MSc Research Methods: Introduction to Course

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To Cover

- About....
- Syllabus
- Assignments and Grading
- Some philosophical points about Economics

About...
About me

- Michael McMahon
- m.mcmahon@warwick.ac.uk
- Biographical information
  - Group chance to ask a question in return for some info

About...
About you

Please stand up if...

- you are from the UK or Ireland - nationality?
- you studied your undergraduate degree in the UK or Ireland? Or through English elsewhere?
- you studied economics as an undergraduate?
- you know how to use Stata?
- you hope to do a PhD?

About...
About the course

The main aims of the course are to:

- prepare MSc students to undertake project work during the MSc;
- enable MSc students to think about a topic for their dissertation;
- provide some of the skills for MSc students to successfully complete the dissertation.

About...
About the course

The course is broadly split into 3 areas:

1. Software introductions
2. Data introduction
3. Discussion of econometric tools and research methodology

About...
About the course

- No lecture next week
- Lectures are 2 hours per week (see the website for detailed timetable, and these notes):
    1. Wednesdays at 5.00-7.00pm in room MS0.1.
    2. Week 19
    3. Week 21, 22, 23, 24
    4. Thursday 21st May 2015 (week 34) 1.00-3.00pm in Woods Scawen room.
- The format will be an open-ended lecture with question and answer session.
- There are no seminars for the module

Assessment

NO EXAM!!!!

Dissertation
Key Information

- Worth 36 CATS.
- Support from supervisor
  - Allocated in May
- Your dissertation must **pass** (i.e. 50%) to gain an MSc.
- Max 8000 words excluding appendices, footnotes, tables and the bibliography.
  - There is no minimum word length and concise expositions are encouraged.
- The dissertation is worth 80% of the total mark for the dissertation module.
- Deadline: Early September 2014 (awaiting final instruction)
  - extensions ONLY for medical cases
- See the online Handbook for details.

Dissertation
The Learning Outcomes

- The main aim of the dissertation is to encourage independent study and to provide a foundation for future original research.
- After the dissertation, students should be able to:
  1. Define a feasible project allowing for time and resource constraints;
  2. Develop an adequate methodology;
  3. Make optimal use of library resources;
  4. Access data bases, understand their uses and limitations and extract relevant data;
  5. Work without the need for continuous supervision.

Dissertation
The Timetable

- **Midnight Fri 17 April 2015:** deadline for submission of proposed title of dissertation and Prospective Supervisors online form
- **Fri 15 May 2015:** MSc dissertation supervisors announced.
- **Fri 29 May 2015:** Deadline for ethical scrutiny form (if applicable).
- **Mon 1 Jun - Fri 12 June 2015:** Supervisors arrange for all supervisees to give short presentations of their ideas to group
- **Mon 22 Jun 2015:** Deadline - e-submit Dissertation Proposal
- **Wed 12 Aug 2015:** Dissertation submission deadline (Erasmus Mundus)
- **Wed 9 Sep 2015:** Dissertation submission deadline (Econ/EIFE)
- **Wed 9 Mar 2016:** Dissertation submission deadline (resit)

Dissertation
The Topic I

- Select a **well-defined** and **manageable** topic.
- Best of all – choose a question that you can answer
- Be **original** if you can. Otherwise, be **evaluative** - not **descriptive**.
  - This is NOT a literature review.
- Check as soon as possible that it is **feasible**.

Dissertation
The Topic II

- Think about this **soon**
  - consult EconLit, browse journals, WPs, www . . .
- Go with your own interests
  - NOT necessarily your supervisor's
  - But if you get offered an idea that captures your fancy – go for it
- Think about your options choices in the light of your interests
- Try out your ideas with fellow students.
- Start making notes

Dissertation
How it should look

- Provide motivation for the idea and the approach used to address it
- Demonstrate clear idea of specific problem and its relationship to the bigger picture
- Formulate methodology to address issue
  - theoretical framework, data, stat techniques
- Evaluate the results
  - Including comparison with existing results
- Indicate the potential for further work

Dissertation
Get organised

1. Have a "big picture" plan
2. Use it as a framework for your work
3. Have chapter headings, and sections
4. Start writing immediately
5. Embed your notes in it as they accumulate
6. But beware of accidental plagiarism
7. Identify skills you need to acquire
8. You may not move sequentially through plan
9. But having it enables you to see the gaps
10. Practice "safe research"

Dissertation

- Do NOT spend time formatting as you go.
- But DO
  - Use MS Office or Scientific Word or Lyx or Latex
  - Use a consistent style
  - Use Excel for charts
  - Learn how to use drawing tools in Word.
  - Learn how to use automatic numbering for tables, equations, etc.
  - Get a native speaker to go through it
  - Present it as a seminar to friends

Dissertation
Consulting Staff

- We like enthusiastic knowledgeable students
  - even when its outside their responsibility

- Make an appointment
  - email
  - turn up on time (with a pencil and paper)
  - don't expect more than 15 mins

- Don't waste them – so be prepared
  - See one or two targetted individuals
  - Check for feasibility
  - Note the advice

- If you waste staff time they will not want to supervise you

Dissertation
Topic Selection and Allocation of Supervisors

1. the student must determine their dissertation topic and three possible supervisors.
2. Topics may be suggested by module lecturers, especially on the optional modules. Or you choose yourself!
3. Information on potential supervisors is made available soon

Dissertation
The Role of the Supervisor

1. to advise you on the feasibility of your chosen topic and ways of refining it;
2. to provide some references to the general methodology to be used;
3. to provide general guidance to the literature review and analysis of the chosen topic.

- your supervisor is not expected to spend more than two hours supervising your dissertation (this includes reading any drafts, email correspondence, etc) as well as face-to-face meetings.
- your supervisor is not expected to be available after the end of the summer term, except to read and comment on a final draft of your dissertation.
  - drop-in facility staffed by experienced PhD students

Dissertation
What We Really Like

- A **well-motivated** economic question
- A **brief** and **critical** review
- A **succinct** statement of what's new
- Some **clear** analysis.
  - It is really important that you show that you understand your data.
  - You must explain what might be wrong with the estimation method used
  - You do not have to use sophisticated techniques.

Dissertation
What We Punish

- Vague rambling descriptions
- Work that is not explained
- Data that is not adequately described
- Econometric work that is clearly crazy
    - econometric tests that are not applicable
- Dropping in significant important variables
- Causal inference based just on correlations
- Unwarranted conclusions
- Incomplete bibliography
- No page numbers.

Dissertation
Cheating

- Plagiarism - its OK to get help from others
    - but **it must be acknowledged**.
    - If you copy some from someone else without acknowledgment it **will undermine everything you do**.
- We check with the Turn-it-in-UK web service
    - It tells us what percentage of your work comes from other sources
- Re-circulating earlier work
- Making up the results

Dissertation
Further (Outside) Advice

- For aspiring academics
    - D Hamermesh, "A Young Economist's Guide to Professional Etiquette", Journal of Economic Perspectives, Winter 1992
- For aspiring theorists
    - W. Thomson "The Young Person's Guide to Writing Economic Theory", Journal of Economic Literature 1999
- For aspiring applied economists
    - D Hammermesh "Doing Applied Economics: Normative and Positive Aspects", in S. Medema and W. Samuels, eds., Foundations of Research in Economics: How Do Economists Do Economics? Edward Elgar Press, 1996.

END

Questions?