
Spring 2026
Jan. 8 - Apr. 24, 2026

ECON 4292 Economics of Immigration

Instructor & Course information

Instructor: Sidonia McKenzie, PhD

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Office: Economics Dept., Room 04C

Office hours: MW 5 - 6 pm & by appointments via Zoom.

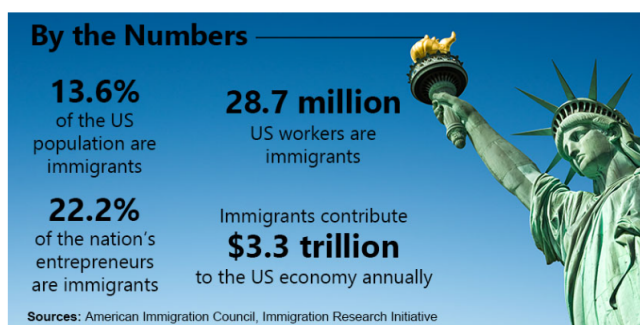
Meeting times: MWF 1:25 - 2:15 pm in ECON BLDG, RM 119

1 Overview

This is a newly offered course in the Department. As such, you are the inaugural—and, dare I say, fortunate—cohort embarking on a 15-week academic journey. I describe this journey as transformational primarily because of the course structure and assessment design, which are intentionally crafted to deepen your understanding of economics as applied to immigration.

The goal of this course is to integrate economic theory and econometric tools with modern data analysis and AI-assisted methods to examine key aspects of international migration, with particular emphasis on the effects of immigration on receiving countries. The course focuses on the economic determinants and consequences of migration by addressing three central questions:

- (i) Who migrates and why?
- (ii) How do immigrants fare in the receiving country?
- (iii) How do immigrants affect native populations?



Specific topics include economic models of immigrant selection, the measurement and implications of economic assimilation in host countries, labor market effects, the estimation of the economic benefits of immigration, and migration policy in the United States and other advanced economies. To enrich our understanding of these issues—and to illustrate how economists approach them in practice—we will engage in data analysis using software such as R (or Python), examine policy documents, read empirical research papers, and critically assess information from the media.

Immigration is a contentious issue that involves both positive and normative analysis. While we may be presented with the same set of facts, we may arrive at different conclusions—and that is entirely appropriate. Our diverse backgrounds and perspectives are an asset to this learning community. The purpose of this course is to train you *how* to think like an economist, not *what* to think.

1.1 Readings: Textbook & Empirical Papers



- *Labor Economics*, George J. Borjas, 9e, McGraw-Hill. (GB; Required)
 - This text serves as our anchor for developing the foundational mathematical tools, theoretical frameworks, and core empirical facts of labor economics. These foundations are essential for understanding the models and distributional consequences central to the economics of immigration.
 - I will use the Connect platform to assign chapter readings, practice quizzes, and selected extra credit activities.
- Lecture slides will be comprehensive and will draw substantially from:
 - *Immigration Economics*, George J. Borjas, Harvard University Press. (GB; Supplement)
 - *The Economics of Immigration*, Cynthia Bansak, Nicole B. Simpson, and Madeline Zavodny. Routledge, 2026. (BSZ; Supplement)

- We will also read a selection of academic articles listed, which will be available on Canvas.
- To stay informed about U.S. immigration policy developments, students may consult the [Center for Immigration Studies](#), an independent, non-partisan think tank focused on immigration research. The [Migration Policy Institute](#) is another excellent source for policy analysis and international migration data. In addition, I strongly encourage you to activate your free student subscriptions to the [Wall Street Journal](#), [New York Times](#), and [Financial Times](#).

1.2 Learning Outcomes

After successfully completing this course, students should be able to use economic theory and empirical methods to:

- (i) model individual migration decisions and destination choice;
- (ii) evaluate the labor market performance of immigrants using descriptive and econometric evidence;
- (iii) assess the economic implications of immigrant assimilation for native workers and host economies;
- (iv) analyze the impact of immigration-related policies on migration flows and labor market outcomes.

These learning outcomes are assessed through problem sets, midterm examinations, empirical exercises, and a group presentation. In addition, students will develop a portfolio-based or group project that demonstrates their ability to use AI-assisted tools for data analysis in applied economic research. This component is designed to equip graduating seniors with practical, marketable skills that enhance their competitiveness in graduate programs and the job market.

1.3 Assessments

This course has four components that determine your final grade:

- (i) **Exams — 45% (15% each)**
 - There will be **three in-person exams**: two midterms and a comprehensive final exam. Exam questions will follow a similar format and level of rigor as the problem sets and in-class worksheets, emphasizing application rather than memorization.

- **Midterm 1 will be held on Friday, February 13, and Midterm 2 on Friday, April 3.** The Final Exam, as scheduled by the University Registrar, will take place on **Thursday, April 30 at 1:30 p.m.**

⚠ All exams are in-person and in our regular classroom. **Exam dates are non-negotiable.** If you foresee conflicts with any of these dates, this course may not be the right fit for you.

