

# MSc Research Methods: Introduction to Course

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University of Warwick

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# To Cover

- About....
- Syllabus
- Assignments and Grading
- Some philosophical points about Economics

# About...

- About me
- About you
- About the course in general

# About...

## About me

- Michael McMahon
- m.mcmahon@warwick.ac.uk
- Biographical information
  - Group chance to ask a question in return for some info

# About...

## About you

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- you studied economics as an undergraduate?
- you know how to use Stata?
- you hope to do a PhD?

# About...

## About the course

The main aims of the course are to:

- prepare MSc students to undertake project work during the MSc;
- enable MSc students to think about a topic for their dissertation;
- provide some of the skills for MSc students to successfully complete the dissertation.

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The course is broadly split into 3 areas:

- 1 Software introductions

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- 1 Software introductions
- 2 Data introduction
- 3 Discussion of econometric tools and research methodology

# About...

## About the course

- Lectures are, for the rest of term, 2 hours per week (see the website for detailed timetable, and these notes):
  - ① Wednesdays at 5.00-7.00pm in room MS0.1.
  - ② And again for 4 more weeks
  - ③ Thursday 22nd May (week 34), 1.00-3.00pm in the Woods-Scawen Room.
- The format will be an open-ended lecture with question and answer session.
- There are no seminars for the module

NO EXAM!!!!

# Dissertation

## Key Information

- Worth 36 CATS.
- Support from supervisor
  - Allocated in May
- Your dissertation must **pass** (i.e. 50%) to gain an MSc.
- Max 8000 words excluding appendices, footnotes, tables and the bibliography.
  - There is no minimum word length and concise expositions are encouraged.
- The dissertation is worth 80% of the total mark for the dissertation module.
- Deadline: Early September 2014 (awaiting final instruction)
  - extensions ONLY for medical cases
- See the online Handbook for details.

# Dissertation

## The Learning Outcomes

- The main aim of the dissertation is to encourage independent study and to provide a foundation for future original research.
- After the dissertation, students should be able to:
  - ① Define a feasible project allowing for time and resource constraints;
  - ② Develop an adequate methodology;
  - ③ Make optimal use of library resources;
  - ④ Access data bases, understand their uses and limitations and extract relevant data;
  - ⑤ Work without the need for continuous supervision.

# Dissertation

## The Topic I

- Select a **well-defined** and **manageable** topic.
- Best of all – choose a question that you can answer
- Be **original** if you can. Otherwise, be **evaluative** - not **descriptive**.
  - This is NOT a literature review.
- Check as soon as possible that it is **feasible**.

# Dissertation

## The Topic II

- Think about this **soon**
  - consult EconLit, browse journals, WPs, www ...
- Go with your own interests
  - NOT necessarily your supervisor's
  - But if you get offered an idea that captures your fancy – go for it
- Think about your options choices in the light of your interests
- Try out your ideas with fellow students.
- Start making notes

# Dissertation

## How it should look

- Provide motivation for the idea and the approach used to address it
- Demonstrate clear idea of specific problem and its relationship to the bigger picture
- Formulate methodology to address issue
  - theoretical framework, data, stat techniques
- Evaluate the results
  - Including comparison with existing results
- Indicate the potential for further work

# Dissertation

## Get organised

- 1 Have a “big picture” plan
- 2 Use it as a framework for your work
- 3 Have chapter headings, and sections
- 4 Start writing immediately
- 5 Embed your notes in it as they accumulate
- 6 But beware of accidental plagiarism
- 7 Identify skills you need to acquire
- 8 You may not move sequentially through plan
- 9 But having it enables you to see the gaps
- 10 Practice “safe research”

# Dissertation

- Do NOT spend time formatting as you go.
- But DO
  - Use MS Office or Scientific Word or Lyx or Latex
  - Use a consistent style
  - Use Excel for charts
  - Learn how to use drawing tools in Word.
  - Learn how to use automatic numbering for tables, equations, etc.
  - Get a native speaker to go through it
  - Present it as a seminar to friends

# Dissertation

## Consulting Staff

- We like enthusiastic knowledgeable students
  - even when its outside their responsibility
- Make an appointment
  - email
  - turn up on time (with a pencil and paper)
  - don't expect more than 15 mins
- Don't waste them – so be prepared
  - See one or two targetted individuals
  - Check for feasibility
  - Note the advice
- If you waste staff time they will not want to supervise you

# Dissertation

## Topic Selection and Allocation of Supervisors

- 1 the student must determine their dissertation topic and three possible supervisors.
- 2 Topics may be suggested by module lecturers, especially on the optional modules. Or you choose yourself!
- 3 Information on potential supervisors is made available soon

# Dissertation

## The Role of the Supervisor

- 1 to advise you on the feasibility of your chosen topic and ways of refining it;
  - 2 to provide some references to the general methodology to be used;
  - 3 to provide general guidance to the literature review and analysis of the chosen topic.
- your supervisor is not expected to spend more than two hours supervising your dissertation (this includes reading any drafts, email correspondence, etc) as well as face-to-face meetings.
  - your supervisor is not expected to be available after the end of the summer term, except to read and comment on a final draft of your dissertation.
    - drop-in facility staffed by experienced PhD students

# Dissertation

## What We Really Like

- A **well-motivated** economic question
- A **brief** and **critical** review
- A **succinct** statement of what's new
- Some **clear** analysis.
  - It is really important that you show that you understand your data.
  - You must explain what might be wrong with the estimation method used
  - You do not have to use sophisticated techniques.

# Dissertation

## What We Punish

- Vague rambling descriptions
- Work that is not explained
- Data that is not adequately described
- Econometric work that is clearly crazy
  - econometric tests that are not applicable
- Dropping in significant important variables
- Causal inference based just on correlations
- Unwarranted conclusions
- Incomplete bibliography
- No page numbers.

# Dissertation

## Cheating

- Plagiarism - its OK to get help from others
  - but **it must be acknowledged**.
  - If you copy some from someone else without acknowledgment it **will undermine everything you do**.
- We check with the Turn-it-in-UK web service
  - It tells us what percentage of your work comes from other sources
- Re-circulating earlier work
- Making up the results

# Dissertation

## Further (Outside) Advice

- For aspiring academics
  - D Hamermesh, “A Young Economist’s Guide to Professional Etiquette“, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Winter 1992
- For aspiring theorists
  - W. Thomson “The Young Person’s Guide to Writing Economic Theory”, *Journal of Economic Literature* 1999
- For aspiring applied economists
  - D Hammermesh ” Doing Applied Economics: Normative and Positive Aspects“, in S. Medema and W. Samuels, eds., *Foundations of Research in Economics: How Do Economists Do Economics?* Edward Elgar Press, 1996.

END

Questions?