

Barnard College Economics Department

2023-2024 Senior Seminar Descriptions

Fall 2023

Econ BC3063 (01) Senior Seminar: “Information and Polarization”

Tue 2:10 PM - 4:00 PM

*Instructor: **Rajiv Sethi***

Prerequisites: Permission of the Instructor and completion of all courses (except the senior requirement) required for economics dept majors. Exceptions to these prerequisites may be granted by the chair of the department only.

We are living in an age that is *information rich* and *interpretation poor*. We have access to an enormous (and sometimes overwhelming) amount of data, but are limited in our capacity to make sense of it. In particular, we have to make judgments about the reliability of sources, take account of the possibility that we are being manipulated or misinformed, and determine what kinds of information we will pass on to others in our social networks.

This course will examine the processes through which information and misinformation are transmitted, and the resulting consequences, including political polarization, echo chambers, filter bubbles, unsubstantiated rumors, fake news, and conspiracy theories.

Among the questions to be considered are the following:

1. How is ideological and political polarization measured, and to what extent has it increased over the past few decades?
2. What is the role of social media in driving changes in polarization?
3. To what extent do messages on social media reflect genuinely held beliefs, rather than partisan cheerleading or the desire for approval?
4. How has the accuracy and reliability of scientific communication been affected by changes in the media landscape?
5. Do echo chambers exist even among professional investors in financial markets, whose profitability depends on holding accurate beliefs?

The course will involve analysis of data from several sources, dealing with beliefs about a broad range of topics, such as the safety and efficacy of vaccines, the incidence of voter fraud, the extent and effects of climate change, and the use of force by law enforcement officers. And we will discuss the feasibility and effectiveness of possible policy responses.

Econ BC3063 (02) Senior Seminar: “Women in Development Economics”

TH 12:10-2pm

Instructor: Anja Benschaul-Tolonen

Prerequisites: Permission of the Instructor and completion of all courses (except the senior requirement) required for economics dept majors. Exceptions to these prerequisites may be granted by the chair of the department only.

This seminar examines the role of gender in processes of economic development. The course focuses on recent quantitative research in order to study the opportunities and challenges that women face in the developing world. Readings will discuss women’s economic life in Africa, South Asia, East Asia and Latin America across four themes: (1) Origins and Patterns of Gender Inequality in the World, (2) Women as Policy Makers, (3) Fertility, Marriage and Intra-household Bargaining Power, (4) Micro Credit, Cash Transfers and Women’s Labor Market Participation. The students will choose to specialize in one of the four themes, and moderate the discussion in a week of their theme. The students will write a research paper related to their chosen topic and present their research findings at the end of the term. [Note: an introductory course in statistics would be helpful as a pre-requisite]

Econ BC3063 (03) Senior Seminar: “Race, Crime, and Incarceration Policy in the United States”

T 4:10-6pm

Instructor: Morgan C. Williams, Jr.

Prerequisites: Permission of the Instructor and completion of all courses (except the senior requirement) required for economics dept majors. Exceptions to these prerequisites may be granted by the chair of the department only.

Recent momentum behind criminal justice reform permitted new discussions concerning incarceration policy and punishment in the United States. This course examines the role of crime, incarceration policy, and institutions in driving contemporary discussions on criminal justice reform through the prism of race. The course will provide students with an opportunity to critically examine how behaviors such as racial stereotypes and stigma influence a variety of issues at the center of criminal justice reform—including racial disparities in crime, law enforcement strategy, sentencing outcomes, and prisoner reentry into the labor market. Students will ultimately learn that even as a pure social construct, race plays a vital role in shaping both social policy and outcomes related to criminal justice reform.

Econ BC3063 (04) Senior Seminar: "Future of Central Banking"

TH 6:10-8pm

Instructor: Elham Saeidinezhad

Prerequisites: Permission of the Instructor and completion of all courses (except the senior requirement) required for economics dept majors. Exceptions to these prerequisites may be granted by the chair of the department only.