(ii) **Problem Sets — 30%**

- Throughout the semester, you will complete *seven problem sets, at least one of which will require the use of statistical software such as R*. These assignments are designed to reinforce course material, strengthen empirical reasoning, and promote deeper engagement with economic research questions related to immigration. **The lowest two problem set scores will be dropped.**
- In addition, several end-of-chapter problems may be assigned and submitted for extra credit.

(iii) **Policy Portfolio — 15%**

- The goal of the policy portfolio is to stimulate your curiosity about immigration policy in the United States and to develop your ability to apply economic tools to real-world policy questions. Students will examine a specific aspect of the U.S. immigration system and critically evaluate its design, effectiveness, and limitations—particularly in periods of heightened political or economic change.
- For example, Temporary Protected Status (TPS) is a humanitarian protection program administered by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) that grants eligible nationals of designated countries temporary relief from removal and authorization to work when conditions in their home country prevent safe return. On [October 3, 2025, the Supreme Court allowed the termination of the 2023 Venezuela TPS designation to take immediate effect](#). A potential project might evaluate the TPS program by assessing its strengths and weaknesses, identifying opportunities for reform, and discussing potential threats to its continuation in the current geopolitical climate.
- The portfolio must be completed in groups of 3–4 students and may not exceed 10 pages, including the title page, references, tables, and figures. All topics must be approved by the instructor by **Week 5** (shortly after Midterm 1) to ensure sufficient variation across projects. Under no circumstances may two groups pursue the same topic.
- Students are encouraged to stay informed about current events, engage in conversations with peers and family members about migration experiences, and draw connections between course material and real-world immigration pathways.
- During the final week of class, each group will deliver a 10–15 minute presentation of their project. To receive full credit, students are also required to provide constructive feedback on their peers' presentations. Slides or presentation notes must be emailed to the instructor prior to presenting. Additional details, including grading rubrics, will be provided later in the semester.

(iv) **Participation — 10%**

- This course is designed to promote active engagement with the lecture material. You are expected not only to **complete the assigned readings**, but also to participate meaningfully in discussions during lectures, workshops, and office hours.
- Participation may take different forms. Whether you are a frequent contributor or a more reserved participant, it should be evident that you are consistently engaged with the course material. Participation will be evaluated holistically, based on attendance, attentiveness, contributions to discussion, collaboration with peers, and overall engagement throughout the semester.

1.4 Academic Rigor & Level of Engagement

- This is an upper-level, time-intensive course. It is not self-paced and does not lend itself to last-minute preparation or assignment submission. You should expect mandatory weekly readings, problem sets, midterms, and presentations. If you are seeking a course that allows minimal weekly engagement with the expectation of earning an A or Pass, then this course is *not* a good fit.

🕒 I expect you to dedicate at least two hours of preparation and study for each class session. Consistent engagement is essential, as the course is designed to build concepts gradually and reinforce them through repeated application.

- Exams will be rigorous and will assess your understanding of economic concepts, key findings from empirical papers, and your ability to interpret regression results based on data analysis covered in class. ECON 4292 is a college-level course at a highly regarded institution, and you are expected to apply economic reasoning and theoretical frameworks to current events and novel settings. In academia, this level of understanding is commonly referred to as *Mastery*.
- Accordingly, **attempting to pass the course by memorizing answers from past exams or worksheets is strongly discouraged. True mastery requires conceptual understanding and the ability to apply economic tools flexibly across various contexts.**



1.5 Grading Protocol

- To facilitate prompt return of graded exams, all exams will be graded using [Crowdmark](#), an online grading platform. You can access Crowdmark with your CU Boulder login credentials by the end of Week 1 (see Table 1).
- On exam days, you will receive a unique Crowdmark link to upload each exam page, including the name page. I typically allot 5–10 minutes at the end of each exam for this process. To submit your exam, take a separate photo of each page, then use your unique Crowdmark link sent via email or Canvas. The link will open a blank version of your exam, where you will upload each photo to the corresponding page. **Ensure that your photo of page 1 is uploaded under page 1, page 2 under page 2, and so on.** Proper alignment of photos and page numbers is critical for grading accuracy.
- For a step-by-step walkthrough, watch this [tutorial video on submitting assignments via Crowdmark](#).

1.6 Late Assignments & Missed Exams

An assignment is considered late if it is submitted after the stated deadline. **Late assignments will not be accepted and will receive a score of zero.** Please pay close attention to the deadlines listed on each assignment.

Many students are aware of my relatively liberal grading policy. This includes opportunities for extra credit and the policy that only your five highest problem set scores count toward your final grade. You should use this flexibility to plan accordingly. In effect, you have two “wild cards” within the problem set component that can be used to accommodate unforeseen circumstances (see Section 1.3).

