

## **The paper assignment. ECON 410. Fall 2021.**

### *Overall task*

Use of the ideas and the methods studied in the course to analyze a specific institutional/cultural question. From the perspective of ideas and methods used, this is meant to be a narrow mandate: use the ideas and methods studied in this course. However, in choosing the substantive area of application of your paper, this is meant to be a very broad mandate. Study what you want to study so long as what you study is relevant to the subject matter of the course. Examples of ideas/institutions/culture that would be particularly pertinent to think about in this context are given at the end of this document. I think you will see how varied the topics can be.

There are two types of papers that I can imagine being written. The first type uses simple theory and a small model; it could be a verbal model if absolutely necessary, but a diagram would be much better, and some math would be even better. The second type of paper would use information/data to analyze the experiences of one or more countries (or sub-national jurisdictions). Some data analysis would be needed: at a minimum some tables, but much better would be a regression or two.

When grading papers, I focus on whether the student has shown that he/she can think deeply and clearly about economic problems and whether the student has used the ideas and methods that we covered in the course. The grade for the paper will not be higher because the student has found a large amount of extra information and summarizes it in the paper.

There is no specified length for the paper. That is your choice. But normally, the final paper would be quite short, for example, 4-5 pages of text, double-spaced, 1 inch margins, (text means excluding figures, tables, references, equations, etc).

I have very weak requirements on the form of the paper: my main criterion is whether I can understand the paper easily and whether I can trace down on Google the information that is important within the paper. (So the only criterion for bibliographical form is: can I find the cited work in one simple Google search?)

### *Paper Structure*

Immediately below are suggestions on the rough structures of the two types of papers. There is no compulsion to follow one of these structures, but over many years I have found these types of structures usually work quite well.

### Structure of a theory/model paper.

0. Introduction with a brief overview of the question you are addressing and what is done in the paper, especially emphasizing its innovative aspects.
1. Broad background information on the particular situation being examined: anything relevant on the factual situation that is necessary for the reader to understand the rest of your paper.
2. A model that works towards explaining some equilibrium outcome, whose configuration is the result of the realization of the values of political or economic or cultural variables.
3. An evaluation of the nature of the equilibrium outcome: perhaps what interesting features it has or whether it is good or bad from some perspective.
4. Using the model to show how a simple change in one of these political or economic or cultural variables will change the equilibrium outcome.
5. Given the change in assumptions, show how that equilibrium change can be used to understand some good/bad happening that has been observed in the real world or to advocate a particular change in some institution or to show why two countries are different.
6. State the conclusions focusing on the main message that you think your paper has, and any major reservations you have about the analysis you have done. (At this level, it is expected that papers will have major flaws in their analysis. I want you to show, briefly, that you are aware of them.) In the conclusion, do not repeat details of what you have done in the rest of the paper, because there is no need.

### Structure of an information/data paper.

0. Introduction with a brief overview of the question you are addressing and what is done in the paper, especially emphasizing its innovative aspects.
1. Broad background information on the particular situation that you are studying. Anything relevant on the factual situation so that the reader can understand the rest of your paper.
2. Introduce the information/data you will use, defining variables, making clear what is the unit of observation, and giving sources for the data..
3. Justify to the reader the mode of analysis you are using. Is it verbal or tabular or statistical? What is the simple equation underlying your analysis? (Even verbal or tabular analysis effectively uses an equation linking variables.) Show why your particular analysis is appropriate for the situation you are studying. Highlight any highly crucial (and unusual) assumptions you are making, and try to justify them as appropriate for the particular context.
4. Present the details of your results and then pinpoint the specific elements of the results that lead you to make particularly important conclusions that you want to emphasize.
5. State the conclusions focusing on the main message that you think your paper has, and any major reservations you have about the analysis you have done. (At this level, it is expected that papers will have major flaws in their analysis. I want you to show, briefly, that you are aware of them.) In the conclusion, do not repeat details of what you have done in the rest of the paper, because there is no need.

*Deadlines:*

Peter Murrell will comment on the submissions made at each of the deadlines, in order to give you his thoughts about how you can improve the paper going forward, and particularly identifying any minefields that might lie in your proposed path as you proceed. This particular point is very important after your submission for the November 30<sup>th</sup> deadline, after which Peter Murrell will comment on your draft paper and help you improve it before you submit the final version.

- a. On or before October 6<sup>th</sup>, a brief discussion of which particular subjects you have thought about studying, which particular choice you are leaning towards as the subject of your paper, and why. The further along you are at this stage, the better prepared you will be to produce a good paper without being rushed at the end. One page will do, but submit however much you want.
- b. On or before November 8<sup>th</sup>, a final decision on the particular subject you have chosen to write your paper on, including a precise statement of the question that you will be addressing, a rough outline of how you will address that question, and a preliminary bibliography of the material that you have read on that subject. Two pages at most.
- c. A reasonable first draft of a paper by November 29<sup>th</sup>. Note the use of the word 'reasonable'.
- d. The paper is due at 4:00pm on December 19<sup>th</sup>. If you have a final exam on either the 18<sup>th</sup> or the 20<sup>th</sup>, the deadline can be extended to 4:00pm on December 21<sup>st</sup>. One-half a grade point is subtracted for each 12 hours the paper is handed in after the appropriate deadline.

*Examples of subject areas that might be interesting for paper topics.*

These are just examples to give you ideas. Feel free to choose any subject that you think is appropriate. When you choose a specific subject, you might not know much about the particular one you have chosen at the time of your choice. That is all part of the exercise, and indeed is a standard part of the research process. The researcher thinks of something interesting and then delves into more details. By the end of September you should have done quite a bit of extra reading to try to understand the background to your particular choice, so that by the middle of October, when we have developed quite a few methods in the course, you are ready to combine your background knowledge on one highly specific subject with some appropriate methods of analysis. Then the real thinking begins!

