

PI 2238. Special Topics in Economic Policy: Gender Relations and Economics

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Application for Innovative Teaching Award: Research-based teaching and learning

I am pleased to submit this description of my class “Gender Relations and Economics” for consideration of a 2017 Innovative Teaching Award. Below I describe the structure of the course and its innovative research-based methods.

The Innovative Character of the Course

The course “Gender Relations and Economics” is a seminar course with about 30 students, and is based on academic literature and writing. There are three main ways in which students in this class are encouraged to interact with scientific methods. First, they must read academic papers in the scientific (economics and socioeconomics) literature, that is, journal articles in internationally ranked journals. Almost all students in the class say that they first read academic papers in this class. In this way, the students are exposed to how academic work is actually done. Not only do they learn about the content of the papers that they read, but they can observe and engage with the main output of academia. Early in the semester, I bring print copies of academic journals to class in order to give them visual insight into what is meant by “papers in a journal” (most bachelor students do not know what exactly this is): even this simple exercise is often illuminating for them.

Students do not only need to read other people’s research for this class, but they have to produce their own research on a (relevant) topic of their choice. The students work in groups of 4-5 and do research on a particular question for the duration of the semester. They then work together to create a research-based video which is meant to help them communicate their research with the academic community and the general public outside of the WU. Early in the semester, I do an innovative “workshop” with them to help get them started on this project. In this workshop, each team has to identify their research question, their hypotheses, and their methods for testing their hypotheses – in other words, following the scientific method, as is done in professional research. In the workshop, each member of the team explains their research question, hypotheses, and methods to members of another group, who give feedback on any or all elements of the research design. This exchange, where the steps of the scientific method are repeated to different members of the class, works to drill the idea of the main elements of research design into the students’ plans for their research.

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Once they have identified their research question, hypotheses, and methods, the students find literature on their own (it must be from academic journals or book chapters) and write an individual annotated bibliography, in which they summarize the texts they have read and say how it relates to the final product of the research project. The videos, on which they spend the whole semester working, can be viewed here on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHU1PxjV3iI&list=PL0jrU_JJiv5kIQ5PT6etwING7-Q-zDETU&index=1

Finally, I often speak with the class about my own research and relate it to the topic of discussion for that week. I show them my research results and talk about submitting my papers to academic journals. They often have questions about the process, which I answer fully and honestly. I also explained to them the process of applying for research grants (third party funding) and told them about a project that I had proposed during the semester. By sharing my experiences, goals, and results with them, I give them the chance to observe how research is done in practice.

Course Syllabus and Structure

The course meets once per week for nine weeks, and has a final 6-hour seminar at the end of the semester for students to showcase the results of their research projects, that is, show their videos. I called this session a “video viewing party” and everyone brought snacks and we watched the videos together and discussed them.

The course begins with an introductory day, which includes a thorough review of academic writing (how to find papers online, how to cite papers in a text and write a bibliography, how to connect to the WU virtual private network (VPN) so that they can find papers on the internet even when they are not on campus, etcetera). Then, each week, students are expected to read the assigned journal article or book chapter on the syllabus (which can be found on the next page of this document). Three times during the semester, they must write a “response paper” to the assigned reading; response papers are described more fully below.

During class meetings, I give a 45-60 minute lecture on the topic of the day. There is always the opportunity for discussion. During the lecture, we also talk about the reading that was completed for that day. Sometimes, there are supporting materials, such as videos to watch or short readings to do in class. Three or four times during in the semester, the students work in small groups to discuss a topic and give a very short presentation to the rest of the class. Thus, the in-class time is highly interactive and students are expected to actively participate in each meeting.

Students get an excellent sense of how research is done, in that they read journal articles for the class. They are thus exposed to actual research in the field. Along with their response papers and final video, the students also write a paper on an issue or model that they learned in another class at the WU, showing how they would expand it or change it to include issues of gender or identity as discussed in class.

Date	Topic; Reading
5 October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction and overview of the course • Course structure; expectations and requirements; goals • Foundations of academic work • Presentation: Gender in Economics
12 October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classical Feminist Economics • Reading: Nelson, Julie A. (1995). “Feminism and Economics.” <i>Journal of Economic Perspectives</i> 9(2): 131-148.
19 October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity and economics • Reading: Akerlof, George A. and Rachel E. Kranton (2000). “Economics and Identity.” <i>Quarterly Journal of Economics</i> 115(3): 715-753.
2 November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender in Economics Essay due • Workshop on research project • Reading: Goldin, Claudia (2014). “A Grand Gender Convergence: Its Last Chapter.” <i>American Economic Review</i> 104(4): 1-30.
16 November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender in the Labor Market I • Reading: Fortin, Nicole M. (2005). “Gender Role Attitudes and the Labour-Market Outcomes of Women Across OECD Countries.” <i>Oxford Review of Economic Policy</i> 21(3): 416-438.
23 November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender in the Labor Market II • Reading: Polachek, Solomon W. (1995). “Human Capital and the Gender Earnings Gap: A Response to Feminist Critiques.” In Edith Kuiper and Jolande Sap (Eds.), <i>Out of the Margin: Feminist Perspectives on Economics</i> (pp. 61-79). London and New York: Routledge.
30 November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender in the Household: Housework, care work, and decision making • Reading: Ironmonger, Duncan (1996). “Counting Outputs, Capital Inputs, and Caring Labor: Estimating Gross Household Product.” <i>Feminist Economics</i> 2(3): 37-64.
7 December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender and Macroeconomics I: Gender and Development; Gender Budgeting • Reading: Mammen, Kristin and Christina Paxson (2000). “Women’s Work and Economic Development.” <i>Journal of Economic Perspectives</i> 14(4): 141-164.
14 December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender and Macroeconomics II: Gender and economic crises • Reading: Schuster, Barbara (2015). “What are the effects of the economic crisis on gender equality in Europe, especially on employment and income of women and men?” Vienna University of Economics and Business Bachelor Thesis.
16 December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video viewing “party” and feedback round

