The main purposes of this micro-economic policy seminar (MEPS) are to expose PhD students to policy-relevant empirical microeconomics and to enable them to produce a paper focused on a particular topic within this area. Students will participate in discussions of key articles, each presented by a student in the group, a faculty member, or an outside speaker. A major emphasis will be placed on important methods and literature in the field of policy and program evaluation, as understood by and used by economists. The emphasis will be on how the methods can be used for estimating causal effects of policies, not on the statistical underpinnings of the techniques. Students will learn many examples of empirical micro-economic research on public policies, and they will delve deeply into one in which they have particular interest.

In addition, MEPS has several secondary purposes:

- Develop presentation and discussion skills that are important for participating in academic and policy communities.
- Provide opportunities for graduate students to present their own research, including early-stage ideas and brainstorming.
- Develop a collegial group of students with similar interests who provide intellectual and moral support to each other through the difficult process of completing dissertations and entering professional life.

The MEPS will meet weekly during the fall semester. After an initial organizational meeting in August, class meetings will include both student presentations and outside speakers drawn from the large number of empirical micro-economists in the DC region. Most of the classes towards the end of the semester will be spent on students presenting the results from their individual projects.

Students will be expected to participate actively whether the presenter is another student or an outside speaker. The other main requirement for course credit is a paper, which can take one of three forms:

1. Research paper in any area of empirical microeconomics. This option is most appropriate for advanced PhD students who already have a clear research question in mind and who have
sufficient previous training in econometrics and economic theory; it could be used to explore a dissertation topic or to develop and draft a dissertation chapter.

2. Replication project based on a paper from a list to be provided (or another paper with the instructor’s permission). This style of paper is appropriate for students with some knowledge of methods but no clear research question already chosen before the beginning of the semester. The replication should not be “pure” but rather involve some modification of the method (or data) that can be motivated as interesting either because it checks the robustness of the original finding or extends the analysis to a new context from which there is potential for new understanding.

3. Review, not of “literature,” but of the state of knowledge on a particular question in empirical microeconomics. Particular emphasis would be placed on the limits or our current knowledge on the question. This option could be used by beginning PhD students; it is discouraged for more advanced students.

In each case, the paper should be planned well in advance by a prospectus of 2-3 pages that precisely defines the question, explains why it’s interesting and important from both the policy and the scholarly points of view, and describes the methods to be used in answering the question. For the research paper and replication options (1 and 2), the description of methods should include the specific data set and basic variables to be analyzed, and the methods to be used. Replication prospectuses should also describe the modification proposed to the original study. Prospectuses of reviews (option 3) should include a list of key articles from which the answer to “what do we know about this question” will be drawn. In all cases, the description of plans in the prospectus may be tentative, subject to amendment. The prospectus is tentatively due September 23, and it will be presented in class, for general discussion.

**Grading:**
Prospectus: 10%
Final paper: 70%
Quality of contributions to class discussions: 20%

If class size permits, we may also have each student make a presentation summarizing a paper in the literature (from a list to be provided or by agreement with the instructor).

The prospectus is tentatively due September 20, and it will be presented in class, for general discussion, in the following week or two. The final paper, which will be presented in class in October and November, is due December 5.

**Pre-requisites:** Students should have taken PUBP720 (micro-economics) and PUBP804 (multivariate statistics), or have equivalent background/knowledge.