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.

This class will focus on the discussion of education-related questions (see list of topics below). However, I certainly hope the class will be the occasion to discuss models and methods that are useful in economics and empirical micro, beyond the study of education questions. The list of topics below is tentative: I can definitely modify the list to include related topics of interest to students. Feel free to email me if you have suggestions and/or questions.

Logistics and instruction planning

Email: mluflade@sas.upenn.edu

Meeting times: Monday and Wednesday, 10:15–11:45am, Fall session 2.

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, either me or a student will be in charge of preparing a presentation of the paper, and leading the discussion. I’ll try to 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 will make short presentations of their original research ideas.

Assessment

- Presentation and discussion of paper(s)
- Referee report: each student will submit a referee report on a current working paper, for instance a paper currently R&R at a general interest or top field journal. Students can choose papers that fit their interest, and check in with me for approval.
- Term paper: each student will submit an 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, 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 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.
Tentative overview of topics

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


2. School choice and mechanism design


3. School and neighborhood choice


4. Supply side


5. Educational inputs —teachers, peers, school quality