

Economics Department
St. Lawrence University
Canton, New York

Economics 309
Labor Economics
Guanyi Yang
Fall 2020

Syllabus

Time and Location

Asynchronous: pre-recorded lecture platform TBA
Synchronous: Zoom, Wednesdays **8:50am - 10:20am**

Course Description

This course deals with the theoretical and empirical aspects of labor economics and the policy implications they lead us to. Among the topics we will deal with in this course are the demand for labor, the supply of labor (labor force participation and hours worked), the determinants of wage rates, unions and unemployment, as well as various manifestations of inequality and discrimination.

Prerequisites

ECON 200 (Quantitative methods) and ECON 251 (Intermediate microeconomics)

Course Goals

This course has three paramount goals: 1) to understand the role of labor in the economy, 2) to recognize the institutional and structural foundations of inequality from modern history to the present day, and 3) to develop data processing skills, journal article reading skills, and oral communication skills.

To achieve the first goal, we will use the traditional models of economic analysis (supply and demand, as well as the economic models of the firm and the consumer) to analyze the market for labor. Labor, however, is a unique good in that the product (labor services) cannot be separated from the seller. (As Henry Ford said, "Why is it that I always get the whole person when what I really wanted is a pair of hands?") This unique feature of labor has resulted in some special aspects of labor, e.g. unions, labor laws and compensation systems. We will explore these institutions in this course.

To achieve the second goal, we will work through theories of human capital, migration and labor mobility, and the economics of discrimination. We will study these issues from both market and pre-market perspectives. This second goal is much more demanding. Throughout the semester, I ask us to constantly move between theories and statistical evidence as well as personal experiences and narratives. We will attempt to go above and beyond economics as a discipline to involve humanities and interdisciplinary perspectives, through supplemental readings, outside lectures, film screenings, and personal reflections. It is my hope that taking this course will allow you have a better understanding of the role of labor in the organization of society more broadly as well as the omnipresence of inequality. Through the content and assignments, I wish we could enrich our capacity of self-reflection on our own social locations in a society

with diversity and dynamics of power. This should serve you well when hiring the labor services of others, supplying your own labor, or evaluating government proposals to affect the supply and/or demand for labor.

To achieve the third goal, we will have various data exercises processing the Current Population Survey and a group research assignment using the US Census data. We want to use these national representative surveys to find evidence of current and historical facts on labor market, inequality and discrimination. We will have weekly readings on the newest journal articles with various topics. You will need to present the readings to the class every week. These exercises will serve to hone your skills at reading and processing data and academic journals, your ability to present complex ideas to other, and your teamwork. The various oral presentation assignments will develop your oral communication competence and confidence. These are all skills that will benefit you in any future career path.

Course Structure

This course will meet every Wednesday for a mandatory synchronous Zoom session to discuss the content of the assigned reading materials, pre-recorded lecture, and media content of that week. These Zoom meetings will also incorporate exercises that link theory and concepts to historical and current events.

Texts

We will mainly rely on reading journal articles throughout the semester. The detailed list is appended at the end of the syllabus.

Course Assignments

There will be individual assignments and group-based assignments, designed to ensure our learning experience and to fulfill the goals for the course. I will distribute detailed instructions on each assignment as we move along.

Quiz: One tricky thing about the asynchronous teaching is that I need to find a way to ensure students are actually learning. Quiz is a natural way of making sure you are watching and learning from the videos, and giving me a feedback on how efficient you are in receiving the knowledge. The quizzes are bi-weekly. We will have four small ones coming directly coming out of materials from the pre-recorded lectures. We will also have two large quizzes. They are more comprehensive than the small quizzes. Quiz due dates are listed in the tentative schedule below. Each one is due by **Sunday 11:50pm** of the assigned week.

SHAD exercises: Short for Student Hands-on Analysis of Data. This is a set of four projects that are designed for us to get familiar the Current Population Survey (CPS), the most important high frequency labor market survey for the U.S.. As we move along through the topics, SHAD exercise allows you to explore data evidence for the topics we discuss. It will train your skill in reading and producing descriptive statistics on labor market for any direction of your future career. Each assignment is worth 3.75%. SHAD due dates are listed in the tentative schedule below. Each one is due by **Sunday 11:50pm** of the assigned week.

Weekly reading: Since I will not require you to buy a textbook, weekly readings are the main source of texts we will be discussing from during the synchronous sessions. The pre-recordings part of the class give you an overview of the relevant topic, and the weekly journal article readings will bring you to the most frontier research on it. Each person needs to sign up for one article to present, and you will receive the regular presentation grade for it. The rest of us will post in Sakai for the reading responses for each

week. The purpose of this set of assignments is to train our journal article reading skills and to practice causal inference thinking. In order to facilitate a sense of academic community, I will award additional points on your participation in annotating the articles in Perusall (platform where you can access the papers). The posting and regular presentation for the reading is due on **Monday 11:50pm** every week. The deadline for receiving annotation credit is **Monday 11:50pm** every week. The peer critic for the presentation posting is due on **Tuesday 11:50pm** each week.

