
Final Project Guidelines

The Final Project

This final project is a chance for you to do original research related to the mobility and inequality topics we have covered in class. The project will require you to synthesize the theoretical concepts, empirical techniques and historical context covered in class, drawing on all of these elements in a study of Williamsburg or Virginia's economic history. You may investigate any aspect of mobility or inequality that interests you. The goal of your final project is to identify and explain an interesting stylized fact about historical mobility or inequality patterns in the local area. This stylized fact could pertain to changes in mobility rates over time, income or wealth gaps between groups, residential segregation patterns, or something else. You may also want to consider how major historical events or policy shifts changed local mobility and inequality patterns. Your final project will consist of two distinct components: a research paper written for an audience of academic economists and a policy memo written for the general public and policy makers.

The Research Paper

Your research paper should seek to identify and explain an interesting stylized fact about historical mobility or inequality patterns in the Williamsburg or Virginia area or identify the impact of a historical event or policy change on local mobility and inequality. You must present original empirical work. This includes both generating, presenting and interpreting summary statistics about mobility or inequality and using regression analysis to estimate empirical relationships between mobility or inequality and other variables of interest. You are encouraged to take advantage of the datasets on Williamsburg families and neighborhoods generated by you and your classmates. However, you are also encouraged to incorporate other data into your analysis and can base your analysis entirely on other data sources rather than the class datasets.

A strong research paper will typically contain the following components (deviations from these components may make sense depending on the nature of your paper):

- An introduction establishing the question you are attempting to answer, providing context for why that question is important, and providing a broad overview of the paper's methods and results.
- A review of the relevant literature on your topic. This review should focus primarily on the academic literature (peer-reviewed journal articles and academic press books).

Throughout the literature review, you should tie your discussion of the literature directly to your research question and your empirical approach.

- A description of your data and methods. This section should discuss the general empirical approach to be taken, the construction of the data, discussion of any limitations of the data, and general summary statistics of the data.
- A presentation of your empirical analysis. This will include both presenting results using clear figures and tables and interpreting those results. The interpretation should include an assessment of how the results do or do not support your thesis. The discussion of your results should also identify shortcomings such as potential issues of bias or external validity.
- A conclusion that summarizes the key findings, places your results in the broader literature, and offers suggestions for future research directions.

Your paper should be approximately 15 double-spaced pages, inclusive of tables, figures and references. This page limit is meant to be a rough guide. If you can write an effective research paper that is slightly shorter, do not feel the need to stretch out the paper to 15 pages. Similarly, if your paper would be much stronger by being a page or two longer, you can exceed the page limit. However, when deviating from the 15-page guideline, be careful to consider whether the deviation is truly leading to a better paper.

Be certain to properly cite all references and data sources. I recommend using the APA reference style for both inline references and your bibliography. A useful guide to the APA style can be found [here](#). You may also want to have access to a pocket guide along the lines of Perrin (2011).

The Policy Memo

The policy memo is a short document that communicates your key findings to a general audience without specialized knowledge of economics or the local area. Your memo should convey the main results of your research paper and discuss the policy implications of your findings in a way that is accessible to policy makers, leaders of nonprofit organizations, members of the media and other interested parties. A well crafted memo will typically include the following (once again, deviations from these may be warranted depending on the nature of your research paper):

- A succinct statement of the policy issue your research relates to.
- A concise summary of your research methodology and your main findings.
- Discussion of the importance of your findings for government policies or nonprofit activities.
- Recommendations for policy changes or redirection of nonprofit efforts.

Your policy memo should be two double-spaced pages and include at least one figure or table based on your research. Unlike the research paper, this is a strict page limit. Policy memos such as these often need to be of a specific length to be effective. One of the key challenges of writing a policy memo is clearly and concisely conveying the appropriate amount of information. Your memo must not exceed two pages (although it is fine if the second page is not a full page).

For the policy memo, it is still essential to properly cite any studies you reference. Once again, I would recommend using the APA citation style. However, your policy memo should have far fewer citations overall given the limited amount of space you have to work with. Most of that space should be used to focus on your findings and recommendations, not the previous literature.