Due to the structure of the course, **you must complete both midterms and the final exam in order to receive an overall course grade in Buff Portal.** Exams will not be rescheduled for any reason except in truly extraordinary circumstances. Missed exams will not be made up. **If you anticipate a conflict with any midterm or the final exam, you should plan to take this course in a different semester.** The Department of Economics offers ECON 4292 every spring and, possibly, during the summer term.

Students may elect the Pass/Fail grading option (see details [here](#)). If you choose this option, please note that **to pass the course you must earn a score of at least 70% (C) on each component of the course assessment.**

1.7 Weekly Class Sessions

Typically, Monday and Wednesday class sessions will be devoted to discussion of lecture slides and key insights from the assigned readings for the week. Please see the Spring schedule in Table 1 for a list of topics covered during the semester.

Friday sessions will focus on applying and reinforcing material from earlier lectures. These sessions will typically involve collaborative discussion of problem sets, targeted worksheets, or software-based workshops. **Friday sessions are not optional enrichment; students are expected to attend, having completed the assigned readings, and to participate actively in applied exercises and discussions.**

Weekly instructions and announcements will be posted on Canvas. Please ensure that your Canvas notifications are set to “Notify immediately,” and check the course [Canvas page](#) regularly.

1.8 Other Important Course Policies

Additional course information is available on the [syllabus page of Canvas](#). There, you will find details on the grade distribution, answers to frequently asked questions, and relevant university policies. Please review all aspects of the course carefully before committing to it. I have invested considerable effort in communicating expectations clearly so that you are fully informed about what this course entails. Finally, please review the accountability mechanism described in the next section.

1.9 Contract

A syllabus functions as a contract between students and the instructor: it provides essential course information and serves as a commitment device to limit arbitrary behavior. By enrolling in this course, you are presumed to have read, understood, and agreed to all policies outlined in this document. **If you determine that these terms are not suitable for any reason, you have several options to opt out of this agreement**, including [dropping the course by January 23](#) or [petitioning for a course withdrawal by April 24](#).

The policies and content outlined in this syllabus are subject to change at the instructor’s discretion. In the event that new guidelines are issued by the Provost after the semester begins and supersede existing course policies, the syllabus will be updated accordingly. Any such changes will be communicated clearly and promptly to students.

Tentative Course Schedule

As of January 5, 2026, a tentative schedule and reading list for lecture topics and exams are provided in the table below. You are encouraged to read ahead. Any changes to the schedule will be announced in class or on Canvas, and students are responsible for keeping their own records up to date. Exam due dates should be considered fixed unless apocalyptic events occur 🌪️.

Table 1: Tentative Course Schedule

Part I: Introductory Theories & Core Models		
Week 0: Jan. 5 - 9	Course & Syllabus Review	
Week 1: Jan. 12 - 16	Labor Demand & Labor Supply (Chap. 2 - 3)	
Week 2: Jan. 19 - 23	Labor Mkt Eqm & Comp. Wage Diff. (Ch. 4 - 5) <i>MLK Day on January 19: Participate in campus wide celebrations</i>	<i>Teams announced: Fri. Jan. 23</i> Problem Set 1 due: Fri. Jan. 23
Week 3: Jan. 26 - 30	Education & Wage Distribution (Ch. 6 - 7)	Problem Set 2 due: Fri. Jan. 30
Week 4: Feb. 2 - 6	Labor Mobility (Ch. 8) & R Workshop	Problem Set 3 due: Fri. Feb. 6
Week 5: Feb. 9 - 13	Catch-up & Exam Prep	Midterm 1 on Fri. Feb 13 in classroom
Part II: Who migrates and why?		
Week 6: Feb. 16 - 20	Intro. to Econ. of Immig.	
Week 7: Feb. 23 - 27	Modeling Migration Decisions and the Self-Selection of Migrants	Problem Set 4 due: Fri. Feb. 27
Week 8: Mar. 2 - 6	Estimating the labor market impact: Descriptive methods	Problem Set 5 due: Fri. Mar. 6
Week 9: Mar. 9 - 13	Estimating the labor market impact: Structural methods	
SPRING BREAK: March 16 - 20 NO CLASSES: Have Fun! ☺🌞🌂		
Part III: How do immigrants fare in the receiving country, and how do they affect native workers?		
Week 11: Mar. 23 - 27	Catch-up & Labor Market impact: Theory	Problem Set 6 due: Fri. Mar 27 Last day to drop course: Tues. March 24
Week 12: Mar. 30 - Apr. 3	Labor Market impact: Theory cont'd & Exam Prep	Midterm 2 on Fri. April 3 in classroom
Week 13: Apr. 6 - 10	High-skill immigration and human capital externalities	
Week 14: Apr. 13 - 17	Catch-up & Course recap	Problem Set 7 due: Fri. Apr 17
Week 15: Apr. 20 - 24	Week of Group Presentations	
Finals Week: April 27 - May 1 Final Exam: Thursday, April 30 at 1:30 pm in classroom		