Group creative project: This is an assignment created for extending your understanding of labor economics from an academic context to every day life. It is easy for us to criticize data, but it is hard for us to criticize ourselves living and producing the data. Each group will identify a topic from the course that speaks to your group the most, and seek an experience of it outside of academia circle creatively. It will be divided into two parts: background preparation and final completion. Each group will discuss with me one-on-one for your background/design preparation, before heading on for the execution. By the end of the semester, we will have a presentation and written submission of the project.

Group research: For many of you, this is going to be the first time coming up with an independent research project. We will conduct it on a group base. I will guide you step-by-step from identifying a research topic, to literature review, to data work, and to completion. For the purpose of this class, we will all be using the same dataset: US Census - American Community Survey (ACS), obtained from IPUMS <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/>. Please sign up for a free account on the website as soon as possible. Together with CPS, ACS is another nationally representative survey for US demography. This group project aims at giving you a hands-on experience on economic research, and on sorting out big data for analysis. Each group will have two presentations: a literature review presentation in the mid of the semester and a final presentation. Each group will meet with me throughout the semester on the progress.

Peer critic: In order to facilitate remote interactions on all presentations uploaded by students, I will collect peer critic for every presentation the class does. Each person will receive a maximum of 3% based on your honest and constructive critic of your peers.

Speaking intensive component: This course is designated as a SPK class. You will have to make presentations formally and informally throughout the class. Formally, each of you will present once for your regular weekly reading presentation, twice in group creation project presentation, and twice in group research project presentation. Informally, I will evaluate your participation in every synchronous sessions. You will receive 2% of your grade from me based on your informal oral communications throughout the semester.

Late/makeup policy: No late submission on Quiz/SHAD/Weekly readings is accepted. I will not provide makeup assignment under any circumstances either. If for health or any university exempt reasons that you are missing an assignment, I will simply remove the item from calculating your grade.

<u>Item</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Item value</u>	<u>% of Total Grade</u>
Quiz	Sakai - Gradescope		20%
2 large quizzes		10	
4 small quizzes		10	
SHAD exercises	Sakai - Gradescope		15%
Weekly reading	Materials at Sakai - Perusall		15%
Weekly posting	Sakai - Gradescope	5	
Article annotation	Sakai - Perusall	2	
Regular presentation	Sakai - VoiceThread	5	
Group creation*			20%
background/design writing	Sakai - Gradescope	2.5	
background/design presentation	Sakai - VoiceThread	2.5	
final group creation writing	Sakai - Gradescope	5	
final group creating presentation	Sakai VoiceThread	10	
Group research*			25%
focused research topic	Sakai - Gradescope	1	
literature review	Sakai - Gradescope	2	
literature presentation	Sakai - VoiceThread	3	
data description and regression	Sakai - Gradescope	5	
final research paper	Sakai - Gradescope	7	
final research presentation	Sakai - VoiceThread	7	
Peer critic	Sakai - VoiceThread		3%
Oral component participation			2%
		Total	100%

*For each group project, your final score will be weighted by your team effort given by your teammates. In particular, your individual final score will be a sum of 70% of your group grade and 30% of team effort grade.

Attendance

I will post pre-recorded videos for the following week content materials weekly. You NEED to study the videos AND read the assigned article for the week before each zoom class. The Wednesday synchronous meetings are mandatory.

Grading Scale*

<u>4.0 Grade</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
4.0	≥ 97%
3.75	≥ 93
3.5	≥ 90
3.25	≥ 88
3.0	≥ 85
2.75	≥ 83
2.5	≥ 80
2.25	≥ 78
2.0	≥ 75
1.75	≥ 73
1.5	≥ 70
1.25	≥ 68
1.0	≥ 65
0.0	< 65

*Pass/fail option not available

Office Hours and Contact

Zoom request can be made directly from here: [Calendly](#)

If the pre-allocated time slots in Calendly do not work for you, feel free to email me: gyang@stlawu.edu (a great way to reach me).

