

University of Colorado at Boulder
Department of Economics

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Economics 8686: Graduate Labor 2, Spring 2025
Syllabus and Schedule
Office Hours: T/Th 1:30-2:30
Economics 208D

Course Description:

The primary goal of this course is to prepare students for original research within the field of Labor Economics. Although we will focus on only a subset of topics, the skills you will learn will prepare you for work across numerous subfields. You will learn to how to read existing papers deeply, in a way that will support your own work in your dissertation and beyond. Further, you will gain an appreciation for the type of research being done on the frontier of the discipline. The course meets in Econ 5, each T/Th (1/14-5/1) from 11:00 AM – 12:15 PM, except for Spring Break (3/25, 3/27).

Prerequisites:

To enroll in this course, you must have completed graduate level work in microeconomic theory and have exposure to some econometric training, at the equivalent level of the first-year graduate sequence. Many of the papers we will read use applied econometric methods beyond those covered in the first-year sequence. Although not required, I strongly recommend exposure to such methods through Econ 8848. I will make the Econ 8848 coursepack available as a reference for students who want it.

Course Materials:

There is no required textbook for this course, although students who have not had an undergraduate course in Labor Economics may find it useful to acquire an undergraduate textbook such as Borjas or Ehrenberg and Smith (any edition is fine). The material to be mastered will be covered in lecture notes and the assigned articles, all of which will be posted or linked on the Canvas website.

Requirements and Grading:

Your grade will depend on your performance on a number of assignments, according to the chart below:

| <u>Assignment</u> | <u>Weight</u> | <u>Due Date</u> |
|----------------------------------|---------------|---------------------------------------|
| Class Participation/Readings | 15% | Each class meeting with a paper |
| 1 Referee Report | 15% | TBA |
| Class Presentation(s) | 10% | Various dates throughout the semester |
| Research Proposal/“Kill an Idea” | 20% | 5/7, 7 PM (Final Exam Slot) |
| First Midterm | 20% | 3/11 during class (tentative date) |
| Second Midterm | 20% | Tuesday 4/22 (date fixed) |

Class Participation/Readings You should read the articles assigned prior to coming to class and be prepared to answer questions and participate in discussions. The reading list will be posted on Canvas, and it will include links to the papers, which can be accessed from any computer on the University's network or connected via VPN. Have a copy (either paper or electronic) of the papers we are discussing available during class. In addition, please fill out the "key paper features" form for each paper that we read. This form will ask you to briefly describe a few things about the paper: the main research question, the model/conceptual framework that guides the analysis, the data used, the primary methodology including the identification strategy/central comparison, and any major limitations that you see in the paper. Part of this grade will come from successfully turning in a form for each paper. The other portion will come from a careful review of a random sample of your forms. These forms serve primarily as a commitment device to encourage you to read the papers before our class meetings. Although it may be possible to populate this form using ChatGPT or another form of AI, doing so goes against the spirit of the assignment, which is to engage with the paper before our class discussion.

Class Choice Papers will be selected by a nomination and voting process. I encourage you all to set up an e-mail alert for new NBER working papers in your areas of interest, including labor. I'd be happy to read and discuss papers that are released during the semester. Alternatively, if there's a topic you're particularly interested in, let me know and we'll see if we can find a paper to read together. Areas that we could choose include labor market adjustments to trade shocks, environmental effects on the labor market, newer work on tasks/automation, active labor market policies, tax effects on labor supply, among others.

A Referee Report will be assigned once during the semester as I find an appropriate article. I anticipate assigning a paper from our seminar series or another working paper I find related to topics we are studying. You will be required to write a brief summary of the paper's methods and conclusions, followed by an analysis of the paper's strengths and weaknesses. You will receive specific instructions when I have selected the paper.

Class Presentations will occur at various times throughout the semester, and students will present either one or two papers, depending on the total enrollment in the course. In each presentation, you will lead the class's discussion of one of the papers from the reading list marked with *** for approximately 35-40 minutes. In the first 25-30 minutes, you will present the research as if it were your own, detailing the motivation, methodology, and results of the paper. In the remaining time, you will lead a discussion critiquing the paper and providing suggestions for how the paper could have been improved.

