ECON 8400-002 — Topics in Education
Course prospectus
University of Pennsylvania
Margaux Luflade
Fall 2022

Course description

Synopsis. As most second-year Ph.D. courses, this course is designed to help you transition to you conducting your own research. Through the discussion of seminal and recent papers, the goal is to help you gain an understanding of the literature that allows you to come up with original questions of interest and/or new useful methods. While this class will focus on the discussion of education-related questions (see list of topics below), the models and methods we will discussed are useful in economics and empirical micro, beyond the study of education questions. A number of papers we will discuss use methods from other economics fields or econometrics techniques useful for all empirical work.

Logistics and instruction planning

Email: mluflade@sas.upenn.edu

Meeting times: Monday, Wednesday, 12–1:30pm, Fall session 2 (Oct. 18th to Dec. 12th)

Office hours: by appointment, feel free to email me.

Typical class structure:

• Each class, we’ll discuss in depth one or two papers. For each paper, a student or I will be in charge of preparing a presentation of the paper. I’ll give a quick broader view of where these papers fit in the literature and how they are connected to other papers of interest.
• In the last few class sessions, students may make short presentations of their original research ideas.

Assessment

• Presentation and discussion of paper(s)
• I am currently working on adding a problem set. The goal of the problem set will be to have you work more in depth on the implementation of empirical research. I will give you a (simulated) dataset and ask you to code some estimator to answer some question.
• A short research proposal: each student will submit an short original research proposal. The goal on this assignment is to start the transition to the third year of the Ph.D., during which you’ll start developing your own research full time. Typically, the proposal would present the research question; explain why it is an interesting question; and describe the (planned) contributions of the paper to the literature. I don’t expect you to submit a fully completed paper outline, rather I will ask for a 1 or 2-page proposal. The idea is to give you a deadline for you to put together the beginning of a project that you could further develop over the spring or the summer. For instance, if it is an empirical project, the proposal could explain clearly the key empirical challenges, propose an identification strategy and data that could be used. If you don’t have a complete identification strategy in mind, clearly establish what you could do with what you have, and what you still need to figure out for the paper to make a contribution. Think about the next steps: at the end of the proposal, establish a to-do list for the summer.
Tentative overview of topics

1. Models of education decisions, skill formation, and identification of the returns to education

- In-class discussions

- Additional readings

2. School choice and mechanism design

- In-class discussions

- Additional readings

3. School and neighborhood choice

- In-class discussions

- Additional readings

4. Supply side

- In-class discussions

• Additional readings

5. Educational inputs — teachers, peers, school quality

• In-class discussions

• Additional readings

6. Unequal access to education/ affirmative action

• In-class discussions

• Additional readings