

Brandeis University

Department of Economics

August 2009 Newsletter for Majors and Minors

The Economics faculty and staff are pleased to welcome you back to Brandeis for the fall semester. We hope you had a great summer and are ready for the new school year. Professor Rachel McCulloch has finished her term as Department Chair. I will be trying to fill her shoes. I hope that you will feel free to stop by the Economics offices to discuss your experience with the major or minor or you can email me at jefferson@brandeis.edu .

Welcome Back!

The UDRs will be holding a welcome back event for Economics majors, minors and faculty on Thursday September 17th at 3:00pm in the Lurias rooms at the Hassenfeld Conference Center. Come celebrate the beginning of the new academic year with the Department.

Advising

This year Professor Scott Redenius is taking over the position of Undergraduate Advising Head. His office is now located in the Economics office, which was previously occupied by Professor Michael Coiner. After many years of service as the Department's UGH, Professor Coiner will be taking a break. He has moved to an undisclosed location but will continue to assist Professor Redenius with advising. Professor Coiner has prepared a detailed [memo](#) that answers many of the basic questions you may have about your academic program. This memo can also be accessed from the Economics Department website (click on "Advice for Students"). Please take time to read it before meeting with your advisor or Prof. Redenius. Some important information about recent changes in departmental requirements also appears later in this newsletter.

Fall Registration and Waiting Lists

Registration for fall courses begins on Monday, August 17. Although many Econ courses are already closed, additional students may be able to register for these courses as other students change their schedules.

If a fall course you hope to take is closed, please email the Department's Academic Administrator, Meredith Robitaille (mrobitai@brandeis.edu), to be put on the course's waitlist. If space becomes available, professors will permit additional students to register. In most cases, seniors will be given priority over juniors, and juniors over sophomores. It is important to attend all the class meetings (as long as they do not

conflict with another course you are taking). Adding a course late does not excuse you from completing all required work.

Any student who is on the wait list and cannot be accommodated this term will receive priority in the same course next time it is offered; for all of our core courses, that will be next semester.

New Faculty

Students will find one new face among faculty teaching fall Econ courses. “The Economics of Race and Gender” (Econ 69a) will be taught by **Dr. Elizabeth Brainerd**, who is joining the Brandeis faculty this summer as the first Susan and Burton Winokur Professor of Economics and Women’s and Gender Studies. Dr. Brainerd is a graduate of Bowdoin College and earned her Ph.D. at Harvard University. She comes to Brandeis after spending the first 13 years of her academic career at Williams College. Dr. Brainerd is a labor economist and economic historian. Much of her research has focused on the economic and health effects for women of the Soviet Union’s transition toward a market economy.

In addition to this full-time member, **Dr. Kent Jones**, will be teaching Econ 60b this fall; **Tyler Hull**, an advanced Ph.D. student in IBS, will teach Econ 171a, “Financial Economics.” Dr. Jones will be filling in for Professor Chad Bown, who will be on leave this year at the World Bank in Washington, D.C.

Other Course News

Fall courses. A list of all fall Economics classes is posted on the [Econ website](#). Students who have questions should contact Professor Redenius (redenius@brandeis.edu) or Meredith Robitaille (mrobitai@brandeis.edu), the Academic Administrator for Economics.

Master’s courses. One advantage of the close association between the Economics Department and the International Business School is the availability to undergraduate majors of a range of master’s-level IBS courses. Although these courses are designed primarily for students in the three IBS master’s programs, junior and senior Econ majors may enroll, with permission of the instructor, when space is available. Students interested in taking IBS classes to satisfy requirements for the Economics major should check *in advance* with Professor Redenius. *Many IBS courses cannot be used as upper-level Econ electives, and some cannot be used as Econ electives at all.*

Ph.D. courses. Juniors and seniors who have already completed Econ 80a, 82b, and 83a, and have a strong math background (minimum of multivariate calculus and linear algebra) may wish to consider enrolling in a Ph.D. course. These are highly mathematical courses intended for Ph.D. students but may also be good choices for advanced undergraduate students planning to apply to a Ph.D. program. Strong

performance in a Ph.D. course increases the chance of acceptance to a selective Ph.D. program.

Please note that first-year Ph.D. courses are offered in alternate years; consequently, the first-year Ph.D. courses will not be offered again until 2010-2011. A set of second year courses – mostly field courses and advanced econometric courses – will be offered in 2009-2010. Undergraduates enrolling in these courses should have taken the relevant first-year theory or econometric courses and check with the relevant instructor. Sophomores and juniors interested in doing graduate work in economics may wish to prepare for the first-year courses that will be offered next year.

