Honours Dissertation 2014

TO: Intending Honours students (2014)
FROM: Paul Hansen, Department of Economics dissertations co-ordinator
Date: October 2013

You are receiving this document because you may be interested in completing the new one-year Honours degree in 2014.

One requirement of these courses is completion of a dissertation as part of ECON490 Econometric Methods and Dissertation. The attached pages provide you with some details about the Honours dissertation.

For those of you have completed the coursework component of an MBus, you are required to complete a thesis (ECON5A), and a lot of the same information (except deadlines) applies.

**ACTION** Please meet the deadlines to maximise your chances of getting your preferred topic. Late registrations will be accepted until Semester 1, 2014, but topic choice may be more limited by then.

(1) Please read the attached notes concerning the choice of a dissertation topic for next year.

(2) By 22 October 2013, please register your interest in enrolling for a dissertation in economics in 2014 by emailing me at paul.hansen@otago.ac.nz with this information:

   NAME / ID NUMBER / EMAIL (an address you check regularly please)

(3) By 19 November 2013, please confirm your intentions by emailing me at paul.hansen@otago.ac.nz with this information:

   NAME / ID NUMBER / EMAIL
   ADDRESS AND PHONE (TERM) / ADDRESS AND PHONE (SUMMER)
   PREFERRED TOPIC(S) (brief description, about 100 words)
   STAFF MEMBER(S) CONSULTED
Aim

The aim of the dissertation is to provide a grounding in research skills. At the outset, undertaking a dissertation may seem like a daunting prospect, but most students ultimately find the experience rewarding and the skills developed to be of high value.

Objectives

You will learn:

1. To plan a research project.
2. To bring relevant economic theory and/or data and/or quantitative techniques to bear on a carefully specified problem.
3. To work largely independently (without detailed supervision).
4. To work to deadlines.
5. To present the results of a substantial research project in a clear and well-organised fashion, both orally and in writing.

Responsibilities of the student

Practically speaking, in terms of ensuring good progress, minimal stress and a good result, both student and supervisor need to be clear on their respective roles.

The student should:

1. Propose a topic following discussion with members of staff. Students need to be aware that there may be others working in similar areas and the final assignment of topics and supervisors is the responsibility of the Department’s Academic Board.
2. Accept that the main responsibility for the progress of the dissertation and its final form rest with her or him.
3. Seek, consider and respond to advice given by the supervisor.
4. Provide the supervisor with draft written work at regular intervals.
5. Present the research proposal at a brownbag seminar in the first semester, and hand in a written version with progress at the end of the first semester.

6. Report preliminary results and general progress at a seminar in second semester.

7. Meet the final submission deadline.

**Role of the supervisor**

The supervisor should:

1. Make time available for discussion on a regular basis as agreed with the student.

2. Provide broad guidance, in particular trying to identify problems with the progress of the research at as early a stage as possible.

3. Advise on detail where necessary or suggest another source of help.

4. Comment on the substance and style of the work in progress, having read drafts provided by the student, but not act as editor or proof-reader. Feedback needs to be provided within a reasonable timeframe, to be agreed between supervisor and student. Especially towards the end of the year, students need to be aware that supervisors may need significantly longer than a few days to provide useful feedback.

5. Provide comment to the dissertation marker regarding the degree to which the final product represents the student’s own work and provide any other information requested by the marker in reaching an assessment.

**Role of the dissertation co-coordinator**

The dissertation coordinator (Paul Hansen in 2014) is responsible for the administration of the Honours dissertation. This involves:

1. Circulating guidelines on the dissertation process, along with a list of staff research and teaching interests to all intending Honours students.

2. Ensuring that every student knows which topic and supervisor he or she has been allocated by the Academic Board and dealing with any changes that arise.

3. Explaining the nature of the dissertation requirements to students.

4. If necessary, setting up training sessions for students in such aspects of the research process as literature searching and presentation skills.

5. Organising the seminar presentations at which students present their proposals and results.

6. Checking that progress reports are completed on time and monitoring student progress, as well as receiving any requests for consideration of special circumstances.

7. Organising collection of the final dissertations and ensuring the marking process is completed in time for the examiners’ meeting.
Assessment criteria

Students perceive, and staff recognise, that there are difficulties in making fair and valid assessments of dissertations that vary by topic area and techniques of analysis. The Department appoints a single marker each year to read and assess all dissertations. That marker applies the following criteria.

