

To: All students eligible to register in ECON 490 during the 2020/21 academic session

ECON 490 is the capstone course of the Economics Majors program at the VSE. It is designed to introduce students to hands-on economic research, in a small-group setting, with close supervision from a faculty member. In the 2020/21 academic session, the VSE is introducing a new modality of ECON 490 in order to better accommodate a wider variety of student goals and needs. Please familiarize yourself with the features of each type of ECON 490 offering in order to select the one most appropriate for your academic profile and learning objectives.

Traditional format sections

For the 2020/21 academic session, most sections of ECON 490 will still be offered in the course's traditional format, with sections containing approximately 20 students. The first weeks of the course will include a brief econometrics refresher and a general discussion of research methods. Each student will then design and carry out an individual empirical research project, with guidance provided by the instructor in one-on-one meetings. Students usually then present their research projects to the class prior to submitting their individual final papers. Many traditional format sections have a predetermined theme (e.g. development economics, labour economics, international finance, etc.).

Students choosing to register in traditional format sections should:

- a) Be comfortable with the material taught in ECON 326, and familiar with econometric software (STATA or R).
- b) Be interested in the theme of the section, and expect to conduct a project in that field of economics.
- c) Be prepared to work independently, with occasional guidance from the instructor.

Group learning sections

Starting this year, the VSE is introducing group learning sections of ECON 490. These will be different from the traditional format sections in the following aspects:

- a) There will be a more thorough review of econometric concepts and how to use statistical software at the beginning of the course.
- b) Students will develop their research projects in groups of up to 4, and will meet with the instructor as a group. The instructor will provide both research direction and guidance on groupwork dynamics.

Group learning sections will have higher enrolments than traditional ones. However, their structure will allow the instructor to spend twice as much time meeting with a given group than would normally be available to an individual student in traditional format sections.

Students who feel they need a stronger refresher of the concepts taught in ECON 326, who are not comfortable with independent research, or who would like to build up their teamwork skills should strongly consider registering in a group learning section.

At this time, all sections of Econ 490 in Term 1 will be held online (web-oriented course).