Research Proposal/"Kill an Idea": The goal of this course is to train you to be able to perform original research in Labor Economics. Two of the most difficult skills to acquire are 1) Coming up with original research questions that can be answered and that contribute to the literature, and 2) Knowing when to stop working on an idea. In order to help you hone these skills, you will select an original research idea, and attempt to "kill it". It may help to imagine that there is a deadline for a conference approaching and that you are trying to decide whether to submit an extended abstract and to commit to working on the project in earnest for the next several months. A successful project will accomplish the following things: motivate an original research question, identify and acquire data, formulate an identification strategy, and perform initial analysis to determine whether the project deserves continued work. In the best-case scenario, your idea will survive this initial testing, and you will continue to work on it beyond this course.

However, you will not be graded on whether your idea “works”. Instead, you will be graded on how well you have determined whether it is worth continuing to work on. The project need not relate to the topics we discuss in class. It could be based on material from 8676, or from an area of Labor Economics (or a closely related field) beyond the scope of either course. In the end, I will be looking for a brief (5-8 pages) write-up of your work on the project. In general, this should be a new project that you have not previously worked on for another class (including the third-year paper class). Also, if you previously enrolled in Econ 8848, this project should be a separate project from your replication for that class.

This paper will serve as our final exam and will be due at the end of our normally scheduled final exam period: May 7, 2025 at 7 PM.

The First Midterm will cover the material on labor demand theory, immigration and migration, and the minimum wage. It is tentatively scheduled for March 11 during the regular class meeting time, although we may move the exam depending on how quickly we progress through the material.

The Second Midterm will cover all of the material after the first midterm. It will occur on 4/22 during the regular class meeting. This date is fixed, as it is the final week available for a midterm this semester.

Final Letter Grades will be a weighted average of each of the components listed above. Prior to averaging, I will assign letter grades to each component.

Seminar Series: You are strongly encouraged to attend the seminar series, especially when the speaker presents on an applied micro topic. Learning to conduct and present original research is a key to your success in the discipline. These seminars are an excellent resource for you in that endeavor. There is a decent chance that I will assign a referee report based on one of the working papers presented in the seminar series.

Late Assignments/ Missed Examinations Policy:

The Referee Report will be due by 11:59 PM on its due date. Paper summaries will be due prior to the class when we discuss them.

If you miss either midterm exam, the missed exam will be given no weight in the calculation of the final grade and other assignments will be reweighted accordingly. There will be no make-up exams. If you foresee any conflict that will prevent you from taking an exam, please let me know as soon as possible and at least two weeks beforehand.

Tentative Schedule

| Topic | Tentative Dates |
|---|----------------------------|
| Introduction, Immigration Background | 1/14, 1/16 |
| Case Study: Mariel Boatlift | 1/21, 1/23 |
| Theory of Labor Demand | 1/28, 1/30 |
| Immigration and Migration | |
| Labor Demand Application: Immigration and Native-Born Labor Market Outcomes | 2/4, 2/6, 2/11 |
| Individual Migration Decision – Roy Model and Applications | 2/13, 2/18 |
| The Minimum Wage | |
| Models of the Minimum Wage | 2/20, 2/25 |
| Empirical Analysis of the Minimum Wage | 2/27, 3/4 |
| MIDTERM EXAM | 3/11 |
| Discrimination and Race/Gender Wage Gaps | |
| Models of Wage Discrimination | 3/6 |
| Empirical Topics in Discrimination | 3/13, 3/18, 3/20, 4/1, 4/3 |
| Human Capital Investment | |
| Basic Models | 4/8 |
| Market Imperfections | 4/10 |
| Behavioral considerations | 4/15, 4/17 |
| Midterm 2 | 4/22 |
| No Class – Prof. Cadena research travel | 4/24 |
| Class choice – see description | 4/29, 5/1 |
| “Kill a Paper” due | Wednesday, 5/7 7:00 PM |

Additional Policies: This course is governed by additional policies covering all courses at CU Boulder. They are listed below for your reference.