Reading List and Tentative Schedule

<u>Week</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Topics</u>	<u>Readings</u>	<u>Assignment</u>
1	Aug. 26	Introduction	Sample paper: Bansak, Jiang, and Yang (2020)	Reading posting and presentation due Monday midnight, peer critic due Tuesday midnight
2	Sept. 2	Labor supply, Lifecycle labor supply	Krüger and Neugart (2018) (optional Doucette and Bradford (2019))	Reading posting and presentation due Monday midnight, peer critic due Tuesday midnight S-Quiz 1 - Sunday midnight ; Reading posting and presentation due Monday midnight, peer critic due Tuesday midnight
3	Sept. 9	Welfare programs	Powell (2020) (optional Neumark and Shirley (2020))	Reading posting and presentation due Monday midnight, peer critic due Tuesday midnight

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<u>Week</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Topics</u>	<u>Readings</u>	<u>Assignment</u>
4	reading	regular assignment, but meeting M&W	Goldin and Mitchell (2017) AND video (Optional Goldin and Katz (2016))	SHAD 1 - Sunday; Reading posting and presentation due Monday midnight, peer critic due Tuesday midnight
4	Sept. 14 - Monday	- One-One Meeting on research topic choice		
4	Sept. 16 - Wednesday	- One-One Meeting on creative project topic		
5	Sept. 23 - Wednesday	- class discussion: Labor supply of women		
6	Sept. 30	Labor demand, Elasticity of labor demand, Minimum wage, Monopsony	Clark, Pohl, and Thomas (2020) (Optional Harasztosi and Lindner (2019))	Group research focused topic writing due Friday midnight; Group creation design writing due Saturday midnight, presentation due Sunday midnight, peer critic due Monday midnight S-Quiz 2 - Sunday; Reading posting and presentation due Monday midnight, peer critic due Tuesday midnight
7	Oct. 7	Labor market equilibrium: Industrial shift and Income inequality over the century - Skill biased technical change	Aaronson and Phelan (2019) (Optional Seltzer (2019))	SHAD 2 - Sunday; Reading posting and presentation due Monday midnight, peer critic due Tuesday midnight
8	Oct. 14	Wage structure	Sseruyange and Bulte (2020) (Optional Liang, Wang, and Zhang (2019))	L-Quiz 1 - Sunday; Reading posting and presentation due Monday midnight, peer critic due Tuesday midnight

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<u>Week</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Topics</u>	<u>Readings</u>	<u>Assignment</u>
9	Oct. 21	Human capital	Baguet and Dumas (2019) (Optional Feir, Gillezeau, Jones, et al. (2019))	Group research literature review due Sunday midnight; literature presentation due Monday night; peer critic due Tuesday midnight Reading posting and presentation due Monday midnight, peer critic due Tuesday midnight S-Quiz 3 - Sunday;
10	Oct. 26 - Monday	Optional - One-One Meeting with me on data		
10	Oct. 28	Economics of education	Weinstein (2018) (Optional Stinebrickner, Stinebrickner, and Sullivan (2019))	Reading posting and presentation due Monday midnight, peer critic due Tuesday midnight
Election Week - No class - Citizens, Go Vote!				
11	Nov. 11	Economics of migration	Peri and Yasenov (2019) (Optional Amuedo-Dorantes and Furtado (2019))	SHAD 3 - Sunday; Reading posting and presentation due Monday midnight, peer critic due Tuesday midnight S-Quiz 4 - Sunday;
12	Nov. 18	Economics of inequality: Gender discrimination; SHAD 4 - Sunday	Carpenter, Eppink, and Gonzales (2020) AND video (Optional Aksoy, Carpenter, Frank, and Huffman (2019))	Reading posting and presentation due Monday midnight, peer critic due Tuesday midnight
Thanksgiving break - No class				
13	Dec. 2	Economics of inequality: Racial Disparity	Cook (2014) AND video 1 AND video 2 (Optional Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004))	L-Quiz 2 - Sunday; SHAD 4 - Monday
Final's week: Dec. 7 - Dec. 11 Final group project presentation and submission. Date TBA				

Student Accessibility Service Office

If you have a disability and need accommodations please be sure to contact the Student Accessibility Services Office (315.229.5537) right away so they can help you get the accommodations you require. If you will need to use any accommodations in this class, please talk with me early so you can have the best possible experience this semester. Although not required, I would like to know of any accommodations that are needed at least 10 days before a quiz or test, so please see me soon. For more specific information visit the Student Accessibility Services website:

<https://www.stlawu.edu/student-accessibility-services> or Email: studentaccessibility@stlawu.edu

WORD Studio

For Fall 2020, all WORD (Written Communication, Oral Communication, Research, and Design) Studio appointments are completely online. We are eager to support you in your writing, oral communication, visual communication, science writing, and reading assignments. Tutors are thoroughly trained and friendly peers who can:

- Help you understand an assignment
- Help you build an argument or structure in papers and oral presentations
- Help you expand your vocab and work on sentence structure
- Work with you on a powerpoint, prezi, or poster
- Refine your reading skills and information literacy
- Help you learn to avoid plagiarism through proper citation

The WORD Studio offers both ESL and science writing specialists, but all of the tutors are equipped to assist with any communication assignment. The WORD Studio is open until 9pm Sunday-Thursday and 10am-2pm on Fridays. Schedule an online appointment by going to the WORD Studio website. If you have any questions about our services, please email the Director, Dr. Lucia Pawlowski, at lpawlowski@stlawu.edu.

References

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