Syllabus
Ph.D. Seminar I (90-901)
Fall, 2015

Class Meetings: Hamburg Hall 2110     Monday & Wednesday 9 - 10:20 am

Heinz College Seminars: Hamburg Hall 2053    Mondays 12:00 - 1:20 pm

Instructor:     Course Assistant:
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Mission: This seminar is intended for all first-year PhD students in the Heinz College to orient them to the research process, which is quite different from most of their prior classroom experiences. We achieve this initially by immersion in diverse faculty members’ research, and then move the students into thinking about their own research – very possibly initially as an extension of some faculty member’s research – by preparing and presenting a brief research proposal to be critiqued by your colleagues and then revised as you see fit to take account of those critiques.

Approach: The principal mode of the initial learning experience is through interaction with various individual faculty members who will be invited to present a research paper to the seminar. In those presentations, the presenters will be asked to indicate how they came upon the research question addressed in the paper, how they formulated their approach to the question, to indicate some of the blind alleys they pursued, and how they worked to strengthen their findings beyond their initial observations. These presentations are also intended to expose students to the very diverse members of the Heinz School faculty so that they can see whose research and research approaches interest them.

The seminar will also include presentations by the PhD III’s (the participants in this seminar last year) on the first draft of their required First Research Paper. In addition, students will be expected to attend the regular Heinz College seminars (usually on Monday, 12:00-1:20).

In the second phase of the course, students will be expected to emerge with a brief research proposal, potentially leading to their First Research Paper. This proposal is likely to be an extension to a paper prepared by a faculty member. In this context, we recognize that all research papers can be seen as “research in progress,” with extensions always possible. That will be followed by the development of a proposal for a possible First Research Paper. The first pass at that will be a brief 5-15-page formal proposal followed by a brief oral presentation for feedback from the class. In developing that proposal, you should identify a worthwhile research question, and that your proposed
effort is tractable in terms of data availability and analytic complexity that you can handle.

To become a successful researcher you must be able to write papers and deliver seminars. The Heinz School's Ph.D. program is designed to push you into developing these skills. Within the next two academic years, you must formally finish and present a finished research paper to the faculty. The Ph.D. seminar is intended to move you forward in meeting this challenge. One stepping-stone before that formal presentation to the faculty is a presentation to the Ph.D. seminar in the fall of the second year of the program.

An important part of the experience in learning how to do research is participation in research seminars where you can observe – and observe critically – how others have pursued and present their research. Thus, you are encouraged to participate in the seminars presented by the more senior PhD students in their First and Second Research Papers and dissertation proposals and defenses. In particular, you are strongly encouraged to participate in the faculty research seminars, which are usually presented – accompanied by the ever-present pizza - on Mondays at 12:00-1:30.

In addition to these activities related to research, we will also take various opportunities to discuss program requirements and future career opportunities. Toward the end of the semester, we will discuss the educational plan you are expected to develop

Grading is based on the richness and fullness of your participation in the seminar based on your interaction with the various faculty and student presenters and on the quality of the oral and written presentations of your research proposal.