NOTE: The following are just examples that came to my mind as I was thinking about the course and reading the media during this calendar year. Feel free to use one of these examples, but also use them to help stimulate your own idea for a paper.

1. Argue for or against the following proposition "Institutional analysis can explain the success of China since 1978."
2. Argue for or against the following proposition "Institutional analysis can explain why the USSR was ultimately a failure."
3. Argue for or against the following proposition "Institutional analysis can help to explain the structure of the US constitution."

4. Argue for or against the following proposition "Institutional or cultural analysis, or both, can help to explain [choose one]...."
  - a. The causes of the US civil war.
  - b. The ultimate failure of Reconstruction.
  - c. The longevity of Jim Crow laws.
  - d. The success of the US in becoming a world economic power.
  - e. The role of interest groups in US politics.
  - f. The degree of inequality in the US.
5. The history of the building of the US as a nation could help to explain why the European Union will ultimately fail/succeed (you choose).
6. Use institutional/cultural analysis to argue why country X failed or succeeded.
7. Institutional and cultural bases of success and failure in combatting the COVID crisis.
8. Decentralization of government: the tradeoffs of local versus central government.
9. Take any element of the US constitution (or the constitution of any other country) and use institutional analysis to make an argument that this element should either remain as it is or be amended.
10. Voting rules.
11. What should be patentable? (Colombians Ask: Who Would Dare Patent Panela?  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/26/science/colombia-panela-patent-gonzalez.html>)
12. What should be subject to copyright protections? ('A US federal court has ruled that "robust reporting" of chess moves during play is in the public interest. The ruling, published on 22 November, explained why the attempt by World Chess (Agon) to stop chess24 and Chessgames from broadcasting the moves of the Carlsen-Karjakin World Chess Championship had been denied. The long-established understanding in the chess world that chess moves can't be copyrighted has therefore now been upheld this year in both a US and a Russian court." <https://chess24.com/en/read/news/us-judge-agrees-with-chess24-on-chess-moves> )
13. How and when should rights be taken away from adults: guardianship rules.  
[https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/britney-spears-jenny-hatch-guardianship/2021/07/14/72d3182a-e4aa-11eb-b722-89ea0dde7771\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/britney-spears-jenny-hatch-guardianship/2021/07/14/72d3182a-e4aa-11eb-b722-89ea0dde7771_story.html)
14. Rules on class action lawsuits.
15. Regulations versus tort law in dealing with pollution (or any other area of economic activity where both of these forms of institutions could be relevant).
16. The basis of statutes of limitations from an economic perspective.
17. The basis of rules against perpetuities from an economic perspective.
18. Should adhesion contracts (which you have agreed to many times in your life!) be enforceable?
19. Private versus public enforcement of laws.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/19/opinion/texas-abortion-law-reward.html>
20. Institutions for coordination between countries during pandemics
21. Institutional/cultural analysis of lockdown restrictions.
22. Institutional/cultural analysis of mandatory quarantines.
23. Institutional/cultural analysis of mask-wearing rules.

24. Institutional/cultural analysis of mandatory vaccination rules.
25. Institutional/cultural analysis of vaccine passports.
26. Mandatory rules on education of children in times of a pandemic.
27. State powers to restrict travel of residents of other states.
28. First-amendment exemptions to COVID restrictions
29. Regulations on the approval of vaccines for general use, and how pandemics might require modifications in these rules.
30. "Don't let intellectual property rights get in the way of global vaccination"  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/03/10/dont-let-intellectual-property-rights-get-way-global-vaccination/>
31. Insurers Must Pay Businesses for Pandemic Claims, British Court Rules  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/15/business/britain-small-business-insurance-coronavirus.html>
32. Should health-care privacy rules be modified in the time of a pandemic?
33. The use of the Defense Production Act during a time of non-war crisis.
34. Rules on compulsory government purchase of businesses in an emergency
35. Rules on government powers to issue orders to businesses in an emergency
36. Rights of landlords to evict tenants, and how they should be changed in times of a pandemic.
37. The enforceability of contracts in times of crisis and rules to defend against breach.  
(<https://www.grossmanllp.com/Upper-East-Side-Gallery-Sues-Landlord-Claiming-It>)
38. Tort law and its relevance to the spread of a virus between individuals
39. Workplace safety rules and tort law in the workplace in COVID times
40. Bankruptcy/insolvency rules and procedures in COVID times
41. Employment rules and firing clauses in pandemics
42. Bank's rights to foreclose after missed mortgage payments in COVID times
43. Force-majeure provisions of contract law in pandemic times.
44. Costs and benefits of federalism in times of a pandemic.
45. Elements of culture that are particularly productive in COVID times
46. Relative roles of culture and formal institutions in preventing spread of virus
47. Property law on personal digital objects: who owns your Kindle books or your emails or your text messages? (<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/03/15/how-much-of-your-stuff-belongs-to-big-tech>)
48. Rights to ownership of the data you generate when accessing the web.
49. Web privacy rights.
50. Privacy trade-offs (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/08/13/apple-csam-child-safety-tool-hashing-privacy/> ).
51. Government subpoena powers to obtain your personal information.  
(<https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2021/06/15/faq-data-subpoena-investigation/> ).
52. Who should be entitled to anonymity when plaintiffs or defendants in civil or criminal legal cases? (<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/09/sports/deshaun-watson-lawsuits-anonymity.html>)

53. Non-disclosure agreements (for example, as the final outcome when a famous person is being sued by somebody for sexual harassment).
54. The governance of sports (world soccer, US baseball/football/basketball, Olympics) from an institutional perspective.
55. The making and the enforcement of the on-field rules of soccer from a historical/institutional/cultural perspective.