

Syllabus

Hass 92: Freshman Discovery Seminar

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University of California, Riverside

Fall 2007

General information

Time and location: W 10:10 a.m. - 11:00 a.m. SPTH 1222
Office hours: M 11am-12pm, W 1-2pm (4108 Sproul Hall)
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Course description

What do criminals, soccer players and poor African farmers have in common? Their actions are shaped by incentives. In this seminar we will explore Economics beyond the traditional analysis of “production, distribution and consumption of goods and services.” We will investigate, among other issues, why drug dealers live with their moms, why Aunt Betty shouldn’t give you a sweater for Christmas, how to say no to “sugar daddies”, whether your name matters in order to get a job interview and whether watching TV makes you sick. All these will serve our main goal: understand human behavior and the policies to shape it.

The contract

Requirements

Attendance is required and please make sure to arrive on time. In addition you will be asked to

- Participate during the weekly meetings.
- Each day two students will be responsible to present the material to the rest of us. Be prepared to present or serve as a commentator as the other person's presentation.
- Prepare a project. The details will be explained during the first day of class. This is due Wednesday, December 5 during the seminar.

Grades

Grades for this seminar are binary. You will either have a pass or a fail. Good performance on the requirements listed above guarantees a pass grade.

Communications

Most communication will take place during class. Otherwise I will send an email through ilearn. It is the student's responsibility to make sure that the email listed on ilearn is valid. If you do not use your UCR account make the appropriate changes to have your UCR emails sent to your preferred account.

Textbooks

Required

Levitt, S. and S. Dubner (2006) *Freakonomics [Revised and Expanded]: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything*. William Morrow Publisher. ISBN: 978-0061234002. [LD, HB74.P8 L479 2005].

Suggested

- Becker, G. (1998) *The Economics of Life: From Baseball to Affirmative Action to Immigration, How Real-World Issues Affect Our Everyday Life*, McGraw-Hill.
- Frank, R. (2007) *The Economic Naturalist: In Search of Explanations for Everyday Enigmas*, Basic Books.
- Cowen, T. (2007) *Discover Your Inner Economist: Use Incentives to Fall in Love, Survive Your Next Meeting, and Motivate Your Dentist*, Dutton Adult.
- Hartford, T. (2006) *The Undercover Economist: Exposing Why the Rich Are Rich, Why the Poor Are Poor—And Why You Can Never Buy a Decent Used Car!* [HT, HC59.15 H35 2006].

Plagiarism

The appropriate ways for referencing the material used to write the paper will be discussed in class. Any student found committing plagiarism, not handing in original work of his/her own, or cheating, will be given an F in the course and will be subject to disciplinary action by the University. Please read this document and become familiar with the correct ways to cite other's work. http://senate.ucr.edu/agenda/041116/CEP_STUDENT_INTEGRITY_DEFINITIONS.pdf.

Course outline and readings

Each of the following topics should take us one week, on average.

I. Introduction

II. The role of incentives

- LD: chapter 1.

III. The role of information

- LD: chapter 2.

IV. Dealing with drugs and parents

- LD: chapter 3.

V. Finding causal effects: experiments

- LD: chapter 4.
- Hoff, K. and P. Pandey (2004) Belief Systems And Durable Inequalities. An Experimental Investigation of Indian Caste. World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 3351, June.

VI. Finding causal effects: other methods

- LD: chapter 5. [*]
- Whitehouse, M. (2007) “Is an Economist Qualified To Solve Puzzle of Autism?” *The Wall Street Journal*, February 27.

VII. Names and jobs

- LD: chapter 6.
- Bertrand, M. and S. Mullainathan (2004) “Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination,” *American Economic Review*, 94(4):991-1013, September.

VIII. Coffee, rents and prices

- HT: chapter 1 and 2.

IX. Globalization and beer

- HT: chapter 9.

X. It's beginning to look like Christmas

- Dubner, S. and S. D. Levitt (2007) “Gift-Card Economy, *The New York Times*, January 7.
- Hartford, T. (2003) “The Deadweight Loss of Christmas,” *The Financial Times*, December 20.
- Hartford, T. (2006) “Are early Christmas decorations efficient?,” *The Financial Times*, December 1.
- Hartford, T. (2006) “Should I send round-robin Christmas letters?,” *The Financial Times*, December 8.