Economics 70, Personal Finance: Making Better Decisions and Building a Better Financial System

Professor John Y. Campbell, Fall 2022

Course Assistants needed:

Econ 70 is a lecture course on personal finance that was taught for the first time in fall 2021, with a cap on student numbers. The cap will be lifted in fall 2022 so the course will expand and is looking for undergraduates with a strong economics background to work as course assistants. Below is a course description followed by a job description.

Course Description:

People face a daunting array of problems in managing their financial lives. Taking out student loans, managing bank accounts and credit cards, financing a home purchase with a mortgage, and saving for retirement are all major challenges. There is evidence that many people lack the skills they need to meet these challenges. This course has three goals. The first objective is to give participants a basic grounding in financial literacy: principles of finance that we can use in our own lives. The second objective is to introduce research on the ways in which households use the financial system, emphasizing common financial mistakes and financial products that seem prone to misuse. We will learn to read papers from the academic economics literature, focusing on the papers’ central ideas and empirical findings. The third objective is to explore ways in which the financial system can be improved to make it easier and safer to use. We will discuss the role of financial advisers, technological solutions (“fintech”), and public policy interventions including disclosures, default choices (“nudges”), and regulations restricting access to financial products.

Job Description:

Course assistants will work as part of a team alongside economics PhD students who are teaching fellows. Econ 70 has no prerequisites, so the content is basic and anyone who has taken Econ 1010a or equivalent should be qualified to do the work. Course assistants will attend lectures (Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:30-11:45am), teach sections using provided material, answer students’ questions, and grade quantitative assignments and exams using provided answer sheets. Some assignments will involve the use of Excel spreadsheets provided by the course, so experience with Excel is a plus.

Estimated hours per week are 10 hours per week for one section, or 16 hours per week for two sections, for 14 weeks. Course assistants are paid $22/hour, which implies total compensation of $3,080 for one section or $4,620 for two sections.

To explore this opportunity, please email John Campbell at john_campbell@harvard.edu.