

## **MPhil/PhD Research, Presentation and Professional Skills Workshops, 2009/10**

**James Banks and Andrew Chesher**

These reading and presentation workshops will take place Wednesdays from 11-1 in room 321. The first meeting will be on 7 October 2009.

### Overview

The goal of this set of courses is to teach 2nd year MPhil/PhD students the basic knowledge and skills required for conducting top level research in Economics, writing a PhD thesis, communicating PhD research to others, and interacting with the academic community. We also give an introduction to some of the basic tasks, responsibilities and duties of being a PhD student and then, subsequently, an academic economist. Finally, the courses are intended to support students in the first stages of their written PhD work which leads to the transfer seminar, by providing structured advice and discussion, and by stimulating discussion among students about their work.

### Courses (dates subject to confirmation)

#### **1: Introduction to PhD research in Economics at UCL**

Dates: 7, 21 October

What is this set of workshops about?

Brief introduction of everybody

What does UCL Economics department expect from its research students?

What does UCL Economics expect from its Teaching Assistants?

What does it mean to be an Economist?

Professional Etiquette

Readings:

Don Davis's guide to choosing a research topic

<http://tinyurl.com/brsfv8>

Richard Hamming, "You and Your Research"

<http://www.cs.virginia.edu/~robins/YouAndYourResearch.pdf>

Dan Hamermesh's website:

<http://www.eco.utexas.edu/faculty/Hamermesh/AdviceforEconomists.htm>

Dan Hamermesh, A Young Economist's Guide to Professional Etiquette

(*Journ. Econ Persps.*, Winter 1992)

Dan Hamermesh, Professional Etiquette for the Mature Economist,

AER papers and proceedings, May 1993, 34-38

Hal Varian: "How to Build an Economic Model in your Spare Time",

<http://www.sims.berkeley.edu/~hal/Papers/how.pdf>

David Romer's golden rules for PhD students

<http://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/ecswong/davidromer.html>

Assignment: Read the different papers on "being an economist" or "doing research", Summarise what you believe are the key messages, contrast the views different economists/academics have on this. You may want to structure along the following lines:

- i) How to develop a good research idea
- ii) How to write and publish a paper,
- iii) How to make other people read your work and comment on it
- iv) How to interact with other researchers etc.

Make a list (with comments) of what you think are the best advice you obtained from these papers.

## **2: Writing research papers and the critical assessment of research**

Dates: 18, 25 November

Writing and Presenting work in English

How to structure a research paper and a PhD thesis

The peer evaluation process:

- Assessment of the quality of other people's work
- Constructive discussion of the work of others.
- Refereeing of research for peer reviewed journals.
  - What is a referee report?
  - How should a referee report be structured?

Readings:

Hal Varian: "What I've learned about Writing Economics",

<http://www.ischool.berkeley.edu/~hal/Papers/writing-economics.html>

John Cochrane's writing tips for PhD students

[http://faculty.chicagogsb.edu/john.cochrane/research/Papers/phd\\_paper\\_writing.pdf](http://faculty.chicagogsb.edu/john.cochrane/research/Papers/phd_paper_writing.pdf)

Michael Kremer's checklist for making your paper as good as it can be

<http://www.economics.harvard.edu/faculty/kremer/files/checklist.pdf>

Assignment 1: Formulate on 5 pages the key ideas you have about your first thesis paper or topic. Carefully point out

- i) to what area do you contribute, and what is the overall area into which your research is embedded,
- ii) what is the state of this literature, and where are avenues and challenges for further research,
- iii) what are the key elements of your research idea,
- iv) why and in which way is what you propose a contribution to the existing literature, i.e. goes beyond what people have done so far,
- v) why is your contribution important, and in which sense,
- vi) is your contribution one which has implications for policy or wider society, or provides some fundamental base other research can build on, and if yes, then explain. You can of course add additional points.

The aim of this exercise is to write succinct yet precise text that convinces the course instructors and your fellow students that what you are doing is in fact important, relevant, and worthwhile spending several years of your life on.

Assignment 2: Write a referee report on an unpublished paper.

### **3: Seminars and presentation skills**

Dates: 20 January, 3 February

Discussion of progress on your written descriptions of your PhD work.

Presenting your research findings

Presentation skills

Preparing a poster

Seminars: Platforms for academic exchange.

*Listen (and comment on) other people's work. Attend each week during term time the departmental seminar and at least one seminar in your subject area.*

How to learn from others: Seminar attendance and critical evaluation of seminars (style, content, etc).

Assignment: Attendance of *two* specified seminars: A Departmental seminar and a job market seminar. Written evaluation of these two seminars, 2 pages for *each* seminar. Each assessment should start with a brief overview of what the particular paper presented is about. It should then assess content, presentation style, whether the contribution is innovative, whether the presenter succeeded in explaining the paper to a wider audience, possible language problems, choice and readability of slides, ppt presentation etc, as applicable, whether speaker induced interest in her/his work, and suggestions for improvements.

Readings:

Matthew Jackson, "Notes on presenting a paper"

<http://www.stanford.edu/~jacksonm/present.pdf>

Jonathon Shewchuk's guide to giving an academic talk

<http://www.cs.berkeley.edu/~jrs/speaking.html>

Useful guides to preparing posters and presentations more generally:

<http://faculty.washington.edu/robinet/poster.html>

<http://www.ncsu.edu/project/posters/NewSite/documents/QuickReferenceV2.pdf>

<http://www.aspb.org/EDUCATION/poster.cfm>

<http://www.the-aps.org/careers/careers1/GradProf/gposter.htm>

For those interested in graphics and clarity of graphical presentation skills you should look at the work of Edward Tufte (<http://www.edwardtufte.com/tufte/index>), and in particular the following classic volume:

Tufte, E. 2001, 'The Visual Display of Quantitative Information', Graphics Press, Connecticut, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition

### **4: Presenting your own PhD research**

Dates: All day 18 and 19 March OR All day 24 and 25 March (to be confirmed)

Discussion and preparation for transfer seminars

Assignment: Prepare and present a 30 minute presentation on your first research paper. Supervisor (and second supervisor if possible) to be present