

Barnard College Economics Department

Fall 2021 Senior Seminar Descriptions (Spring seminars – next page)

ECON BC3063 (01) Senior Seminar: “Women in Development Economics”

Instructor: Anja Benshaul-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 (02) Senior Seminar: “Logic and Limits of Economic Justice”

Instructor: Belinda Archibong

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 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 macro-finance, 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.

ECON BC3063 (04) Senior Seminar: “Race, Crime, and Incarceration Policy in the United States”

Instructor: Morgan Williams

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 policing, 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 race influences topics such as crime, policing, incarceration policy, and prisoner reentry.

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Spring 2022 Senior Seminar Descriptions

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: “Stereotypes and the Administration of Justice”

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.

Daily life is full of encounters between people who know very little about each other. In navigating such encounters, people often rely on beliefs formed on the basis of visual cues such as markers of race, ethnicity and gender, as well as build, accents, tattoos and piercings. Whether consciously or unconsciously, we attribute to individuals certain characteristics of the groups to which we imagine they belong. We stereotype.

This course is about the manner in which stereotypes affect interactions connected to the justice system. Many of the relevant interactions here are not routine; they arise only under unexpected contingencies. These include interactions between victims and offenders, buyers and sellers of contraband, parties to a dispute, police officers and suspects, prosecutors and witnesses, and judges and defendants. In all such cases, decisions must be made

under conditions of limited information, time pressure, and significant consequences for the well being of one or more parties involved. Stereotypes loom especially large in such instances.

The course will examine trends in crime and punishment in the United States over the past few decades from this perspective. We will explore the manner in which stereotypes affect some of the underlying incentives and strategic calculations that give rise to patterns of criminal offending, witness cooperation, and police action. We will also consider how stereotypes affect tolerance of mass incarceration in the public at large, and examine the policy implications that flow from this analysis.