

**Course Code:** ECON 5101 L1 Spring 2026

**Course Title:** Econometric Thinking for Business Strategists

**Instructor:** Prof. Dean HE, Ph.D.

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**Office:** LSK 5061B

**Class Time:** 1:30PM to 4:50pm Wednesdays (Feb 4, 11, 25, Mar 4, 11, 18, 25, Apr 1)

**Meeting Location:** MIL13101 (Rm 1, 31/F, Tower 1,Millennity)

## COURSE OVERVIEW

This course introduces the art and science of applying and understanding econometric models in the analysis of business strategy. It aims to equip business leaders and strategists to understand and interpret econometric analysis in business strategy analysis, and to provide them with an understanding of three widely used techniques in modern business econometrics: randomized control trials, regression discontinuity, and differences-in-differences.

Data analysis in economics, or “econometrics” as it is called by practitioners, has moved away from mathematical complexity and towards simpler tools that are accessible to businesses and can be applied easily to big data. After learning how these tools provide superior analytical results than traditional regression techniques in making inferences about the real world, business strategists will gain the practical knowledge to wield them successfully and make better business strategy decisions with real business data.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES / LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Prepare students become skeptical about claims of cause & effect in business decision makings, make them realize when there are flaws in causal claims of business strategy and communicate specific reasons to be doubtful
- Prepare students understand why experimentation is the best method for solving the causal-inference problem in business strategy making and why randomization is key to experimentation, although it is costly and can be very unrealistic
- Prepare students understand when “natural” experiments become good substitutes and enable students be able to describe examples of successful experiments, why we feel confident in the results and the limits to what we learn from any experiment
- Prepare students able to design, pilot, and pitch your own experimental analysis with the primary focus on strategical thinking and experimental design, without going into the detailed math, spreadsheets or coding.

## COURSE MATERIALS

### (A) RECOMMENDED READING

- Thomke, S. H. (2020). *Experimentation works: The surprising power of business experiments*. Harvard Business Press.
- Huntington-Klein, N. (2025). *The effect: An introduction to research design and causality*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition CRC Press. <https://theeffectbook.net/index.html>

**COURSE OUTLINE<sup>1</sup>**

Session	Date	Time	Topic	Required Readings and Notes <sup>2</sup>
<b>Section 1: Experimental Design</b>				
<b>Class 1</b>	4/2	1:30pm to 4:50pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction</li> <li>• Average Treatment Effects &amp; Selection Bias</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “BEworks: Experimentation in Business”</li> <li>• “Is Your Digital Advertising Campaign Working?”</li> <li>• “Why Businesses Don't Experiment”</li> <li>• “Do We Really Know What Makes Us Healthy?”</li> </ul>
<b>Class 2</b>	11/2	1:30pm to 4:50pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Precision and Power</li> <li>• Randomization and Balance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Running Randomized Evaluations</li> <li>• Discussion of Group Project Idea with the course instructor and pitch Idea</li> <li>• Distribution of Problem Set 1</li> </ul>
<b>Section 2: Econometric Analysis and Natural Experiments</b>				
<b>Class 3</b>	25/2	1:30pm to 4:50pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regression with Covariates</li> <li>• Heterogeneous Effects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HBS case: Advertising Experiments at Restaurant Grades</li> <li>• Background on Bangladesh SC Experiment</li> </ul>
<b>Class 4</b>	4/3	1:30pm to 4:50pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-Compliance</li> <li>• Placebo and Hawthorn Effects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Virgin Atlantic Tested 3 Ways to Change Employee Behavior"</li> </ul>
<b>Class 5</b>	11/3	1:30pm to 4:50pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regression Discontinuity (RD) and its application: Uber</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Using Big Data to Estimate Consumer Surplus: The Case of Uber" pp. 6-10</li> <li>• Problem Set 1 DUE before class</li> <li>• Bargaining at Ebay</li> </ul>
<b>Class 6</b>	18/3	1:30pm to 4:50pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difference-in-Difference (DID) and its application: Bargaining at Ebay</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distribution of Problem 2</li> </ul>
<b>Class 7</b>	25/3	1:30pm to 4:50pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sample Attrition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Does Working From Home Work?" (pp 176 - 183)</li> </ul>
<b>Class 8</b>	1/4	1:30pm to 4:50pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group Presentation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group Project Due</li> <li>• Problem Set 2 Due</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> The course outline is subject to change until its final version before the launch of the class

<sup>2</sup> Note that the case readings are subject to change until its final version before the launch of the class

## GRADING / ASSESSMENT

Assessment Method	Description	Weight	Additional Note
<b>Class Participation</b>	In-class discussions are an integral part of the course, and students are expected to contribute to the learning experience of the class by asking relevant questions, offering insights into the topic at hand. Quality of contribution matters more than quantity. Class participation scores will also account for attendance and lateness. <b>There will also be two in class quizzes on the case readings assigned, each counts 5%.</b>	30%	The attendance requirement by HKUST MS program is that 1) absent for 25% of a course, 2 out of 8 classes, 1/3 grade deduction will be given (i.e., A- to B+); 2) absent for more than 25% of a course, an “F” grade will be given.  Class participation is graded at the individual level.
<b>Problem Sets</b>	There will be TWO problem sets for the course. the first one covering experimental methods and the second one covering analysis of natural experiments. They are written up and turned in as groups, but each group member shall contribute individually.	20%	
<b>Group Project and Presentation</b>	Students will work in teams (of 5 people) to develop a causal question related to a real business strategy, design an experiment to test their question, run a pilot study to inform their design if they can, and “pitch” a proposed design and implementation strategy (directed to the key decision maker in the company) during Class 7/8 (Presentation).	50%	Each group must submit an experimental idea (10% of project grade). Then each group must meet with course instructors to present an initial design plan and a revised version (10% of the project grade), pitch the idea (presentation) at a full-class session during Class 8 (20% of the project grade) and submit a written version of this pitch (60% of the project grade). Presentation and pitch of project design are graded at the individual level.