

Labor Economics 2nd Year Paper Assignment

Due: August 31, 2027

The first step to writing a GREAT research paper is asking a GREAT research question. Ask a bad question and you will undoubtedly end up with a bad paper. Generating research questions will be the subject of two deadlines for the 2nd Year Paper. For each assignment, you will propose two original research questions: explain why the question is interesting (motivation), outline the feasibility of answering the question, and describe how answering the question as you propose will be a contribution to science (that is, how writing the paper will shift the scientific frontier).

For each of TWO research questions, please include the following sections:

1) The research question written as a question

2) **Motivation:** why is this question interesting? Who cares besides you? What would be the benefit of knowing its answer? Scientific progress/policy relevance/other? What is the connection of the question to theory, history, or policy? One or two brief paragraphs.

3) What you will do and its feasibility:

- a) Theoretical studies: describe HOW you will specify or solve the problem? Will you apply certain insights from another field, a new solution technique? Will you alter a canonical model in an important way, relax a key assumption? How will you test or validate your theory? (Why will your answer be more interesting than in previous work?)
- b) Empirical studies:
 - i. Are the data available? If your study is empirical, describe the data and variables you can get to answer your question. Would you need to collect the information? Is it available in public resources? Take time to carefully examine the different data sources (We suggest the IPUMS.org website as a start) to see what is available. But there are many others. If there are no data, you can't answer the question you posed. If you have the data, the next step is thinking through your empirical methodology (also called "research design" or "identification strategy").
 - ii. What is your research design and is it credible? Describe the method you will use to answer your question (description, regression, structural/theoretical, quasi or natural experiment, etc.) and why this approach will provide a compelling answer to your question. Can you test the methodology's key assumptions?

4) **Contribution:** If it is interesting and feasible, why has no one done this before? How will answering the question add value to the literature? Of course, it is ideal if there are several ways in which you will contribute. It is necessary to have at least one reason. One or two brief paragraphs.

We will be sticklers about the length and submission guideline:

Length: Minimum: 1 page of writing /maximum: 2 pages of writing; 1-inch margins, single spaced, font size 12 (around 500 words). No tables or figures at this stage—save these for the more detailed research plan you will submit later. *Brevity is a skill (and one we want you to develop sooner rather than later). Longer assignments are not better assignments. We will hold you to the word limit.*