

AEM 7150 (Fall 2024, 1.5 credits) / AEM 7151 (Spring 2025, 1.5 credits)
Applied Microeconomic Research
Second Year Project for Applied Economics and Management Ph.D. Students

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Textbook and Readings: No textbook will be required for this course, however, readings and other supporting materials needed for class and assignments will be distributed to students during the semester via Canvas.

Catalog description: Enrollment limited to AEM Ph.D. students only. Required for all second year AEM Ph.D. students. We review the research process as practiced in applied economics. The course output is an applied economic research project. Students must select a graduate faculty mentor for the project.

Learning Objectives: 1. Use and evaluate scientific and economic information to reach defensible conclusions. 2. Develop skills to conduct independent research and to be able to communicate your approach and findings to the academic community.

All second-year AEM PhD students must complete an applied project within the course sequence of AEM 7150 (fall) and AEM 7151 (spring). The goal of this course sequence is to help students make the critical transition from a consumer to a producer of research. The transition can be challenging. Readings, discussions, and learning-by-doing will facilitate learning how best to navigate the transition from student to scholar. The research paper each student generates through this sequence aims to make the transition easier by familiarizing students with best practices and common pitfalls and by providing regular guidance and feedback, from a faculty mentor as well as the seminar organizer, as students develop independent research projects. In addition to guidance from the seminar instructor, students select a graduate faculty mentor with whom to work over the course of the academic year.

In addition to helping smooth the transition to become an independent researcher, another outcome of this course is to develop a polished draft of an academic paper that could be presented at an academic meeting during the summer of 2025 or 2026 and could eventually publish in a top field journal (e.g., AJAE, Food Policy, JAERE, JDE, or similar). This project can lead to a sole-authored paper or a joint paper with the mentor (and/or others). But the paper must primarily reflect the student's work, as reflected in earned first authorship. The paper will also get feedback from a third faculty reader (besides the seminar instructor and the faculty mentor).

While we will not meet as a group on a weekly basis, there will be several individual and group meetings throughout the sequence. Please feel free to contact me via e-mail to schedule an appointment to discuss your second-year paper between these required milestones. I expect each

student to meet with me at least once per semester individually to discuss their ideas and progress. All students are also expected to attend [the Applied Economics and Policy seminar series](#) (typically held on Fridays from 2:30-4:00 PM) and are strongly encouraged to regularly participate in relevant seminar series of your research areas (e.g., behavioral, development, finance, labor, marketing, SEERE).

The following are course deadlines (those without dates listed will have an exact date/time /location announced later). All written assignments should be submitted online in Canvas course site under the assignment link with the file name as: assignment number-FirstNameLastName (e.g., for assignment #3 I would label it as “3-ChrisBarrett”).

Your final grade for AEM 7150/7151 (S/U grades) will be based the following seven assignments (all due by 5:00 PM Ithaca time on the date listed, submitted via Canvas):

1. September 9, 2024 (10 pts) – Pick two peer-reviewed papers published in highly-regarded journals in your field, on which you would like to build your second-year paper. Ideally, one article is of interest topically, and the other methodologically. For each article, write two pages summarizing: 1) what the paper does (central question(s), method(s), and conclusion(s)); 2) how the abstract, introduction, conclusion, and the paper overall was constructed to motivate someone skimming to invest in reading the full paper; 3) three substantive things that you have learned from the paper; and 4) why you think it successfully published in a good journal.
2. October 21, 2024 (5 pts) – Notify me of your faculty mentor via the Canvas discussion board. I will follow up with all designated faculty mentors to confirm and to schedule your presentations for days/times when they can attend.
3. December 2, 2024 (10 pts) – Five-page proposal due outlining your research question, motivation, contribution to the literature (including identifying prior papers on which you build), the proposed data and methods, and expected outcomes.
4. Early February 2025 (20 pts) – First presentation. 10-minute presentation of your work to date and plans for next steps. All AEM Ph.D. students and faculty will be encouraged to attend.
5. May 6, 2024 (20 pts) – First complete draft of the paper. You may not have all the results yet but you need to include your detailed plans for next steps. The draft paper should typically run 15-35 pages (12-point font, double-spaced) including everything (except an optional appendix). You can include additional important materials in an appendix.
6. Mid-May 2024 (20 pts) – Second presentation. A 20-minute presentation of your work, of which the first 15 minutes will be presentation of the work and then 5 minutes for questions and comments. All AEM Ph.D. students and faculty will be encouraged to attend.
7. May 15, 2024 (15 pts) – Two referee reports of two classmates’ draft papers. We will review good refereeing practices in the early May group meeting. You will provide 2-4 page, detailed reviews of two papers I will assign to you, offering substantive feedback on your classmate’s draft paper.

