

Research Methods for Economics and Policy

Spring 2025, April-May

Lorenzo Neri

Learning outcomes

At the end of the course, students will have proved their understanding of the research process. This will include: i) generating and formulating research ideas; ii) conducting a literature review; iii) reading and extracting information from economics papers; iv) finding, collecting, and analyzing data; v) writing an academic paper and effectively presenting the results.

The acquired skill set is a fundamental support for students interested in doing academic research.

By the end of the course, students will be able to set up a research project, gather and process different types of data, and effectively communicate the results.

Students will be able to identify and formulate important and policy-relevant research questions, understand which data sources and methods fit the research question better, and communicate the results effectively.

Students will be able to communicate the set up and results of a research project formally and effectively to both academic and policy-makers. Emphasis will be placed on both academic writing and delivering an academic presentation.

Administrative information

Lecture time and room: Monday-Wednesday, 9-11, Room S11. April 7th to May 21st. No lectures on April 21-23.

Office hours: by appointment. Please email Lorenzo at lorenzo.neri@uniroma2.it.

Final grade: THERE IS NO EXAM. The final grade will be awarded as follows:

- Research Proposal (70%); **due May 29th, via email.**
- Attendance/engagement (5%).
- Presentation (10%); week 4.
- Presentation (15%); week 6.

Slides will be uploaded on the course page.

Please if you have any trouble finding a paper, do get in touch and I will send you the pdf.

It is important to start planning and thinking about your research idea well ahead. Please do not hesitate to get in touch and come see me to discuss potential ideas.

There is no textbook. The course will make use of economics papers and ad-hoc material that will be provided by the course coordinator. The full list of papers and resources will be published on the module page.

Topic 1. Generating ideas and preparing a literature review

Lecture 1: generating research ideas and preparing a literature review.

Lecture 2: reading an economics paper.

Papers:

Dynarski, S., Libassi, C. J., Micheltore, K., and Owen, S. (2021). [Closing the gap: The effect of reducing complexity and uncertainty in college pricing on the choices of low-income students](#). American Economic Review 111.6: 1721-1756.

Deshpande, M., and Li, Y. (2019). [Who is screened out? Application costs and the targeting of disability programs](#). American Economic Journal: Economic Policy, 11(4), 213-248.

Lecture 3: reading an economics paper.

Papers assigned for group work:

Chyn, E. (2018). [Moved to opportunity: The long-run effects of public housing demolition on children](#). American Economic Review, 108(10), 3028-3056.

Chetty, R., Hendren, N., & Katz, L. F. (2016). [The effects of exposure to better neighborhoods on children: New evidence from the moving to opportunity experiment](#). American Economic Review, 106(4), 855-902.

Draca, M., Machin, S., & Witt, R. (2011). [Panic on the streets of London: Police, crime, and the July 2005 terror attacks](#). American Economic Review, 101(5), 2157-2181.

Topic 2. Data

Lecture 4: Data sources.

Topic 3. Academic presenting

Lecture 5: Academic Presenting.

Topic 4. Methods and research credibility

Lecture 6/7: Research replicability, empirics, research credibility.

Topic 5. Coding sessions

Module 1: Best practices, organisation of syntax files, etc

Module 2: Exercises on visualisation of results, etc

Module 3: Web-scraping

Topic 6. Academic writing

Student presentations of published papers (Week 4)

Please see the guidelines and list of papers on the module page. Pick one and prepare a 20/30-minutes presentation. The presentation must cover the main aspect of the paper in detail. During the presentation, you should discuss:

- Context and background
- Motivation
- Literature and contribution
- Data and methods
- Empirical methodology
- Main results
- Discussion

ONLY for PhD students auditing the module: PhD students attending the module should pick a paper and, in addition to presenting the paper, should prepare a critical evaluation of the paper. You are welcome to pick a paper from the list or an alternative paper that you would like to present. One thing you can consider, and that I recommend, is picking a recent Job Market Paper of a top Job Market candidate from top EU and US institutions. Once you have chosen the paper, please contact me for approval.

Group and 1-to-1 Meetings (Week 5)

Module 1: Students discuss their research proposal with their peers.

Module 2: In-class meeting with the lecturer.

Student presentations of research proposals (Week 6)

Students present their research proposal.