

**WORKSHOP AND LECTURE SERIES  
IN LAW AND ECONOMICS**

**SYLLABUS  
(SPRING 2025)**

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**OFFICE HOURS:**                   after the class or by appointment

**CLASS DATES:**                   March: 11, 12, 18, 19, 25, 26;  
  April: 8, 9;  
  May: 13, 20, 21, 27;  
  June: 3, 4.

For the exact times and locations see the schedule at:  
<https://laweconbusiness.ethz.ch/teaching/lawecon/schedule.html>.

## **I. COURSE CONTENT**

Students registered for the course attend 14 lectures given by 8 different speakers from various universities. Each lecture is based either on a paper authored by the speaker (some of them still unpublished) or related to the speaker's overall research interests.

Topics of all the talks lie at the intersection of social sciences and law. The speakers approach legal problems using empirical or quantitative methods drawn from economics, psychology and other social sciences.

Participants are encouraged to actively take part in the discussions during the meetings, asking questions and making comments.

Around 14 days before each lecture, the paper underlying the lecture is posted on the course webpage or sent to the students by email. For some of the talks, the paper will not be available (then the information will appear on the course webpage).

You can find more information on the course in an introductory video here:  
<https://lawecon.ethz.ch/teaching/lawecon.html>.

## II. COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND ASSIGNMENTS

### 1. Attendance

There are **14 lectures**. **All students** are required to attend **at least 9** of them (and sign an attendance list, which circulates during the talks).

### 2. Comments/Reaction papers

A reaction paper is a comment on someone's paper. You can find information on how to write a reaction paper below.

Every student needs to write at least one reaction paper. The deadline for submitting it is noon on the day of the respective lecture. Keep in mind that for some lectures there won't be a paper available before and you won't be able to write a comment on it! However, for each speaker, at least one paper should be available.

Students who send two comments receive the better of the two grades (you cannot submit more than two papers!).

**ETH and Sankt Gallen students:** the grade from the reaction paper is the final grade from the course. Students from ETH Zurich submit their works via Moodle. Students from University of St. Gallen should send their works to [desiree.klingler@unisg.ch](mailto:desiree.klingler@unisg.ch).

**UZH students:** the grade from the reaction paper constitutes 80% of the final grade (the remaining 20% contributed by questions). Students from University of Zurich submit the reaction papers via OLAT.

### 3. Questions

**ETH and Sankt Gallen students:** students are required to send a question on at least 3 different papers (so at least 3 questions in general). The questions should be submitted to Moodle (ETH students) or to [desiree.klingler@unisg.ch](mailto:desiree.klingler@unisg.ch) (St. Gallen) until noon on the day of the respective lecture. Submitting these questions is a prerequisite to passing this class.

**UZH students:** students should send 3 questions on 4 papers (a total of 12). The questions should be submitted to OLAT until noon on the day of the respective lecture. For UZH students, the three best questions will contribute 20% of their grade. Still, submitting the questions is a prerequisite to passing the class (i.e. failing to pass either the reaction paper or the questions means failing the whole module!).

Students are encouraged to ask the questions during the talks. Once again, not for every lecture a paper will be available, so do not hesitate too long!

### 4. ECTS

Students from **ETH Zurich** receive **2 ECTS** for this course, students from **University of Zurich** – **6 ECTS**, and students from **University of St. Gallen** - **4 ECTS**.

## 5. Discussion

You are strongly encouraged to ask questions and to take part in the discussion. This way you will have a much better learning experience!

### III. GUIDELINES FOR THE REACTION PAPER

You are asked to write a “reaction paper,” *as if you were a peer or colleague of the author*. You will be expected to offer not only criticisms, but also suggestions of how those criticisms relate to the overall project and how they may be corrected (or why they cannot be corrected). In other words, we expect you to not only to act like students, but to act like colleagues or collaborators in scholarship.

Some of the assigned reading will have not been published. This means that some papers may be unpolished, incomplete, and may not even make perfect sense. That makes reading the papers harder work than normal. However, it allows you the opportunity to offer constructive criticisms of the works in progress.