A final draft paper is due no later than **August 19, 2025**, (one week before fall classes begin). The final draft should follow the publication format for the journal that you target for submission of your manuscript. You may get additional comments on this draft from me, your mentor, and other AEM faculty members, but this assignment will not be graded. You should aspire to include the paper in your dissertation and to submit it to an appropriate peer-reviewed journal by winter 2025-26.

In addition to individual meetings that we may have and the two mandatory presentations, we will also hold group meetings to check your progress and to give students feedback and suggestions. Please mark these group meetings on your calendar. These will include:

- (1) A kick-off group meeting (August 29, 2024) to introduce the seminar and to get you to start thinking about the second-year paper. We will also discuss expectations and guidelines.
- (2) Small group meetings – grouped by student interest area - run September 9, 11, and 12, for an initial discussion of your research ideas.
- (3) A pre-proposal group meeting on November 14, 2024 where we discuss your research ideas, plans, and progress before you finalize your five page proposal.
- (4) A post-presentation group meeting in February 2025 (exact date TBD) to give you feedback and discuss next steps for the paper as you prepare your draft and your second presentation.
- (5) A pre-final presentation group meeting in early May 2025 (exact date TBD) to discuss your draft and answer any questions that you have about the final presentation expectations.

Students will be graded each semester based partly on whether they have met the deadlines, whether they have participated in the group meetings, and on the quality of their presentations and written work (as evaluated by the instructor and by additional AEM faculty acting as referees). Students are strongly encouraged to begin work as early as possible. This is a substantial and time-consuming requirement, but also an important step as a Ph.D. student and early career scholar.

Five questions to ask yourself before deciding on the topic:

1. Why is your research question interesting (to the academic community) and important (to society, policy makers, and your college-educated aunt or uncle). Why would the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *The Atlantic* or some similar mass media outlet want to interview you about your research results?
2. How does your research advance the broader economics (or other) research literature?
3. What real-world example(s) can you point to that helps motivate your research (or the magnitude of the issue)?
4. What are the potential policy implications?
5. What are the (empirical) challenges that you may face and how should you address them?

Useful references:

* We will discuss these four articles at our first meeting. Please read in advance.

(AEM Ph.D. alumnus) Marc Bellemare's short, informative book, *Doing Economics: What You Should Have Learned in Grad School – But Didn't*, MIT Press, 2022.

*Anne Lamott, "Shitty First Drafts," from *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*, 1994. Read the whole book if you can, but at a minimum, this short essay from it.

*Neale Mahoney's article on descriptive vs. model-based (or reduced-form vs. structural) approaches to applied research

<https://pubs.aeaweb.org/doi/pdfplus/10.1257/jep.36.3.211>

*Nooshin Warren, Matthew Farmer, Tianyu Gu and Caleb Warren on "Marketing Ideas: How to Write Research Articles that Readers Understand and Cite", *Journal of Marketing* 85,5 (2021): 42-57. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/00222429211003560>

*Peter Kennedy's "Sinning in the Basement: What are the Rules? The Ten Commandments of Applied Econometrics," *Journal of Economic Surveys* 16(4): 569-589.

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1467-6419.00179>

Donald Davis's article on thesis research:

<http://www.columbia.edu/~drd28/Thesis%20Research.pdf>

Steven Pischke's advice on economic research:

<http://econ.lse.ac.uk/staff/spischke/phds/How%20to%20start.pdf>

Plamen Nikolov's (annually updated) article on writing tips that combine multiple sources:

https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/11041649/WritingTips_0720.pdf?sequence=5&isAllowed=y

Jesse Shapiro's advise on how to give an applied micro talk:

https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/shapiro/files/applied_micro_slides.pdf

On dealing with graduate school stress:

