

MSc Seminar
Behavioral, Organizational, and Labor Economics
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Content

This seminar introduces students to state-of-the-art research in behavioral, organizational, and labor economics. It builds on a growing body of research in economics and psychology showing that individual behavior is shaped not only by economic incentives and constraints, but also by psychological factors and limitations in self-control, cognition, and attention.

Students independently and critically analyze research questions at the intersection of behavioral economics, organizational economics, and labor economics. The seminar covers a broad range of topics, highlighting how behavioral insights help explain behavior in real-world settings such as organizations, labor markets, consumer decision-making, and public policy. Depending on the chosen topic, papers may be more behaviorally focused, more closely linked to organizational or labor economics, or combine elements of all three fields.

Examples of research topics and papers from previous semesters include:

- Biased beliefs and unemployment duration
- Promotions and incentives
- Experimental evidence on founders' reactions to information shocks
- Self-image concerns and charitable giving
- Misperceptions and support for climate action
- Heuristics and biases in real-estate markets
- Experiments on perception and error detection in AI- versus human-generated texts

Seminar Project

Students are expected to actively engage with existing research and work with data or experimental designs. The seminar project can take two different forms.

- Option 1: Students replicate and extend an existing empirical paper
- Option 2: Students develop an own experiment and conduct a pilot study on selected research questions.

The seminar is designed to prepare students for independent research and provides an excellent foundation for a subsequent MSc thesis.

Prerequisites

Students should have a sound knowledge of microeconomics and empirical methods. Students will also benefit from previous course work on behavioral economics and labor economics, although no specific previous knowledge is required.

Course Procedures and Timeline

- **Block 1: Introduction.** The seminar starts with an introductory meeting in the first week of the semester and 1-2 lectures in the first two weeks of the semester. In the lectures, we will discuss possible topics for the seminar papers and provide an overview of the required theoretical and empirical methods.
- **Block 2: Writing Period.** Students work independently on their seminar paper. Individual appointments for consultation will be available.
- **Block 3: Seminar Presentations.** The seminar concludes with a workshop (block seminar) where students present their seminar projects. Each student is expected to actively participate in the discussion of all presentations. Attendance of the full workshop is mandatory. The planned date for the workshop is 1-2 weeks after the paper submission.

Examination and Grading

Grading is based on the seminar paper (max. 15 pages) and the workshop presentation (approx. 20 minutes), weighted 3:2 (paper 60%, presentation 40%).

Course Topics and Preliminary Reading List

Seminar topics will be assigned in the first week of the semester. The following overview allows you to familiarize yourself with possible topics. This list of topics is tentative and subject to changes:

Option 1: replication & extension of an existing empirical study

- **Actual and perceived support for climate action:** Andre, P., Boneva, T., Chopra, F. et al. (2024) ‘Globally representative evidence on the actual and perceived support for climate action’, *Nature Climate Change*, 14, pp. 253–259. doi:10.1038/s41558-024-01925-3.
- **How do default specifications affect charitable giving:** Altmann, S., Falk, A., Heidhues, P., Jayaraman, R. and Teirlinck, M. (2019) ‘Defaults and donations: Evidence from a field experiment’, *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 101(5), pp. 808–826. doi:10.1162/rest_a_00774.
- **Promotions as Workplace Incentives?** Altmann, S., Falk, A. and Wibrals, M. (2012) ‘Promotions and incentives: The case of multistage elimination tournaments’, *Journal of Labor Economics*, 30(1), pp. 149–174. doi:10.1086/662130.
- **Is wage equality (un)fair?** Abeler, J., Altmann, S., Kube, S. and Wibrals, M. (2010) ‘Gift exchange and workers’ fairness concerns: When equality is unfair’, *Journal of*

the European Economic Association, 8(6), pp. 1299–1324. doi:10.1111/j.1542-4774.2010.tb00556.x.

Option 2: Own experimental design + pilot study

Possible Research Questions:

- Does signing a pledge increase timely task completion?
- How do differences in commuting time and wages affect (stated) job choice?
- How to beliefs about others' behavior affect support for climate action?
- Does a gendered label change individuals' willingness-to-pay for the same product?
- How does knowledge about a “gender price gap” affect perceived fairness and purchase intent?

...or an own question that you can study, e.g., in your student job (in this case: contact us!)