

Econ 496: Economics Workbench

Economics Department – UNC at Chapel Hill

Spring 2011

Instructor Information:

Mike Aguilar

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Office Hours: T,R 3:30pm-5:00pm, or by appointment

Pre-requisites:

Econ 400, 410, 420; Overall GPA ≥ 3.5

Statistical programming experience in Matlab; Instructor approval

Course Description:

This course has two goals: 1) To allow those enrolled in the class to begin their transition from students to practitioners of economics, and 2) To assist students/instructors in other economics classes to incorporate "real-time" data analysis into their studies.

Students enrolled in this 496 course, referred to as "Consultants", may work toward these goals along two main paths. First, those with a comparative advantage in programming may search through the economics literature for models/concepts they found interesting during the course of their studies. The Consultants then devise a method with which to visualize this concept/model in a dynamic setting. Such a visualization is referred to as an "App". Consultants document the construction and pedagogical importance of their Apps in the classroom. Second, those with a comparative advantage in writing may contribute to a weekly economic commentary, which analyzes current events in the domestic and international economy.

The primary method of dissemination is the course website, which at the moment is www.unc.edu/~maguilar/EconWorkbench.html. The website is updated on a weekly basis, and is entirely student-run. The target audience for the website are UNC faculty and students. The goal is to facilitate class-room discussion, and link economic theories to current events.

Grading:

Assessment of student performance depends upon i) the quantity and quality of Apps generated over the course of the semester, ii) the ability to document clearly their work for other students, and/or iii) the quantity and quality of contributions to weekly economic commentary. Requisite student output will depend upon the credit hours (1, 2, or 3) for which the student registers. As a guide, students taking the class for 3 credit hours can be expected to create at least 15 Apps during a semester, with documentation for each App being approximately 2 paragraphs in length. Weekly commentaries are expected to be about 1-3 pages in length.