

Political Economics III, Spring 2025

This course will cover recent – primarily unpublished – papers in political economics. Except for covering some recent research, one aim of the course is to train students in critical thinking about how to formulate a research question and how to approach it, theoretically or empirically. A number of the selected papers are written by this year's or last year's job-market candidates. The course will thus also help you to think concretely about a possible – albeit often a very ambitious – job-market paper.

Organization and examination

In each session, three recent papers in political economics will be discussed, where each paper is presented by one of the students in the course. Students can select the papers they want to present and discuss from [this](#) list. They may also select papers outside of the list, after approval by one of the instructors.

Students should present at least one paper every other lecture (4 in total). We have created a Google Doc sheet ([link](#)) where you can sign up for the paper on a first-come, first-served basis (if a paper appears in a slot, it is already taken). If you wish to choose a recent paper that is not on the list, please let us know.

Each paper session will start with a short (aim for 20 minutes) discussion of the paper by a student, followed by a general discussion of the paper. The student should also write a referee report for the paper. Discussing a paper and writing a referee report are highly complementary tasks, and developing related skills pays off in several ways. Economists are often asked to act as referees and discussants. Learning how to read other papers with the critical eye of a good discussant will help you improve your own writing.

Structure of referee report and discussion

We recommend the following structure for both your discussion and referee report. First, briefly summarize the paper's main message and contribution, and describe how the paper fits into the existing literature. Describe any unique aspects of the paper. Is there a particularly useful and interesting methodological approach in the paper? Does the paper introduce you to a new technique or interesting data set and do you think these will be useful in other applications?

Next, evaluate the main claims made in the paper. Almost every paper states its main claims in the abstract. Are the claims convincing? Are there problems with specific parts of the argument? If so, identify them clearly. Is it a mistake in economic or political analysis, in algebra, data analysis or interpretation?

If possible, suggest how to improve the paper. Try to be as specific as possible. Are there obvious directions for future research?

For the discussion, it is important to focus on the big picture instead of the details or derivations. Decide what are your most important arguments and focus on those. Try to distill your discussion to a few important points, and use most of your time in discussing them.

Other

All participants (faculty and students) are strongly encouraged to read the selected papers in advance.

The examination will be based on the submitted referee reports and participation in discussions.

Instructors

Mitch Downey, Torsten Persson, Johanna Rickne, David Strömberg, and Ferenc Szucs.