

Barnard College Economics Department

Fall 2018 Senior Seminar Descriptions

ECON BC3063 (01) Senior Seminar: “Stereotypes, Crime, and Justice”

Instructor: Rajiv Sethi , T 4:10-6:00pm

Prerequisites: Permission of the Instructor and completion of all courses (except 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.

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 crime and the criminal 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.

ECON BC3063x (02) Senior Seminar: “The Economics of Social Policy”

Instructor: Elizabeth Ananat, M 10:10am-12:00pm

Prerequisites: Permission of the Instructor and completion of all courses (except 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.

The U.S. system of supporting children and families differs greatly from those of other rich countries, and from the system in this country a generation ago. Since the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, which “ended welfare as we knew it,” social policy toward low-income families has been piecemeal and unpredictable. In the meantime, a system of tax benefits has grown with little oversight to deliver ever-larger amounts to families mostly on the upper half of the income distribution.

We will begin the course with readings on the history of US social policy to discover how we got to this point. Next, we will examine each of the major current social policies individually to discover its rationale, goals, and effectiveness; each student will take responsibility for becoming the class expert on a different segment of the policy landscape, so that we can develop a shared understanding of how the pieces fit together. By the end of the course, each class member will use research evidence to generate a proposal for how to improve their component of social policy.

(continued on next page)

Spring 2019 Senior Seminar Descriptions

ECON BC3063y (01) Senior Seminar: “Behavioral Economics”

Instructor: Homa Zarghamee , Hours TBA

Prerequisites: Permission of the Instructor and completion of all courses (except 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.

Behavioral economics incorporates insights from psychology into economics. We will study how behavioral-economic theories of judgment and decision-making differ from standard-economic ones, and how these differences impact our understanding of social phenomena. We will become acquainted with experimental economics as a tool for testing economic theory.

ECON BC3063y (02) Senior Seminar: “Empires and Imperialism in Economic History”

Instructor: Alan Dye, Hours TBA

Prerequisites: Permission of the Instructor and completion of all courses (except 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.

One of the legacies of modern economic and political globalization has been the rise of Western imperialism. Great empires of ancient and pre-modern history have also shaped world civilization. Understanding the causes and persistent consequences of the world’s imperialist past remains one of the greatest challenges in the study of global economic history. What were their motivations? How do they relate to the rise of global capitalism? Persistent effects of colonial institutions are often cited as a leading cause of postcolonial poverty. Yet some former colonies, notably former British colonies, but also Taiwan, South Korea, and others, have performed successfully in the long-run. What explains this great divergence in long-run economic performance? This seminar will examine and debate a growing literature that addresses these and related questions. Focus will be on institutions, political economy and comparative historical analysis.

ECON BC3063y (03) Senior Seminar: “Empirical Macro-Finance”

Instructor: Martina Jasova, Hours TBA

Prerequisites: Permission of the Instructor and completion of all courses (except 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.

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.

[Note: An introductory statistics course will be useful as a prerequisite.]