<http://www.uhs.berkeley.edu/bewell/grad%20student%20stress.pdf>

<http://thegradstudentway.com/blog/?p=1727>

Gentzkow and Shapiro on how to organize code for empirical analysis:

<https://web.stanford.edu/~gentzkow/research/CodeAndData.pdf>

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to comply scrupulously with the Cornell University Code of Academic Integrity and read [the Essential Guide to Academic Integrity at Cornell](#). A useful tutorial on avoiding plagiarism can be found at <http://plagiarism.arts.cornell.edu/tutorial/index.cfm>. Work through the exercises there on your own time to familiarize yourself with the particulars of Cornell's Code. All work submitted by students in AEM 7150/7151 for academic credit must be the student's own work. I take academic integrity very seriously and so should you. **A student found to be in violation of the Cornell University Code of Academic Integrity on any assignment will automatically get an Unsatisfactory (U) grade for the entire course.**

You may use tools such as generative artificial intelligence (GAI, such as ChatGPT) to help with background research and brainstorming, to reverse outline your draft to see if its structure conveys the messages you intend, to check the grammar, spelling, and syntax of your draft text, and for other research support functions. But keep in mind that GAI tools are predictive and commonly generate not only bland text but also factual errors, fabricated citations, etc. GAI "hallucinates" regularly. Further, misrepresenting GAI text output as your own is fraud. So be forewarned; if you use GAI, you bear full responsibility for all errors and academic fraud it may introduce. I strongly recommend that if you use GAI, you add a footnote on the first page indicating precisely how you used it, the same way you document your other research methods. This will both help me learn better how best to guide students' responsible use of GAI and help remind you of the limits of appropriate use of this (or any other) tool.

Diversity and Inclusiveness

Due to the importance of open discussion in this course, attention is paid to safeguarding individual freedom of expression and respecting all other persons following Cornell's founding principle of "any person, any study." Students in AEM 7150/7151 are expected to follow [Cornell's Statement on Diversity and Inclusiveness](#).

Students with Disabilities

Your access in this course is important. If you have a Student Disability Services (SDS) accommodation letter please be sure to send it to me by September 9 so that we have adequate time to arrange your approved academic accommodations. If you need an immediate accommodation for equal access, please speak with me after class or email me and/or SDS. If the need arises for additional accommodations during the semester, please contact SDS. SDS is located on level 5 of Cornell Health, 110 Ho Plaza, 607-254-4545, email sds_cu@cornell.edu.

Course Canvas

The course home page is on Canvas. The page provides you with announcements, information about the course, links to the syllabus, useful web sites, current grades, etc. You should check the course web site frequently during the semester, especially for announcements prior to assignment due dates. All assignments are to be submitted through the Canvas site.

Classroom culture

I think of “classroom culture” as a set of guidelines and norms that we use to enable an optimal learning environment for everyone. This is largely about how we communicate with each other (instructors, TAs, and students) and how we foster communication, including communication between students. Although we have a small class and will not necessarily meet in person each week, I will try to find ways to engage with students and invite them to ask questions, give their thoughts, and share their experiences. I expect we all have ideas to share in AEM 7150/7151; we all have conducted research in some capacity (across different subareas of applied economics and management) although some more than others.

Overall, please comport yourself professionally in AEM 7150/7151 (in the classroom and when you interact with your peers, the instructor during office hours, and with your second-year paper faculty mentor).

Student well-being

If you think you might benefit from speaking with a professional counselor, Cornell Health has extensive, free, confidential services available. Please do not hesitate to reach out to them or to me. We respect and uphold University policies and regulations as regards the observation of religious holidays; assistance available to the physically handicapped, visually and/or hearing-impaired student; plagiarism; sexual harassment; and racial or ethnic discrimination. Please become familiar with the respective University regulations and come to me with any concerns or questions you might have.

Lauren's Promise

I will listen and believe you if someone is threatening you. Lauren McCluskey, a 21-year-old honors student athlete, was murdered on Oct. 22, 2018, by a man she briefly dated on the University of Utah campus. We must all take actions to ensure that this never happens again. If you are in immediate danger, call 911.

Any form of sexual harassment or violence will not be excused or tolerated at Cornell University. Cornell University has instituted procedures to respond to violations of these laws and standards, programs aimed at the prevention of such conduct, and intervention on behalf of the victims.