1. *Literature review.* The dissertation should demonstrate familiarity with the appropriate literature and contain a critical appraisal of that literature. Critical appraisal entails more than just saying what has been done before. It requires assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of previous work.

2. *Methods.* Appropriate techniques should be used and understanding and mastery of them should be demonstrated and the work should be free from errors in the application of those techniques. Remember that in economics, reasoning and evidence are valued over anecdote and opinion.

3. *Originality.* There should be a degree of originality. This is not to be taken to mean that some path-breaking contribution to the discipline has to be made. Originality can be demonstrated in a number of ways. At the very least, it can be done through the application of an existing theory and methods to a previously unexamined example or data set. The use of more appropriate econometric techniques, refining the definition or measurement of key variables and the addition of new variables are other possibilities. In broad terms, “originality” means that you are extending the existing literature in some useful way. Account will be taken of the degree of difficulty of what has been attempted.


Note, in particular, that the Harvard system of referencing is preferred in economics and that footnotes are preferred to endnotes. Note also that the expected length of the dissertation is 8000 to 12,000 words. Concise expression is valued and an excessively long dissertation will be penalised. Plagiarism must be avoided so that it is wise to keep careful track of references throughout the research process.

5. *Organisation.* The dissertation should be well structured, setting out its aims, methods, data characteristics, results, conclusions and limitations as clearly as possible.

6. *Process.* Account may be taken of the extent of independence demonstrated by the student, as measured by supervisor comments and the student’s ability to present the topic of the dissertation in a clear manner in seminar presentations and to handle questions on the topic.
These criteria do not necessarily carry equal weight, but the more of them that are satisfied, the better the result will be. It is difficult to specify exact weights for the criteria. To take a rather extreme case as an example, a dissertation might meet all of the criteria to a very high degree except that it is, in large part, plagiarised or not the student’s own work. Such a dissertation, in spite of its meeting all other criteria, would fail.

**Timetable**

A good dissertation is the result of a number of months’ disciplined work and cannot be assembled hastily at the last minute.

It is important to get off to a good start, however false starts are possible and not necessarily avoidable. Discuss your ideas for topics with a number of staff. When you have a reasonably firm idea of your area of interest, start to work out some greater detail with some staff member’s guidance. A list of staff and their research and teaching interests is at the end of these notes.

Try to set yourself deadlines and stick as closely as possible to them. Some deadlines will be imposed on you by the Department. You will be advised of these by the dissertation co-ordinator. An approximate guide to when deadlines are likely follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week (approximate)</th>
<th>For completion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2013, Semester 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 (before lectures end)</td>
<td>Notes on the dissertation process circulated to all prospective Honours students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 (exam study break)</td>
<td>Prospective students register their contact details with the dissertations co-ordinator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 - 17</td>
<td>Prospective students submit proposed topic to dissertations co-ordinator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2014, Semester 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Topic choice and supervisor assignment <strong>confirmed</strong>. Late enrolments will be accepted up to this point.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Brief written proposal and preliminary <strong>presentations</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Dissertation proposal and report on progress submitted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2014, Semester 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 6</td>
<td>Second presentation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Proposals and dissertations should be submitted to the dissertations co-coordinator, and two bound printed copies submitted to Janet Bryant. Janet is happy to assist with binding.

Staff research interests

Below are brief descriptions of the research interests of staff members. Note that Chris Hajzler, Steffen Lippert, Dorian Owen and Steve Stillman will be on leave next year; however, Dorian has kindly said he is still happy to supervise as he won’t be away from the Department for long.

More information about staff interests can be obtained by speaking to the staff member directly. You can also check out the economics department website, [www.business.otago.ac.nz/econ/staff/index.html](http://www.business.otago.ac.nz/econ/staff/index.html). All staff can be contacted by email (e.g. [paul.hansen@otago.ac.nz](mailto:paul.hansen@otago.ac.nz), etc.)

### SARAH BAIRD

Sarah’s work largely focuses on analysing health and education issues in developing countries through careful programme design and evaluation. She has worked on areas as diverse as the schooling and health of young women in Malawi, community-driven development in Tanzania, deworming in Kenya, and global infant mortality. She will continue to work on these topics, but is also interested in expanding her research to include health and education issues in New Zealand and the broader Pacific region.

### NATHAN BERG

Nathan specialises in behavioural economics. He teaches microeconomics, financial economics, psychology and economics, and statistics and econometrics.

