



School of Economics
Academic Year 2025-26 Term 1
PhD in Economics

ECON745 Topics in Labour Economics

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

It will introduce you to the major topics studied by labour economists and to the methods they use. At the end of the course, you should have a good idea of research questions, the most relevant literature, as well as what the research frontier looks like. This should help you formulate research questions in this field, as well as equip you to tackle these questions with contemporary methods

A second goal of this course is to teach the “tools” of labor economics. By this I mean the computing, presentation, and writing skills that are essential for a successful research project. I will give advice on presentation skills and ask you to give in-class presentations of journal articles related to the course material. Lastly, I will assign a short paper proposal that asks you to identify an important research question and describe how you propose to answer it in clear language.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the end of the course, students should be able to

- Be familiar with a range of labour economy issues.
- Better at presenting papers, organizing literature review, and writing referee reports
- Discuss critically and be equipped for independent applied research.

PRE-REQUISITE/CO-REQUISITE/MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE COURSES:

Students should know basic identification strategies such as difference-in-difference, instrumental variables, regression discontinuity designs, and randomized controlled trial. We will not teach those methods in detail.

Students should have already taken and passed ECON601 Microeconomics I

GRADED BASIS: Graded

COURSE UNIT: 1CU

COURSE AREA: ART

ASSESSMENT METHODS

Paper presentation from reference list: 25%
 Referee report : 20%
 Proposal and its presentation: 35%
 In-class attendance and participation: 20%
Total : 100%

Paper presentation from reference list:

Under each topic, I will assign an important paper (theory or empirical) for student to present (1 hour)

Referee report:

Each student needs to write a referee report, commenting the paper presented by one applied micro seminar speaker or job market candidates visiting our school. I will announce the presentation of which seminars speakers or job market candidates are eligible for writing the referee report.

Proposal and its presentation:

At the end of the semester, each student needs to present a proposal he/she plans to work on. I will require students to have a monthly meeting with me to discuss the proposal starting from the first month of the semester.

CLASS TIMINGS

The course comprises twelve 3-hour sessions. Each class has three parts:

1. In the first one hour, I will talk about the most important concepts, topics, models, and papers in this field
2. I will talk about a collection of important empirical papers under this topic
3. One student uses 1 hour to present one important empirical or theory papers under this topic

Notes:

1. I will make example presentations in the first one or two weeks
2. The class arrangements are subject to change due to the number of students registering the class
3. Students who audit the class are required to participate in the presentation

RECOMMENDED/REQUIRED TEXTS AND READINGS

To be released in the first class

WEEKLY LESSON PLAN (subject to adjustments)

Week No	Topic	Readings
1	Education, Human Capital, and Teacher Value Added	
2	Labor Supply and Behavioral Labor	
3	Labor Market Selection - Roy Model and its Application	
4	Job Search and Unemployment	
5	Local Labor Market and Migration	
6	Inequality and Mobility	
7	Gender, Race, and Discrimination	
8	Wage Structure and Labor Contract	
9	Personnel Economics	
10	Neighborhood Effects and Peer Effects	
11	Preference, Attitude, and Ideology	
12	Proposal Presentation	
Backup	Technology Advancement and Labor Market	

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

All acts of academic dishonesty (including, but not limited to, plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, facilitation of acts of academic dishonesty by others, unauthorized possession of exam questions, or tampering with the academic work of other students) are serious offences.

All work (whether oral or written) submitted for purposes of assessment must be the student's own work. Penalties for violation of the policy range from zero marks for the component assessment to expulsion, depending on the nature of the offense.

When in doubt, students should consult the instructors of the course. Details on the SMU Code of Academic Integrity may be accessed at <https://smu.sharepoint.com/sites/oasis/SitePages/DOSWKLWC/UCSC.aspx>.

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ACCESSIBILITY

SMU strives to make learning experiences accessible for all. If students anticipate or experience physical or academic barriers due to disability, please let the instructor know immediately. Students are also welcome to contact the university's disability services team if they have questions or concerns about academic provisions: DSS@smu.edu.sg. Please be aware that the accessible tables in the seminar room should remain available for students who require them.

DIGITAL READINESS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING (DRTL)

As part of emergency preparedness, instructors may conduct lessons online via the Zoom platform during the term, to prepare students for online learning. During an actual emergency, students will be notified to access the Zoom platform for their online lessons. The class schedule will mirror the current face-to-face class timetable unless otherwise stated.

ASSESSMENTS

Faculty have been instructed not to reuse questions verbatim from past year papers or published test banks, for the graded continuous assessments and examinations in this course.