Because most of you have not done this before, here are some tips on how to be a great colleague when writing a reaction paper:

- 1) Remember that the biggest compliment you can give a scholar is to seriously (and critically) engage with their work. Of course, everyone loves to hear that their work is great. But for serious scholars, it is better to hear how it succeeds, how it does not, and how it might be improved. As a former colleague of mine said, “Friends don’t let friends write bad papers.” Help them write good papers.
- 2) Your stance should be one of helpful criticism. Do not simply say that some aspect of the paper does not work. Explain **how** it does not work, and how it might be improved.
- 3) Try to give detailed and specific feedback, rather than general criticisms that can be made of any paper. A statement like “I do not think that these negative results on the effect of the policy XX in organization YY are generalizable because most organizations are different” is always true, and would not generate a good discussion. Phrasing your criticism slightly differently, for example, by stating “I do not think that these negative results on XX are generalizable. This is because the study was conducted with data on people working in YY. There might be a selection of people selecting into this job because of characteristic ZZ. This characteristic however affects how one react to policy XX because of...” shows greater insight and would lead to a more fruitful discussion. It is fine to express a personal opinion, but make sure that you substantiate your position by explaining the reasoning that led you to draw these conclusions. Also, be specific: Imagine the author(s) are going to read you discussion paper. Ideally, they should be able to take away some insights into how they could improve the paper, which aspects they should stress as being really compelling or what to improve if they had the possibility to re-do everything or write a follow-up paper.

- 4) It is generally a good idea to start with a short summary of about **one** paragraph of the paper so that a reader of your reaction is (re-)introduced to the target paper. In order to be concise, you have to leave some details out. Writing this paragraph will help you to emphasize the most important points from the paper for your reaction. It lays the **foundation** for the criticisms or suggestions that you will make.
- 5) There are many different types of critiques that can be applied to papers. Here are some of the most common and helpful types:
- *Critiques focusing on a paper's premises.* What are the necessary premises? Are they valid? Are the premises valid, but unnecessary? Do the steps in the paper flow from the premises?
  - *Additional arguments, tests, or research that would support the paper's conclusion.* Is there a missing step that could be resolved by answering a particular question? Would a different specification close off an alternative explanation?
  - *Critiques of the conclusion's generalizability.* For empirical papers, especially experimental ones: It is (almost) always right to question the generalizability of results. Try to be constructive: What are the specific factors you think do not necessarily generalize to other settings and which are important? If you had the chance to make one or two follow-up papers, what would you investigate if you could only change one or two things at a time? How would you do so and why would you choose these aspects?
  - *Assessing the mechanism.* Many empirical papers want to demonstrate a particular causal effect, or lack thereof (e.g. state regulations have no effect on the rate of prescription of a drug). If your paper is one of those, examine whether the findings which the authors present in favor of that causal mechanism can be really attributed to it or whether there are alternative, competing explanations.
  - *Elaboration of the paper's success.* If you think the authors solved a critical issue very well, that is definitely something that should be addressed in the discussion paper. Again, make sure that you substantiate such a claim by saying why it is a crucial issue they successfully address and why it is not trivial to do so. It is important to avoid merely summarizing the target paper; if you think the paper's argument is right, try to elaborate some way in which the conclusions could extend even further, or defend how a plausible counterargument or critique is not actually successful.
  - *Next steps.* Your reaction paper can go further and suggest what should be done next. What data should be collected as a next step? How would a follow-up experiment, which examines a specific channel in more detail look like? How should a theory be expanded in order to account for hitherto unaccounted or

neglected findings? Again, speculation is fine as long as there as one can see the reasoning behind it.

- *Legal implications.* If you are a law student, your paper can, e.g., work out implications for legal doctrine or legal theory, discuss a related court case, and/or challenge the analysis.

6) Some Do's and Don'ts:

- Don't
  - Write, "I found this interesting, can you say more about it?"
  - Ask for enormous expansions of the paper.
  - Repeat your point multiple times to fill space.
  - Use extraneous examples that take up all your space.
  - Provide *only* summary of the paper.
- Do
  - Write clearly.
  - Be creative.
  - Try to comment on the central claims of the paper rather than fussing around the edges. It is ok to ask for another sensitivity test or one more proof, but please do not make your whole reaction paper into a list of minor extras that you would like to see incorporated into the paper.
  - Feel free to bring in any special knowledge you have.
  - Feel free to make suggestions for addressing papers that have not been cited by the author.
  - Show original thinking: It is better to mention a few (or even just one) points and provide some carefully considered reasoning than just collecting an array of loose ideas.
  - If you do not have ideas or feel unsure: Ask a fellow student (either from this or another course). If you start a conversation about the paper, you will be forced to articulate your thoughts and to summarize the paper clearly and concisely, and in return you will get some immediate feedback from the person that you are talking to. All of this can be very helpful in writing a good discussion paper.

7) Finally, a note about the tone of the reaction paper. Be direct and clear. Do not be rude. It is not rude to be direct and clear, but it is rude to be sarcastic, make personal attacks, or assume a tone of superiority. We know you will not do that.