Technical Details

Both the research paper and policy memo are due at **5pm on April 29, 2019**. You will receive a single overall grade for the paper and policy memo out of 20 points. Late assignments will incur a grade penalty of one point that increases by one point after every 24 hours. So papers turned in after 5pm on the 29th but before 5pm on the 30th will receive a one point deduction, papers turned in after 5pm on the 30th but before 5pm on May 1st will receive a two point deduction, and so on.

The research paper and policy memo should be submitted by email to me (jman@wm.edu) as two separate PDF attachments. All figures and tables should be incorporated into the documents, they should not be sent as separate files. Failure to follow these submission guidelines will lower your project grade. You will receive an email from me confirming receipt of your paper and memo.

A Few Resources

Data and Analysis

You will have access to the class-generated datasets including the intergenerational dataset of Williamsburg families and the dataset of properties from Williamsburg neighborhoods. These are good starting points and I encourage you to consider using them (these are truly novel datasets, after all, never before used in academic research). However, there are several other excellent resources to keep in mind. Here is a short, and certainly not exhaustive, list:

- [Google Scholar](#) - This is hands down the easiest way to search for scholarly work on your topic of interest. Nearly every academic article ever published will pop up in Google Scholar search results. Furthermore, Google Scholar has several very useful features. You can quickly see all of the articles that cite a particularly relevant article you found. You can quickly find other articles by the same author. You can get links to multiple

versions of the article, including links to access the article through William & Mary's library site. You can also quickly copy and paste the bibliographic information for an article (you will really appreciate this feature when constructing your bibliography).

- [Google Books](#) - As the name suggests, this is Google's book search engine. You can certainly use it to search the contents of various academic books. However, in the context of economic history research, it is actually far more valuable for finding government publications and other historical data sources that have been digitized by Google. These scanned historical documents often present untapped sources of incredibly detailed data. Often the historical documents are available as free PDF documents. To exploit Google Book's wealth of historical documents, be certain to use the filters to limit the publication years to your historical time frame.
- [Ancestry Library Edition](#) - After the data project, you are all familiar with Ancestry as a source for micro-level historical data. The data project focused on federal census records. However, there are many other useful individual-level data sources on Ancestry including birth records, death records, and ship manifests.
- [Integrated Public Use Microdata Series \(IPUMS\)](#) - IPUMS provides an incredibly easy to use way to get data extracts of individual-level data from historical censuses both for the United States and other countries. Variables are cleaned, coded and harmonized across census years. IPUMS also has extensive historical GIS data and a wide range of modern datasets available for download.
- [Swem Research Librarians](#) - Many students often overlook the help that Swem can provide. In addition to extensive research resources in the form of books and databases, Swem also has research librarians who can provide invaluable guidance for your project.
- [Swem Special Collections](#) - The Swem Special Collections contain a wide range of amazing historical documents. Much of the collection is devoted to historical documents related to the College and the surrounding area. Given that you are researching historical mobility and inequality patterns in Williamsburg or Virginia more generally, the Special Collections provide a source of unique and fascinating historical sources.

Writing an Economics Research Paper

First and foremost, pay attention to the structure and style of the academic articles we have read in class. This will give you a decent starting point for thinking about how to approach your research paper (but should not be a guide for your policy memo). In addition, there are a handful of useful guides for both writing an economics research paper generally and for designing graphs and tables for maximum effectiveness in your paper. Here are just a few to peruse:

- McCloskey, D. (1985). Economical writing. *Economic Inquiry*, 23(2), 187–222

- Thomson, W. (2001). *A Guide for the Young Economist*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press
- Schwabish, J. A. (2014). An economist's guide to visualizing data. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 28(1), 209–34
- Tufte, E., & Graves-Morris, P. (2014). *The visual display of quantitative information.; 1983*. Cheshire, CT: Graphics Press

References

McCloskey, D. (1985). Economical writing. *Economic Inquiry*, 23(2), 187–222.

Perrin, R. (2011). *Pocket guide to APA style*. Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning.

Schwabish, J. A. (2014). An economist's guide to visualizing data. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 28(1), 209–34.

Thomson, W. (2001). *A Guide for the Young Economist*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Tufte, E., & Graves-Morris, P. (2014). *The visual display of quantitative information.; 1983*. Cheshire, CT: Graphics Press.