This seminar aims to expose you to several different issues that shape the future of central banking. The class is an opportunity to write, review, and present your perspective on the topics such as the history of central banking (how it originated in London's Lombard Street and why it moved to New York?), the central banks' intervention beyond traditional tools to respond to the triple crises of 2007-09 Great Financial Crisis, COVID-19 Crisis, Ukraine- Russia Conflict, and the state of the financial innovation in central banking, such as the creation of Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC).

Spring 2024

ECON BC3063 (01) Senior Seminar: "Human Capital and Human Freedom"

Instructor: Lalith Munasinghe

Prerequisites: Permission of the Instructor and completion of all courses (except the senior requirement) required for economics dept majors. Exceptions to these prerequisites may be granted by the chair of the department only.

In this senior seminar we read a collection of essays written by economists and philosophers that relate to three broad topics: Human capital theory (HCT), human freedom, and the role of the worker in the modern workplace. Human Capital Theory. Our readings will focus on the historical origins of HCT and on the puzzles and facts of labor market phenomena that the theory is designed to explain. We will read some of the pioneering works by two Nobel laureates in economics Schultz and Becker. Human Freedom. We will read about and discuss various notions of human freedom, starting with a highly romantic and individualistic vision of Marx, and then moving on to more contemporary ideas of negative and positive conceptions of human freedom. Our readings will begin with Marx (selections from the 1844 Manuscripts, Grundrisse and Capital Vol. III), and continue on to some modern essays by Isaiah Berlin, Charles Taylor and Amartya Sen. Worker and Firm. The final topic focuses on economic theories of the employment relationship between the worker and the firm. The readings will be aimed at providing multiple perspectives on the worker-firm relationship. In particular, we will read about the employment relationship from the radical, neoclassical and the managerial perspectives, with a view to unraveling the philosophical differences in these accounts. Readings will include papers by Marglin, Stiglitz, Bowles, and Lazear, to mention a few. Here are some broad questions that I hope these readings will prompt us to think about and discuss in class. 1. The first set of questions relates directly to freedom. For example, what constitutes human freedom or what is the locus of human freedom? Is freedom about whether human beings as moral agents live up to some predetermined ideal in the Platonic sense? Or is it more about the nature of human activity as it relates to the creative pursuit of diverse human interests? 2. A second set

of questions is to ask whether human freedom might in any way relate to human capital theory. For example, do we have to learn skills or cultivate our tastes, interests and desires to become free agents just like we learn skills to become lawyers and carpenters? 3. A third set of questions relate to whether freedom can be achieved within the context of the modern workplace. For example, is work necessarily alienating? Is it a mere means to other ends? Or is it possible to find freedom and meaning in our working lives?

ECON BC3063 (02) Senior Seminar: “Logic and Limits of Economic Justice”

Instructor: Belinda Archibong

Prerequisites: Permission of the instructor and the completion of all courses (except for the senior requirement) required for the economics track, political economy track, or economics and mathematics majors. Exceptions to these prerequisites may be granted by the chair of the department only.

What is economic justice? What does economics have to do with ethics? And how should a society concerned with the wellbeing of its members choose between multiple ‘equally efficient outcomes’? These are some of the main questions we’ll be tackling in this course. We will examine the problems of economic justice under capitalism. The seminar has three goals: (1) to study the debate between economics and philosophers about the meaning and nature of justice, (2) to explore the conflict between efficiency and justice, and (3) to evaluate implications of justice for gender equality, intergenerational equity and climate change.

ECON BC3063 (03) Senior Seminar: “Empirical Macro-Finance”

Instructor: Martina Jasova

Prerequisites: Permission of the Instructor and completion of all courses (except the senior requirement) required for economics dept majors. Exceptions to these prerequisites may be granted by the chair of the department only.

This seminar will introduce students to the research at the intersection of macroeconomics and finance. We will study how big data can help answer questions related to financial crises, central banks’ policies, banking, household finance and inequality. The course has three principal learning objectives: 1) to introduce students to the frontier research in macrofinance, 2) to become familiar with quantitative data and statistical methods used in applied research, and 3) to discuss and examine how researchers use big data to analyze connections between finance and the macro economy.

2023-2024 Thesis Section Instructors

Martina Jasova

Fall 2023; Mon 11:00 AM - 12:50 PM

Elizabeth Ananat

Fall 2023; Tues 11:00 AM - 12:50 PM