Topics Labor Economics Seminar

I structured the seminar topics into 2 areas. Each area contains a set of related topics so we can discuss multiple aspects of a broad topic in the seminar. The structure fosters interaction and discussion (it worked nicely last semester).

**Topic Area 1: Reform of the Welfare State and the Labor Market**

Several industrialized countries have fundamentally transformed their welfare state provisions over the past two decades. Among those are the United States, the United Kingdom, Sweden and Germany. Many other countries have been discussing or planning similar reforms. In this topic area, we want to study these welfare reforms, the economic reasons for it and its empirical consequences.

**Topic A: The Hartz IV Reform in Germany**

We will start looking at the most important welfare reform in Germany known as the “Hartz IV Reform”.


**Topic B: The 1996 Welfare Reform in the United States and Employment**

The United States has dramatically changed its provisions for welfare payments during the 1990s.


**Topic C: Time Limits in the US 1996 Welfare Reform**

One of the novel features of the new welfare system in the United States is the introduction of time limits. Hence, welfare recipients can only receive welfare payments for a certain amount of time. Many states even restrict the total number of years a person can receive welfare over her lifetime.


**Topic D: The US Welfare Reform and its Effects on Families**
What other effects did welfare reform have on marital stability, living arrangements and children?


**Topic E: The Role of Sanctions for Benefit Receipt (of Unemployed and Welfare Recipients)**


**Topic F: Active Labor Market Programs in Europe: do they work?**

A complementary policy to welfare payments is to train the unemployed and make them “fit” for the regular labor market. This topic explores whether public training programs work.


**Topic Area 2: Fertility, Public Policy and the Labor Market**

In many developed countries, and Germany in particular, fertility rates are below replacement. That implies that populations are shrinking over time which will have dramatic effects for the public pension system. In this topic area, we want to study some aspects of fertility and how fertility decisions are influenced (if so) by economic factors and public policies.

General references:


**Topic A: Economic theory of fertility and the Quantity and the Quality of Children**


**Topic B: Employment and Fertility**

How does employment or job loss affect fertility behavior? From a theoretical point of view, the answer is ambiguous which is why this is an interesting empirical question.


**Topic C: The Effect of Parental Leave Policies on Employment and Wages**


**Topic D: Childbearing and Labor Market Careers**


**Topic E: The Family Wage Gap**

Women with children earn less than women without children. This topic first discusses the leading explanations for the “family wage gap” and then traces the size of this wage penalty and how it changes over time using empirical studies.


**Topic F: Human Capital Investment and Fertility**

More educated women have typically fewer children than less educated women. This topic will analyze how to explain this phenomenon.


**Topic G: Fertility in East Germany after Unification**

East Germany experienced pronounced changes in its fertility rates after unification in 1990. This topic will trace these changes in the data. How has fertility changed over time? Which groups of women have experienced the largest changes in fertility? How do the changes compare to West Germany? How could be possible explain these changes?


Organizational Matters

- Once you have chosen your topic, email your student id, name and most preferred and second most preferred topic to Frau Morawa (sabine.morawa@awi.uni-heidelberg.de).

- The organizational meeting of the course will be held on **Tuesday, May 8 2012 (3-5 pm)**. Note: this is different from the announced date (Monday). I had to move my lecture to Monday so we need to switch to Tuesday instead. Let Frau Morawa know if there is a problem with the date of the organizational meeting.

- The default language of the seminar is English. However, if all participants feel comfortable in German and there is a majority of participants with a preference for German, we can also hold the seminar in German. We will discuss that at the organizational meeting as well.

- In the organizational meeting, I will talk for an hour or so about how to write an academic paper and also make some remarks about finding your own research questions. I will focus on empirical research (or a combination of theory and empirical research) because that is my own area of research.

- We will also discuss the requirements and what you need to do until the seminar.

- If you want to get started, read the suggested references and further literature you might find in those references or from other sources.

- Write up a one-page concept on what your question is, the main theoretical arguments, some main results you expect or learned about and what open questions is + a list of references.

- Every one of you should come to my office hours at least once to discuss the structure and arguments of your concept and the next steps.

- Some good general references where you will find lots of useful background information and further references are:

  For help with econometrics, use one of your favorite undergraduate textbooks.