HONOR CODE

All students enrolled in a University of Colorado Boulder course are responsible for knowing and adhering to the [Honor Code](#). Violations of the Honor Code may include but are not limited to: plagiarism (including use of paper writing services or technology [such as essay bots]), cheating, fabrication, lying, bribery, threat, unauthorized access to academic materials, clicker fraud, submitting the same or similar work in more than one course without permission from all course instructors involved, and aiding academic dishonesty. Understanding the course's syllabus is a vital part in adhering to the Honor Code.

All incidents of academic misconduct will be reported to Student Conduct & Conflict Resolution: StudentConduct@colorado.edu. Students found responsible for violating the [Honor Code](#) will be assigned resolution outcomes from the Student Conduct & Conflict Resolution as well as be subject to academic sanctions from the faculty member. Visit [Honor Code](#) for more information on the academic integrity policy.

ACCOMMODATION FOR DISABILITIES, TEMPORARY MEDICAL CONDITIONS, AND MEDICAL ISOLATION

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit your accommodation letter from Disability Services to your faculty member in a timely manner so that your needs can be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities in the academic environment. Information on requesting accommodations is located on the [Disability Services website](#). Contact Disability Services at 303-492-8671

or DSinfo@colorado.edu for further assistance. If you have a temporary medical condition, see [Temporary Medical Conditions](#) on the Disability Services website.

If you have a temporary illness, injury or required medical isolation for which you require adjustment, please let me know as soon as possible, and we will work out a solution.

ACCOMMODATION FOR RELIGIOUS OBLIGATIONS

Campus policy requires faculty to provide reasonable accommodations for students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. Please communicate the need for a religious accommodation in a timely manner. In this class, please let me know as soon as possible if you foresee a conflict with an exam, and we will find an alternative time for you to take it. See the [campus policy regarding religious observances](#) for full details.

PREFERRED STUDENT NAMES AND PRONOUNS

CU Boulder recognizes that students' legal information doesn't always align with how they identify. Students may update their preferred names and pronouns via the student portal;

those preferred names and pronouns are listed on instructors' class rosters. In the absence of such updates, the name that appears on the class roster is the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to use your preferred name/pronouns, regardless of what appears in the class roster.

CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR

Students and faculty are responsible for maintaining an appropriate learning environment in all instructional settings, whether in person, remote, or online. Failure to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, marital status, political affiliation, or political philosophy.

For more information, see the [classroom behavior policy](#), the [Student Code of Conduct](#), and the [Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance](#).

SEXUAL MISCONDUCT, DISCRIMINATION, HARASSMENT AND/OR RELATED RETALIATION

CU Boulder is committed to fostering an inclusive and welcoming learning, working, and living environment. University policy prohibits [protected-class](#) discrimination and harassment, sexual misconduct (harassment, exploitation, and assault), intimate partner abuse (dating or domestic violence), stalking, and related retaliation by or against members of our community on- and off-campus. The Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC) addresses these concerns, and individuals who have been subjected to misconduct can contact OIEC at 303-492-2127 or email CUREport@colorado.edu. Information about university policies, [reporting options](#), and [OIEC support resources](#) including confidential services can be found on the [OIEC website](#). Please know that faculty and graduate instructors are required to inform OIEC when they are made aware of incidents related to these concerns regardless of when or where something occurred. This is to ensure that individuals impacted receive outreach from OIEC about their options and support resources. To learn more about reporting and support for a variety of concerns, visit the [Don't Ignore It page](#).

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS

The University of Colorado Boulder is committed to the well-being of all students. If you are struggling with personal stressors, mental health or substance use concerns that are impacting academic or daily life, please contact [Counseling and Psychiatric Services \(CAPS\)](#) located in C4C or call (303) 492-2277, 24/7.

Free and unlimited telehealth is also available through [Academic Live Care](#). The Academic Live Care site also provides information about additional wellness services on campus that are available to students.

ACCEPTABLE USE OF AI IN THIS CLASS

Using AI in this course to complete the summary forms for the papers we read is highly discouraged. Using AI to generate the first draft of your referee report is prohibited; this restriction aligns with norms in the discipline for actual peer review. You may, however, use AI as a copy editor for your written work, including the final project. You may also use AI to help you prepare your slide deck for the class presentations. In the end, however, you will be responsible for the full contents of what you turn in/present.