groups?
- How the Composition of Siblings Affects Child Health Quality

Behavioral and experimental economics

Traditional economic theory uses many assumptions about individual preferences and behavior (for example, unbounded rationality and selfishness). Behavioral economics integrates insights from psychology which have documented that human behavior often departs from these assumptions in important ways. Examples include sharing with strangers, self-control difficulties or overconfidence.

If you want to learn more about behavioral economics, great starting points are:
- Wilkinson (2008): Introduction to behavioral economics
- Several books which popularize behavioral economics are available in bookstores both in English and Czech:
    - Dan Ariely: Predictable Irrational, The Upside of Irrationality, The Honest Truth about Dishonesty
    - Daniel Kahneman: Thinkg, Fast and Slow
    - Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein: Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness

You are also welcome to attend the course JEB147 Behavioral Economics and Finance -- https://is.cuni.cz/studium/predmety/index.php?do=predmet&kod=JEB147&skr=2019 -- which takes place in winter semester at IES.

For your thesis, you will need to collect your own dataset. You can either implement a survey experiment or an economic experiment. Survey experiments involve distributing a questionnaire among a sample of respondents and randomly varying some of its elements across respondents. In contrast, economic experiments involve incentivized tasks, which make the respondents to think seriously about their choices but at the same time require some cost. For your thesis, you could do a replication/extension of an interesting (survey) experiment conducted in another country and test if the results are stable in another environment (Czech Republic). Even more interestingly, you could build on existing experiments and extend them in some important way.

If you are interested in experimental economics, there is a course -- http://ies.fsv.cuni.cz/en/syllab/JEM136 -- that covers lots of topics in the field and includes practice how to organize a lab experiment. There is also a laboratory for experimental economics at the University of Economics (VŠE) -- http://www.vse-lee.cz/cze/o-lee/o-nas.

Process of writing/our co-operation

Stage 1: as described at the beginning of this document

Stage 2
- Write the questionnaire/prepare the experimental script. Think carefully about random manipulations you plan to implement.
- Make detailed plans how to access the respondents/participants.
- Send me the questionnaire/experimental script at least five days before meet so that we can have an efficient discussion about it.

Stage 3
- Distribute the questionnaires/run the experiments.
- Analyze the data, think about the results and possible interpretations.
- Send me the main results presented in a concise way – a few tables with clearly labeled variables and a short (max half-page) summary of the results.
- At this point it will be useful for us to meet and discuss the results and their interpretation.

Stage 4
- Finalize the data analysis.
- Write down the first draft of your thesis.
- Send it to me at least five days before we meet so that I can read it.
- Get comments and finalize the thesis.

If you find it useful to discuss with me a part of your thesis any other time, always send it to me at least five days before we meet.

Research topics

In general, you can work on any topic in behavioral economics. Topics related to time discounting (patience), social preferences, limited self-control and cooperation are particularly welcome.

Here are a few examples of the research questions studies in a bachelor/master thesis in the past:
- Differences in Competitiveness at a Young Age: An Experiment
- Gender Differences in Competitiveness and Confidence: Comparison of Children from India and the Czech Republic
- Zero Price Effect: An Experiment
- Comparison of Progress in Information Processing after a Term of Studies of Mathematical and Non-Mathematical Programs