

Thesis Guidelines

Prof. Ronak Jain

1. Application Procedure

1.1 How to Apply

If you are interested in writing a thesis under my supervision in **Behavioral Development Economics or Education**, please follow the steps below:

1. **Check course requirements** (see next subsection) and expectations (next section)
2. **Send an email** to me with the following:
 - Your **CV**
 - An **up-to-date transcript**
 - In the body of the email, **please clearly state**:
 - (i) the topic(s) or research question(s) you are interested in,
 - (ii) your possible start date, and
 - (iii) which of the required courses you have completed
3. **Topic guidance**: You are welcome to propose your own topic if it fits within the field of behavioral, development and education economics. Or if your research interests match, I can suggest possible topics that you could explore and/or work on within existing projects (depending on availability) as well. If the latter is the case, please indicate this in your application.
4. **Reply**: If you follow these steps, I will reply within **two weeks**, informing you about my capacity and, if relevant, asking clarifying questions.

1.2 Course Requirements:

- **MA students:**
You must have completed:
 - A course in **econometrics or causal inference**, and
 - At least one course or evidence of familiarity in behavioral economics, development economics, experimental methods or education.
- **BA students:**
You must have taken:
 - A course in **causal inference or econometrics** (e.g., Intermediate Econometrics), and
 - Have some familiarity in behavioral economics, development economics, experimental methods or education.

2 Expectations

2.1 A strong thesis will demonstrate:

1. **Focus** – Clear alignment with the stated research question.
2. **Literature Mastery** – Understanding of the most relevant contributions in behavioral and development economics.
3. **Methodological Rigor** – Correct empirical analysis.
4. **Clarity of Communication** – Precise, professional writing with logical flow.
5. **Policy Relevance** – Reflection on how the findings matter for development contexts.

2.2 BA Thesis

The BA thesis should demonstrate that a student can:

1. Formulate a **clear, well-defined research question**.
2. Summarize and critically discuss the **relevant literature**.
3. Apply **empirical methods correctly** (e.g., regression analysis, descriptive data analysis) or carefully design and discuss a feasible experiment design.
4. Interpret results logically and in context, even if based on secondary data or smaller-scale analysis.
5. Write clearly and professionally.

Emphasis is on showing understanding, applying taught methods, and building an argument.

2.3 MA Thesis

The MA thesis should demonstrate that a student can:

1. Formulate an **original and relevant research question**
2. Situate the question in **the literature**, showing deeper mastery of key contributions.
3. Apply **advanced empirical methods** rigorously (e.g., causal inference, experiments, or mixed methods).
4. Produce **independent empirical analysis or experimental design proposal**, with critical discussion of identification, robustness, and limitations.
5. Reflect on the **policy relevance** of findings.

Emphasis is on independent research contribution, methodological rigor, and originality.

4 Steps Before Supervision is Confirmed

Before I formally agree to supervise your thesis, the following steps must take place:

1. **Check Course Requirements and Guidance on topics** in Section 1
2. **Submit Application Email with** CV, transcript, preferred topic(s), start date, and courses taken.
3. **Preliminary Screening:** I will check your background knowledge, course preparation, and whether your suggested topic fits within my research expertise. If so, you may be asked to submit a brief note (1 page max) outlining:
 - Brief motivation for your proposed research question(s): Why it is interesting in a behavioral/development/education context?
 - Which data or methods you envision using? Which kind of theses do you envision writing (empirical, experimental design, mixed methods)
4. **Initial Meeting and Decision**
 - We may hold a short meeting (in person or online) to discuss your motivation note, clarify expectations, and ensure the topic is feasible within a BA/MA thesis to see if I can supervise.
5. **Later Check-Ins**
 - During our initial meeting, we will discuss a timeline for milestones and meetings.
 - Structure and formatting guidelines are detailed in the next two sections.

5 Structure of the Thesis

Your thesis should resemble a **working paper in economics**, written with the same academic rigor. It must be in English and follow the style of empirical economics research papers. The following IZA discussion paper No. 16276 “Writing Tips for Crafting Effective Economics Research Papers – 2023-2024 Edition” by Plamen Nikolov is a useful guide.

Core Elements

1. Abstract (≤150 words)

- Concise summary of research question, main method, and key findings.

2. Introduction

- **Motivation:** Why does this question matter in a development/behavioral context?
- **Research Question:** Stated clearly and precisely.
- **Contribution to Literature:** How does your work relate to and extend prior research?
- **Main Findings:** Your answer to the research question.
- **Methods and Data:** Short overview of datasets, surveys, experiments, or models used.
- **Policy Implications:** What do your findings mean for real-world decision-making?

3. Main Body

The structure will vary by project type:

- **Experimental Thesis:** context, intervention or design proposal, randomization/assignment, results, and robustness checks.
- **Empirical Thesis:** data, identification strategy, econometric approach, results, robustness.
- **Qualitative/Mixed-Methods Thesis:** framework, methodology, coding strategy, evidence, synthesis.

4. Conclusion

- Summarize main findings.
- Note limitations of your work.
- Suggest directions for future research.

5. References

- Must be complete, consistent, and in a standard citation format (e.g., APA or Chicago).
- Every paper cited in the text must appear in the bibliography.

6. Appendices (if applicable)

- Supplementary tables, robustness checks, survey instruments, experimental scripts, or derivations.

7. Declaration of Authorship & AI Use

- Mandatory statement on authorship and transparency in the use of AI tools.

6 Formal Layout

- Font: 12 pt Times New Roman (or similar)
- Line spacing: 1.5
- Margins: 1.5 inches on all sides
- Maximum length: **25 pages** (including main tables and figures, excluding appendices)
- Writing style: Clear, precise, professional