Evaluation of Progress and Performance

The students are graded on their participation, response papers, essay on gender in an economic model of their choice, annotated bibliography, and final video. The students are given a very clear grading rubric for the response papers (included at the end of this document) and I give extensive feedback on each of their papers. The annotated bibliography is graded based

on the quality of their summaries and their ability to cite the papers correctly (which, after emphasizing this all semester, should not be an issue for any of the students by the end of the semester, when the bibliographies are due). The grade for the video comes from three sources: five points from my judgement of the quality, five points from their teammates, and ten points from a peer-review (the average of the rating of the rest of the class), since a main goal of the final video is to present research results in an interesting way. The students then receive their final grades using the following scale: 1 = ≥ 90 ; 2 = 80-89; 3 = 65-79; 4 = 55-64; 5 = ≤ 54 .

Response papers (3)	15 each
Gender in Economic Models Essay	15
Annotated bibliography	10
Group video	20
Class participation	10

Implementation of didactic concept

The didactic strategy of the course is to teach students about the research process so they learn how to do their own research. A central component of how this is achieved is by encouraging them to engage with existing research and giving them regular practice in reading research in the literature. Students read academic papers each week and are challenged to truly interact with the papers in their response papers. The students are required to find the assigned papers online, which is a helpful way to train them to find literature on their own, as they need to do that later for their final project and of course in other classes and their bachelor thesis.

Students receive a great deal of feedback on their response papers. In this feedback, they are encouraged to think critically about the research they read in the papers: what the main point was, what was especially exciting about the paper, and what they think ought to be done differently (see the last page of this document for details on the grading rubric). This engagement gets the students thinking carefully about what goes into academic research, the form and style it takes, and what makes research good.

The annotated bibliography for their group projects takes their ability to engage with the literature one step further: here, they must find literature on their own and identify which papers or books are relevant for their research question. They have to summarize at least three of these “additional” papers, which means that they get a lot of practice in reading, understanding, and writing about academic texts.

Finally, they work in teams (which means that they need to communicate their research findings with each other) to create a video about their research. In this way, they are challenged to translate the findings of their academic research into a medium that is designed for the scientific community as well as the general public.

Interestingly, some of their videos got some comments on YouTube – a few of the videos got comments from hostile viewers who aggressively attacked the focus of the videos on gender equality (the students called the people writing the comments “trolls”). This was an important experience and led to an interesting discussion about social backlash towards certain types of research. The first-hand experience of being “trolled” was an unexpected and enlightening one.

Benefits to the Students

The students benefit in a wide range of ways from the course’s research-based teaching. First, most immediately, the course gives them excellent preparation for writing their bachelor’s thesis, because they learn how to form a research question *based on existing literature*; how to identify which research questions are feasible to answer; and how to go about answering the question. They get a great deal of experience in finding, reading, and summarizing literature, which helps them in all of their future academic writing. To this end of preparing them to write

their bachelor thesis, one of their assigned papers is a very good 2015 thesis from a previous WU student.

In general, the course is very helpful to the students in that it gives them insight into how research is produced, and thus *how science is done*. Even for the students who do not intend to go on to a Master's or post-graduate degree, this course gives them tremendous insight into research on the economy. This information is important, because it gives them the critical tools of understanding the news and political conversations in a new way. Having engaged with literature and research in the same way that professors (the people producing the research) do, the students learn a lot about where society's information comes from.

Finally, students benefit from the research-based approach to learning because it empowers them to form their own opinion on the topics covered based on facts. The topic of the course – gender relations and economics – is uncomfortable for some of the students, be it for political or social reasons. However, since the course is strictly based on objective research and not political ideology, they learn a lot about an important topic towards which they may have otherwise been hostile. In this way, they learn to approach an important topic in a fact-based way.

Appendix: Grading Rubric for Response Papers

Response papers are three-paragraph long papers about a reading, the points for which are given as follows. The papers should

- 4: correctly and clearly describe what the text is about. This is a **3-4 sentence summary** of the main questions, goals, methods, and conclusions of the text.
- 3: succinctly and clearly discuss the single **most interesting idea or concept** introduced in the text, and explain why exactly it is so compelling.
- 3: thoroughly discuss **what is missing** from the text, or how it **could be improved**. In the first case, the student explains exactly why this missing piece is important and how it would change the analysis; in the second case, the student provides his/her own suggestions for improvement. Keep in mind that the critique should be based on the context of the goals of the paper!
- 2: include concepts and ideas discussed in the course and/or from previous readings.
- 2: correctly cite the text under discussion.
- 1: meet the formal requirements for correct spelling, punctuation, and length.