

Topics in Empirical Macroeconomics and Finance

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“Chance favors only the prepared mind”.¹ (Louis Pasteur, 1822-1895)

Lectures Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:30-11:45am. Bunche Hall 9294.

Office hours Email me for an appointment.

Website <https://moodle2.sscnet.ucla.edu/course/view/18S-ECON221C-1>.

Grading First, I will ask you to replicate **two** empirical macro or/and finance papers, using **publicly available data** (e.g. national accounts, Compustat, CRSP, Nielsen Scanner data, other WRDS material, etc.), but for which the replication code was not made available online by the authors (or not fully). I shall give you a list of papers among which to choose at the very beginning of the quarter. See the preliminary timetable on page 14 for deadlines. I believe that the best way to learn empirical methods in macroeconomics and finance is to “get your hands dirty”, and practice working with data. The first replication exercise will count towards 40% of your final grade, and the second will count towards 40%. Second, I will ask you to **present a recent paper in empirical macroeconomics** during the last two lectures. (30 minutes each) Again, I will give you a list from which to choose. This will count towards 20% of your final grade.

Course outline This course will follow an inductive, or bottom-up, approach. Whenever possible, I will start from the facts, and review different theories in light of these facts.² I will particularly emphasize empirical observations that have not been explained by currently discussed theories. My hope is that you will find here some inspiration for a dissertation topic. The course will constitute of four parts:

1. **Evidence-based macroeconomics (4 topics)** The first part of the course will introduce you to empirical methods in macroeconomics. We will discuss identification in macroeconomics through structural, narrative, and cross-sectional approaches; and compare the merits of these various approaches. These methods will be used throughout the rest of the class.

¹“La chance ne sourit qu’aux esprits bien préparés.”

²“For professional economists, after Malthus, were apparently unmoved by the lack of correspondence between the results of their theory and the facts of observation;—a discrepancy which the ordinary man has not failed to observe, with the result of his growing unwillingness to accord to economists that measure of respect which he gives to other groups of scientists whose theoretical results are confirmed by observation when they are applied to the facts.” (JM Keynes)

2. **Consumption, Investment, the Trade Balance and Asset Pricing (5 topics)** The second part of the class will be structured around empirical “puzzles”, which cannot be explained with neoclassical theories of consumption, investment, the trade balance and asset pricing (including exchange rates).
3. **Low interest rate macroeconomics (4 topics)** The third part will present evidence in favor of the “savings glut” hypothesis, and present overlapping-generations and other models of underconsumption. I will also discuss issues of secular stagnation, competitiveness and external balance, and discuss the relationship to Keynesian economics.
4. **Heterogeneity and macroeconomics (4 topics)** Finally, the last part of the course will focus on evidence and models of firm size and productivity heterogeneity, the labor income distribution, etc. I will finally cover some static optimal taxation.

Textbooks I will assume that you have basic knowledge of first year macroeconomics and finance, which can be found in many different textbooks. For macroeconomics, I would recommend:

- Romer, David. Advanced Macroeconomics. McGraw-Hill Education, 2011. [Link](#)
- Galí, Jordi. Monetary Policy, Inflation, and the Business Cycle: An Introduction to the New Keynesian Framework and Its Applications, Second Edition. Princeton University Press, 2015. [Link](#)
- Blanchard, Olivier Jean, and Stanley Fischer. Lectures on Macroeconomics. Vol. 12. 3. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990. [Link](#)

If you are interested in how macroeconomics is used in practice, I strongly recommend:³

- Bénassy-Quéré, Agnès, Benoît Coeuré, Pierre Jacquet, and Jean Pisani-Ferry. Economic Policy: Theory and Practice. Vol. 53. 9. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. [Link](#)

For finance, I would advise two excellent and complementary textbooks:

- Campbell, John Y. Financial Decisions and Markets: A Course in Asset Pricing. Princeton University Press, 2017. [Link](#)
- Cochrane, John H. Asset Pricing (Revised Edition). Princeton University Press, 2009. [Link](#)

³In the foreword to this textbook, Olivier Blanchard writes: “For a long time, I have felt that my graduate textbook written with Stan Fischer sent the wrong message. We had made the choice to present models and their logic, rather than their applications. The justification was a perfectly good one, namely that we wanted to show the intellectual structure of macroeconomic theory first. But, de facto, the lack of serious empirics sent another message: That theory was largely divorced from practice, and from facts. That message is wrong: Theory without facts is much too easy, and of very little use.”

Bibliography

Articles with a 📖 symbol will be covered during class. The list of articles may change during the quarter.

Methodology

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Part I

Evidence-based macroeconomics

1 Causality in macroeconomics

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Summer Institute Econometric Lecture, 2011, “Computational Tools & Macroeconomic Applications”, Lawrence Christiano and Jesus Fernandez-Villaverde. [Link](#)

📖 “Empirical Macroeconomics. Thomas J. Sargent and Christopher A. Sims” Scientific Background on the Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel 2011. [Link](#)

- ☞ Uhlig, Harald. “Economics and Reality.” *Journal of Macroeconomics*, Has macro progressed?, 34, no. 1 (March 1, 2012): 29–41. [Link](#)
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- ☞ Nakamura, Emi, and Jón Steinsson. “Identification in Macroeconomics.” Working Paper. National Bureau of Economic Research, October 2017. [Link](#)

2 Model-based identification / Structural VARs

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Part II

Investment and asset pricing

1 Investment: benchmark and puzzles

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2 Asset pricing: benchmark and puzzles

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Part III

Low interest rates macroeconomics

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Part IV

Heterogeneity and macro

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4 Static optimal taxation

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Tentative Course Time Table - Spring 2018

I - Evidence-based macroeconomics	
1. Causality in macroeconomics	April 3, 2018
2. Model-based identification / Structural VARs	April 5, 2018
3. Narrative approach and case/event studies	April 10, 2018
4. Cross-sectional data and model based aggregation	April 12, 2018
II - Investment and asset pricing	
1. Investment: benchmark and puzzles	April 17, 2018
2. Asset pricing: benchmark and puzzles	April 19, 2018
3. Investment and financial frictions	April 24, 2018
4. Asset pricing and financial frictions	April 26, 2018
Replication 1 proposal due	April 29, 2018
5. Behavioral asset pricing	May 1/3, 2018
III - Low interest rates macroeconomics	
1. Measuring the marginal product of capital	May 8, 2018
2. OLG models, public debt, rational bubbles	May 10, 2018
Replication 1 due	May 13, 2018
3. Low interest rates: demand or supply	May 15, 2018
4. External balance and competitiveness	May 17, 2018
IV - Heterogeneity and macro	
1. Size / wage distributions: evidence	May 22, 2018
2. Size / wage distributions: dynamic theories	May 24, 2018
Presentation / Replication 2 proposal due	May 27, 2018
3. Size / wage distributions: assignment models	May 29, 2018
4. Static optimal taxation	May 31, 2018
Presentations	June 5/7, 2018
Replication 2 due	June 8, 2018