

Economic Research in Practice

ECN 310, Fall 2023

Professor Buzard

Research is the systematic investigation of a specific question or problem in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions. *Economic Research in Practice* will allow students to explore economic questions of interest through engagement in the early stages of the research process. The course will enhance students' ability to integrate economic theory, quantitative research skills, and research using a project-based approach.

Schedule: WF 2:15–3:35, Eggers 040

Class Website: All materials and announcements will be posted on Blackboard. Announcements will also be pushed to SU email accounts. It is each student's responsibility to check daily for announcements.

Required Materials: None. All readings will be provided.

Office Hours and Contact Information:

- Professor Buzard (kbuzard@syr.edu, 315-443-4079): TBA in Eggers 131; or by appointment at kbuzard@syr.edu.
- Teaching Assistant: TBA

Prerequisites: ECN 101

Course Objectives: This course centers learning around students. Working most often in small teams, we will emphasize reflection and discussion of course material and how it relates to applications to help each other understand issues in which you are interested. This course will prepare students for research opportunities such as the Economics Distinction program, an honors thesis, and/or research assistantships. In the course of writing a research proposal on an economic topic of their choice, students will

1. learn the steps involved in conducting economic research;
2. utilize economic theory to frame analysis of research questions;
3. become familiar with basic concepts of statistical description as it applies to economic analysis;
4. select a research question of interest, write a literature review and formulate a hypothesis;
5. collect, clean, visualize and analyze relevant data using descriptive statistics.

Course Overview: The course will be experiential. Students will be expected to read the assigned material before class and then will be guided through examples in which they will apply the key

concepts in teams during class. Challenging concepts from the reading will also be explored and clarified via these examples. Portions of many class periods will be used to “workshop” students’ chosen projects so that students learn not only about the topic they have chosen but also from the areas that are being explored by their classmates. The in-class examples as well as a list of potential research topics will be drawn from labor, public, urban, trade and development economics as well as political economy. The instructor will also provide guidance for any student who wishes to explore an economic question not represented on the list of potential topics.

Grading: Grades will be based primarily on performance in the various stages of the course project, but class participation and scores on reading quizzes and small skills-based assignments will also figure into the final grade.

Statistical Software: Students will learn to use the statistical software Stata (available to students in the computer lab and on a Maxwell computing server) at the beginning of the course. Later in the course, students will also learn to use R/RStudio (an open source option that is free).

Required Readings:

- Research in the Real World (Remler and Van Ryzen Ch. 1)
- Theory, Models and Research Questions (Remler and Van Ryzen Ch. 2)
- Overview of the Research Process for Economics (Greenlaw, Ch. 2)
- Writing the Research Proposal (Greenlaw, Appendix 2A)
- Surveying the Existing Knowledge about a Topic (Greenlaw, Ch. 3)
- Critical Reading or How to Understand Published Research (Greenlaw, Ch. 6)
- Locating and Collecting Economic Data (Greenlaw, Ch. 8)
- Cleaning Data (Topper and Klinenberg, Ch. 5)
- Five Guidelines for Better Data Visualizations (Schwabish, Ch. 2)
- Measurement (Remler and Van Ryzen Ch. 4)
- Sampling (Remler and Van Ryzen Ch. 5)
- Making Sense of the Numbers (Remler and Van Ryzen Ch. 8)

These readings are drawn from the following textbooks; copies of each chapter will be provided to students:

1. Greenlaw, S. A. (2005). *Doing Economics: A Guide to Understanding and Carrying Out Economic Research*. South-Western College Publications.
2. Remler, D. K., & Van Ryzin, G. G. (2021). *Research methods in practice: Strategies for description and causation*. Sage Publications.

3. Schwabish, J. (2021). Better Data Visualizations: A Guide for Scholars, Researchers, and Wonks. Columbia University Press.
4. Topper, M. & Klinenberg, D. (2021). Data Wrangling for Economists.

Chapters 1 and 4-6 of Keller (2015) will be provided as reference material on the key probabilistic and statistical concepts; treatment of these concepts will be integrated with the final five readings.

5. Keller, G. (2015). Statistics for Management and Economics. Cengage Learning.

Course Benefits: This course will engage a diverse group of early-career students in carefully curated research experiences and connect those who wish for further research opportunities to appropriate mentoring. Providing this mentoring along with early education in research methods will allow students to take advantage of the full range of research opportunities offered by our department. We will track student outcomes so that we can help faculty screen candidates for research assistant positions as well as our economics distinction and B.S./M.A. programs. Participation in this course will provide context for the econometric courses and allow students in the distinction courses to go further in their independent research projects. The course will also help to increase both the number and diversity of economics majors who successfully apply to Ph.D. programs.