

Econ 911 Term Paper

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Here is some guidance for the term paper, which is due in class on **Thursday April 6**.

For MA students, the paper can function as a draft of an MA project. For PhD students, it can be a prospectus for a thesis chapter. However, you are not committed to using the paper in either of these ways.

It is a good idea to talk with me first about ideas you may have for the paper, before you invest a lot of time in research and writing.

The paper should be about a topic covered in the course or closely related to it. Aim for roughly 15 pages. There are rapidly diminishing returns after that. Please address each of the following points.

1. The paper should present and document some interesting empirical facts.
2. It should review and assess the existing literature that tries to explain these facts. What was useful about this earlier work? What were the limitations or flaws of this work? This literature could involve articles or books written by economists (be sure to discuss such materials if they exist). Depending on the specific topic, the literature may also include relevant material from anthropology, archaeology, demography, climatology, etc.
3. The paper should present your own preferred theoretical explanation of the facts. Be sure to explain the structure of your theory and justify it. Your theory could be presented using math, graphs, verbal reasoning, or some combination of these tools. I am not imposing any methodological constraint other than logic. But be sure to construct a careful and convincing argument for why your explanation is better than the other possibilities. In particular, you should anticipate potential criticisms and address them. However, it is also desirable to be open about the limitations or weaknesses of your theory (no theory ever explains everything!).
4. You should end with a sketch of potential future research (empirical, theoretical, or both). What are the remaining gaps in our knowledge? Why are these gaps important? How could they be filled in?

I am posting a bibliography as part of the web materials for the course. This can be used as a starting point, but you will have to dig more deeply on your own.