To learn more about taking a Ph.D. course, contact Professor Blake LeBaron (blebaron@brandeis.edu) or me (jefferson@brandeis.edu).

Senior Honors Program

Econ majors with a GPA of at least 3.5 in the major are eligible for the Department's honors program, which involves writing a thesis under the supervision of a member of the faculty. For details, see the "Senior Honors" link on the Economics Department website:

<http://www.brandeis.edu/departments/economics/thesismain.html>. Seniors who plan to participate in the honors program should consult the Senior Honors Thesis Coordinator, Professor Nidhiya Menon (nmenon@brandeis.edu), as soon as possible.

Undergraduate Departmental Representatives (UDRs).

The UDRs for the 2000-10 academic year are Elizabeth M. Setren '10, Naomi Cohn '11, Bradley Mahlof '11 and Darren Sandler '11. Bios for each of the Econ UDRs can be found on the [Economics website](#). One responsibility of the UDRs is to serve as a liaison between Econ majors and minors and the Economics Department faculty. Through email, they will inform you of Economics Department news, upcoming events, and employment opportunities. They can also let members of the Economics Department faculty and staff know about student concerns and pass along suggestions about the curriculum or other aspects of Department life.

Recent Changes in the Requirements for the Major

Several recent changes to the requirements for the Econ major are important for current and potential majors. Please consult your advisor or Prof. Redenius if you are not sure how these requirements affect you.

Enforcement of the calculus requirement. Every student must satisfy a calculus requirement before enrolling in Econ 80a, 82b, or 83a. Specifically, students must

establish competence in calculus in any one of three ways: completion of Math 10a with a grade of C- or better; scoring at least 4 on the AP Mathematics AB test, or at least 3 on the AP Mathematics BC test; or passing a placement exam the Econ Department administers at the beginning of the semester. Students must satisfy the requirement before taking Econ 80a, 82b, or 83a. See Prof. Redenius as soon as possible if you plan to take the placement exam.

According to the Bulletin, "The required intermediate theory courses (80a, 82b, 83a) assume knowledge of calculus at the level taught in Math 10a." Prior to fall 2004, the Department allowed students to decide whether their calculus skills were sufficient. However, our experience indicated that students who have not completed Math 10a or passed the AP tests often overestimate their calculus skills and then struggle with parts of Econ 80a, 82b, and 83a, as well as the upper-level electives that use calculus.

This change in the enforcement of the requirement does *not* mean that use of calculus in Econ 80a, 82b, and 83a has increased. Students who have studied calculus and have satisfied the calculus requirement but feel they have forgotten much of what they once knew should not be concerned. Instructors will review the necessary material when it is needed during the course. Most students find that their calculus skills can be revived with a little review and assistance.

Econometrics as a requirement for the major. Econometrics (Econ 184b, Econ 185a, or Econ 215a) is now required for ***all*** Economics majors. We adopted this requirement for two reasons. First, econometrics provides a bridge between the economic theory that students learn in their courses and economics in the real world. Studying econometrics allows Econ majors to acquire skills needed to evaluate competing approaches used to analyze human behavior and the functioning of economic systems. A second and very practical reason is that graduate programs and employers increasingly expect Econ majors to have a working knowledge of econometrics. *Last year's seniors reported that they were asked about econometrics courses and even asked econometrics questions during job interviews.* **In order to help econometrics fit into your course planning, we now offer Econ 184b in both the fall and the spring semesters.**

Minimum acceptable grades in Economics 2a and 8b. Students must earn a grade of C or higher in Econ 2a and Econ 8b in order to pursue the major. This requirement supplants the previous requirement of C-which still applies to students who entered Brandeis before fall 2004.

Minimum acceptable grades in Economics 80a, 82b, 83a and Econometrics. Students must earn a minimum grade of C- in Econ 80a, Econ 82b, and Econ 83a. A student who receives a grade of D+ or below must re-take the course to complete the major, and the student will not be allowed to enroll in upper-level electives for which that course is a prerequisite until a C- or better has been attained.

For both the major and the minor, a 2.00 minimum GPA is required. To ensure uniformity of minimum grading standards for graduation, only Econ 2a and courses that have Econ 2a as a prerequisite will be included in the calculation of the major (or minor) GPA for this required minimum test. This applies to all students who have entered Brandeis since fall of 2004.

Finally...

We hope that 2009-10 will be a productive, satisfying, and enjoyable year for our students. We especially urge our senior majors to take full advantage of the course offerings in the Economics Department before leaving campus for the last time in December or next May.

Best wishes,

Gary Jefferson
Chair