RULES FOR ADVISORY FOR MASTER/ BACHELOR THESIS

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This document tries to put some guidelines to BA and MA students who are interested to write their thesis with me as an advisor. Having this process clear will give you better opportunity to get the advice when you need it, and ultimately write a better thesis. Of course, it requires strong interest on the part of the students to take his/her thesis seriously and an ambition to answer an important question in a scientific way.

In terms of methodology I am interested in applied microeconomic topics ("use data to study individual behavior"): so I strongly welcome students that are willing to work with individual-level data and learn basic (or more advanced) econometric techniques to answer some economic question. In terms of field of economics, topics that have something to do with development microeconomics, experimental/behavioral economics, or labor economics are preferred. Below there is a list of some of those topics and a sketch of steps you should follow.

Experimental and behavioral economics

Traditional economic theory uses many assumptions about individual preferences and behavior. Experimental economics is a tool to test if the people indeed behave as the theory -- which you learned during the microeconomics courses -- really works in practice and if not, how the behavior deviates from the standard theory and why. Behavioral economics integrates insights from psychology and offers several complementary (and sometimes contradictory) theories to standard economic models.

For your thesis, you could adjust an existing experiment or simply do a replication/extension of an interesting experiment conducted let's say in the US and you could test if the results are stable in another environment (Czech Republic). Even more interestingly, you could build on existing experiments and extend them in some way (different subject pools).

There is now a full course (taught jointly for IES and CERGE students) that can provide you with ideas about research questions and experiments. It covers a lot of topics in experimental and behavioral economics and includes practice how to organize a lab experiments. This is an ideal starting point for a thesis on experimental topics, because its main requirement is to write a proposal for an experiment and students receive feedback both from teachers as well as other students about their ideas.
http://ies.fsv.cuni.cz/en/syllab/JEM136

There is a modern lab of experimental economics (available to students and researchers of VSE, IES and CERGE-EI) in which it is possible to conduct experiments (http://www.vse-lee.cz/cze/o-lee/o-nas) Once or twice in a year there is a workshop of an invited speaker on selected topics in experimental economics
http://ies.fsv.cuni.cz/en/syllab/JEM134, which can serve as additional source of inspiration for a thesis topic.

A good star for reading is an overview textbook of Wilkinson (2008): Introduction to behavioral economics (3 copies are in the library).

In general, I welcome topics for supervision that are related to:
- Social preferences
- Reciprocity
- Cooperation
- Discrimination
- Time discounting and limited self-control
- Trust

Applied development microeconomics

Data sources
There are now lots of micro-level data available from developing countries. They are typically publicly available -- this is a nice difference to many other fields, since funders of data collection often condition their support on making them freely available. However, we feel they are often insufficiently exploited. Maybe you will be surprised how detailed the data are and how many interesting questions one can explore by using them. To browse, you can have a look for example here:

- Matlab Health and Socio-economic Survey (MHSS):
  http://rand.org/labor/FLS/MHSS/index.html

- List of development micro data sets on webpages of Duncan Thomas (Duke University)
  http://ipl.econ.duke.edu/dthomas/dev_data/index.html

- Poverty Action Lab (MIT):
  http://www.povertyactionlab.org/JPALdata/

- Status of Women and Fertility study (University of Pennsylvania)
  http://swaf.pop.upenn.edu//intropage.html

- International Food and Policy Research Institute (Washington, D.C.)
  http://www.ifpri.org/data/dataset.asp

Process of writing/our co-operation
This is an example how a process of writing on this topic could look like.

Stage 1
- Read literature on the field of interest
- Find a specific question that sounds interesting to you and that is empirically testable
- Write the question/topic in one paragraph
- Come to me to discuss it

Stage 2
- Read in bigger detail about the topic, in particular what other researchers did and found; and make some notes
- Think about the data variables that you would like to have to analyze the question of interest
- Think about where to get the data (with this I might help you or you can look to some of the links above)
- This is the stage when I expect to see you regularly talking with me (once per month)

Stage 3
- Learn the data well by reading the questionnaires and supplementary materials
- Learn the techniques that you would like to use
- Do preliminary analysis
- Come to me to talk about the results and their interpretation

Stage 4
- Write down the preliminary version of your thesis
- Send it to me 10 days before coming to me for consultation so that I can read it
- Get comments
- Finalize the thesis

Similar process would apply if you would work with any other non-experimental micro-level data (e.g., labor economics), but in that case I know less about appropriate data sets and it is usually more difficult (costly) to get access to them.

Suggested topics
- Gender differences in education: Comparison of several countries
- Siblings' rivalry: How the composition of siblings affects future life outcomes (education, health, marriage, etc)?
- Does parental education predict individual education more in least developed countries or in middle-income countries?

- Which individual characteristics predict having more wives (polygamy) in Africa? Are these characteristics the same in different countries?
- Infidelity, polygamy and AIDS.
- Education and heterogeneity in fertility preferences among spouses.
- In general topics related to health, education, fertility preferences and financial behavior in developing countries are welcome.
- In Czech republic, working with a SHARE data set (very detailed survey about elderly) is also an interesting route.

Version: February, 2012