### DAN FARHAT

Dan’s research interests are mainly in the area of computational economics, focusing specifically on artificial social systems and business cycle analysis.
DAVID FIELDING

David’s research interests are mainly in the macroeconomics of developing countries and the economics of violent conflict. Current research topics include the economic dimensions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and monetary unions in Sub-Saharan Africa.

MURAT GENÇ

Murat’s interest is in applied microeconomics and micro-econometrics, with recent focus on empirical trade studies that use gravity models.

CHRIS HAJZLER (ON LEAVE IN 2014)

Chris’ research interests are primarily in the areas of international macroeconomics and trade. He is also interested in growth and development. Recent research is focused on the impact of political risk on international investment flows, and on understanding price dispersion across cities and countries.

PAUL HANSEN

Paul is interested in research projects that involve decision-making, including Multiple Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA) and Conjoint Analysis – in any area! If interested, visit www.1000minds.com, especially www.1000minds.com/researchers. Paul also has expertise and interest in health economics, including health care priority-setting.

ALFRED HAUG

Alfred’s research interests are mainly in applying econometric time series techniques to macroeconomics. Current research topics include testing for structural breaks in time series, the empirical modelling of shocks to macroeconomic variables, the empirical role of monetary aggregates, and empirical money demand in the longer run beyond the business cycle frequency.

MOHAMMAD JAFORULLAH

Mohammad’s research interests are in the analysis of energy policies using CGE and I-O models, agricultural economics, e.g., analysis of the supply responses of agricultural crops, calculation of regional I-O multipliers and the estimation of frontier production functions.
VIKTORIA KAHUI

Viktoria’s research interests are primarily in natural resource and environmental economics. Her main research is in the economics of fisheries and bio-economic modelling. In the past she has also supervised students on topics such as forestry economics and the Emission Trading Scheme, including methods of dynamic optimization modelling, linear programming (with Dan Farhat) and empirical estimations.

ALAN KING

Alan’s current research interests primarily relate to the time-series modelling of import or export flows (using error-correction models) and to testing the income convergence hypothesis (using a range of unit-root tests).

STEPHEN KNOWLES

Stephen’s current research interests are primarily in the area of using economic experiments to analyse what motivates people to give money to charity. Stephen has also done work on the empirical modelling of economic growth, including the relationship between social capital, institutions and economic performance.

STEFFEN LIPPERT (ON LEAVE IN 2014)

Steffen’s research focuses on industrial economics, the economics of innovation, and the economics of social interaction and networks.

DORIAN OWEN (ON LEAVE IN 2014, BUT AVAILABLE TO SUPERVISE)

Dorian’s research interests are mainly in the areas of empirical modelling of economic growth and development, sports economics and applied econometrics. Current interests include competitive balance and different aspects of competition design in sports leagues, fundamental determinants of economic growth and development, and the aggregate relationship between health and economic growth.

ARLENE OZANNE

Arlene’s research interests are in development economics (particularly East Asian economic development and empirical modelling of total factor productivity (TFP) using cross-sectional, time-series and multi-country panel data); labour economics (particularly migration issues) and economics education.
BERK ÖZLER

Berk is interested in policy issues that are salient, especially in the developing world, such as the effective design of cash transfer programs and the role of conditionalities, HIV prevention among adolescent girls, empowerment of young women, etc. He also works on issues surrounding the measurement and reduction of poverty; the effects of inequality and inequality of opportunity on health, crime, and the targeting/effectiveness of poverty reduction programmes.

TRENT SMITH

Trent’s research interests lie primarily in the area of behavioural economics. Drawing on evidence from a wide array of behavioural sciences – including psychology, anthropology, behavioural ecology, neuroendocrinology, and molecular biology – he applies theoretical and empirical methods from economics to phenomena such as addiction, obesity, economic insecurity, and television advertisements.

STEVE STILLMAN (ON LEAVE IN 2014)

Steve’s research focuses on empirical labour economics, specialising in the behaviour of individuals and households. Steve is broadly interested in research on migration, health, nutrition, education, household decision-making and inequality.

PAUL THORSNES

Paul’s research interests are primarily in the areas of urban/regional and environmental economics. Recent research includes estimates of effects on housing markets of variation in the quality of environmental amenities and household decisions with respect to energy.

TARJA VIITANEN

Tarja’s research interests are in labour economics, family economics, law and economics and socio-economics. Her recent research has focused on the microeconomic effects of tax policies, law changes and policies on childcare and elderly care as well as several topics on divorce, trust, terrorism and school shootings.