

Course evaluation report

ECON3715/4715

Fall 2022

Course responsible: Maxwell Kellogg

What is working?

Overall, students seem pleased with the lectures and my teaching style. I think I do a good job at identifying “pressure points” where students are likely to get stuck, and giving additional attention to those aspects of the course material. I put substantial effort into keeping students motivated and interested, by encouraging questions, providing related personal anecdotes, and explaining why I care about the core topics in the class (and why I think students should care about them too). As a result, I think I have managed to foster an environment where students are generally willing to participate and ask questions.

What can be improved?

It can be difficult to shut down lines of questions from students that are somewhat tangential to the material on hand, since this can have a chilling effect. Balancing that is something I should improve on, because I often find myself pressed for time to cover everything we need to discuss.

In general, I suspect the seminars (in which we discuss individual papers) have been less useful for the students than the lectures. I try to engage in discussion with the students, and that has been successful when the topic moved to issues *related* to the paper. For instance, we had a great discussion about p-values, p-hacking, and multiple hypothesis testing in an early seminar. In situations like that, the dynamic of the seminar changed from a group conversation to one more like advice-giving, which I found the students appreciated. My guess is that the kind of group discussion I expected on the papers is difficult to manage with a class as large as this one.

What can you do to improve the course?

I think handling tangential questions is just a matter of having a few tactful, gentle ways of shutting down a question in mind when I’m lecturing.

When it comes to the seminars, I see a few possible solutions. One is to try to simulate smaller group discussions by asking groups of students to present during the seminars instead of presenting on papers at the end of the semester. Another option is to reformat the seminars, framing them around the key ideas that I want students to take away from the paper, focusing less on discussing the details of the paper itself. The obvious drawback of the second option is that students will face more responsibility to study the papers on their own, and there are educational benefits to discussing the papers together as a class.