

Honors Distinction in Economics

What is distinction in economics?

The economics distinction program is designed to support undergraduate students who want to conduct original, high-quality research in economics. The distinction program is comprised of two courses: ECN 495 (Economic Thesis I) and ECN 496 (Economic Thesis II), which are scheduled in the fall and spring semesters, respectively. In the first course, students utilize economic theory and statistical principles to formulate a compelling research agenda, which includes a defined empirical strategy and data sources. In the second course, students execute their research plans, present their work-in-progress, and write their theses. In both courses, students work closely with the program director, a professor of economics, and constructively with other distinction students. Distinction students are also required to take the two-semester sequence in econometrics: ECN 521 (Economics Statistics), and ECN 522 (Econometric Methods). At the end of the program, students present their work during the Maxwell Celebration of Undergraduate Scholarship, which includes a seminar in the economics department and a poster session in the Maxwell School. Students who successfully complete the program and maintain a cumulative grade point average of 3.4 will graduate with distinction, a designation highlighted on Syracuse University transcripts.

What are the benefits of graduating with distinction?

An undergraduate thesis has long been a signal of academic excellence and achievement in a major field of study. It is also one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences of an undergraduate career. By working on a thesis, students engage in sustained intellectual activity, develop a depth of inquiry, and acquire research, writing, and presentation skills. The program also requires regular consultation with economics professors and collaboration with other students. Through these interactions, students participate in the intellectual community focused on the creation of economic research.

A thesis project also provides excellent preparation for graduate school and a competitive edge in the job market. The analytical and quantitative skills acquired through the program are utilized in the public, private, and non-profit sectors and across multiple fields, including finance, labor, education, health, environment, and development. In recent years, distinction students have gone to work at the Federal Reserve Board of Governors, Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, JP Morgan Chase, Morgan Stanley, Ernst & Young, KPMG, Citi, American Institutes for Research, and the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative. Some distinction students have pursued graduate degrees in economics, including doctoral degrees at the University of California, Berkeley, and the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

Who is eligible for the distinction program?

Eligible students are invited to participate in the economics distinction program in their junior year. Students studying abroad during the junior year are also considered for the program. Invitation letters are sent to eligible students in March, prior to registration for fall classes. Invited students may meet with the program director before registration to decide if the program is right for them.

Given the rigors of writing a thesis, students are invited based on their likelihood to complete the program successfully. At a minimum, by January of the junior year, students must have declared economics as a major, must have a cumulative grade point average of at least 3.3, and must have a cumulative grade point average within the major of at least 3.0. In recent years, however, the grade point averages of invited students have been well above these thresholds. Invitations are also based on the depth and breadth of completed coursework in economics, specifically ECN 505 (Mathematical Economics), ECN 521 (Economics Statistics), ECN 522 (Econometric Methods), and 400-level field courses. A student may also demonstrate aptitude through previous quantitative research experience through independent study, an internship, or as a research assistant.

Note: The distinction program is open to students majoring in economics alone, or as a double or dual major. The program is selective and students must meet the academic criteria described above. If you think you might meet these criteria and are interested in the program, contact Professor Perry Singleton (psingleton@maxwell.syr.edu) for further inquiry.

How is this program related to Renée Crown University Honors?

The economics distinction program and the Renée Crown University Honors Program are administratively independent. This means that students who do not participate in the honors program may still qualify for the distinction program. Conversely, students who participate in the honors program do not automatically qualify for the distinction program.

If an honors student also participates in the distinction program, they may submit their distinction thesis as their capstone project. Honors students who choose this path enroll in ECN495 (Economic Thesis I) and ECN496 (Economic Thesis II) instead of the Junior Honors Seminar or the Senior Honors Seminar offered by the Renée Crown University Honors Program.

The thesis produced in the economics distinction program can not be submitted to similar distinction programs of other academic departments.

How do I find more information?

Students who are interested in the economics distinction program should consult their major academic adviser or mentor. Advisers and mentors understand the program and can help students decide if this option fits their academic and career goals. Advisers and mentors also know the selection criteria and can help students plan a course of study to prepare for thesis research in the senior year. Students with specific questions about the distinction program should contact the Distinction Program Director, Professor Perry Singleton, by sending an email to psingleton@maxwell.syr.edu.

Contact Us



Professor Perry Singleton

Professor Perry Singleton is the director of the economics distinction program. Professor Singleton has taught at Syracuse University since 2007 and has directed the economics distinction program since 2012. His research interests are in labor, public, and health economics, and his research has been published in the Journal of Public Economics, Journal of Law and Economics, Journal of Human Resources, and Industrial and Labor Relations Review. He advises both undergraduate students on their distinction theses as well as doctoral students on their dissertations. To contact Professor Singleton, please email psinglet@syr.edu.