

Hamilton College, Spring 2026

Economics 490: Topics in Labor Economics

Classes: Tuesday and Thursday 10:30-11:45am, KJ 110
Instructor: Jian Qi (Jay) Tan, KJ 218
Email: jtan1@hamilton.edu
Office Hours: Monday 10:00-11:30am & Tuesday 4:00-5:30pm (or by appointment)

Course Overview

Course Description

This is a topics course in the field of labor economics. This course has two goals: To acquaint students with current research and empirical methods. We will start with an overview of the US labor market. Labor economics is a broad field, and we focus on a selection of topics using papers at the frontier of current research. In the first half, we will discuss the impact of large-scale government programs and shocks from automation. In the second half, we will look at how gender, marriage and leadership shape labor market outcomes.

This course will engage you with several of Hamilton's educational goals: Analytic Discernment (understanding the strengths and weaknesses of various empirical models and their applications); Disciplinary Practice (understanding of modern tools of empirical economics and cutting-edge research); and Ethical, Informed and Engaged Citizenship (critically assess evidence and answer policy relevant questions).

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Critically read, review and discuss research papers
- Use this knowledge to situate a research question within a strand or several strands of literature
- Use economic tools to study questions relevant to labor economics

As a 400-level elective, this course is designed to not only support your understanding in the field of labor economics, but to help prepare you to undertake any senior project in economics.

Readings

The tentative list of papers is included in the course schedule. Readings will be posted to Blackboard.

A good reference for econometric methods that we will cover in this course can be found in "Causal Inference: The Mixtape" by Scott Cunningham. This is available for free at <https://mixtape.scunning.com/>

Prerequisites

Economics 275 and 266.

Resources

The easiest way to reach me is during my office hours. Seek help sooner rather than later. Although, feel free to drop by even if you don't have any specific questions! Email me any questions you might have. I will respond within 24 hours on weekdays. If I don't, send me a follow up email.

LITS Workshops

Workshops held by Dr. Tae Hyun Lim (tlim@hamilton.edu), Data Science/Analysis Research Librarian at the LITS will be relevant and highly useful for the course. You are encouraged to attend them. The schedule for this semester is as follows:

The **Introduction to CITRIX and STATA** workshop for economics students will be held on **Wednesday, January 28, 2026, from 6 p.m.** in the **Couper Classroom** on the 1st floor in Burke Library. Novices to the CITRIX environment and STATA are strongly recommended to attend. The workshop will cover topics such as installing and registering CITRIX, opening STATA on CITRIX, accessing your files on CITRIX, and loading and exploring data on STATA on CITRIX. The workshop will take approximately one and a half hours. Students interested in the workshop are encouraged to [SIGN UP on this sheet](#), although walk-ins are welcome. **PLEASE BRING YOUR OWN LAPTOPS.**

The **STATA Refresher** workshop for economics students will be held on **Thursday, January 29, 2026, from 6 p.m.** in the **Couper Classroom** on the 1st floor in Burke Library. Students with some STATA experience who want to refresh their skills are strongly recommended to attend. The workshop will cover topics such as basic data manipulation and visualization. The workshop will take approximately one and a half hours. Students interested in the workshop are encouraged to [SIGN UP on this sheet](#), although walk-ins are welcome. **PLEASE BRING YOUR OWN LAPTOPS.**

The campus also offers other resources that might help you:

- [Data Science Tutors](#)
- [Writing Center](#)
- [Oral Communication Center](#)

Course Policies

Grade Components

1. Class participation (15%)
2. Critical summaries (18%)
3. Critical discussion lead (20%)
4. Quizzes (20%)
5. Empirical assignments (27%)

Class participation

Since this is a small class, you are expected to participate actively. This means attending all classes, preparing for each class by doing the assigned readings, reviewing any relevant previous material, engaging in class discussions, providing thoughtful feedback to your peers and asking relevant and insightful questions.

Please let me know in advance if you plan to miss class for any reason. Missing class without valid justification will lower your participation grade. Plan to arrive on time in order to minimize class disruptions. Class disruptions, texting, using electronic devices for any reasons unrelated to class or any other disorderly behavior will adversely affect your grade. Please refrain from leaving the classroom unless it is absolutely necessary.

Critical summaries

You will write critical summaries of journal articles and prepare to answer questions about the article discussed in class on that day. A guide to critical summaries and leads has been posted. There are now 11 critical summaries, but only the grades from the top 10 would be counted in the final grading (i.e., you have 1 drop). You do not need to hand in a critical summary report for your critical discussion lead paper, but send me the slides and they will count as one of the critical summary reports.

Critical discussion lead

Each student will lead a critical discussion of a paper. This will take up one class session and will require the use of slides. You are required to meet with me the week before your discussion lead with a lesson plan. A guide has been posted (see Announcements).

Quizzes

I will give random short quizzes based on the introductions and conclusions of each required paper.

Empirical assignments

There will be tentatively three empirical lab-based assignments based on the empirical techniques covered in the class. The labs are designed to help you understand and critically think about the paper in more

detail, apply tools that you learn in econometrics and build skills that you will use in any 500-level senior project.

Grading

I will communicate grading decisions before handing back assignments. For final grades, A (90-100) means excellent work, B (80-89) means good work, C (70-79) means satisfactory work, and D (60-69) means passing but below the average required for graduation. Grading cutoffs are determined at the end of the semester by the instructor.

Missed Work

Late assignments will not be accepted. Instead, to be fair to all students, you will have two late vouchers that you can use during the semester for empirical assignments or critical summaries. To use your voucher, send me an email with the subject “490 Late Voucher for [Name of Assignment]” before the assignment is due. This voucher will allow you to turn in the assignment 72 hours after the due date. If you do not turn in your assignment by then, a 10% penalty will be imposed for every hour that the assignment is late. You are advised to save your vouchers for medical or family emergencies.

Academic Honesty and Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Students are expected to understand and abide by Hamilton College’s [Honor Code](#). Any violations of the Honor Code will be treated seriously, including but not limited to a zero on the associated assignment, quiz, or exam.

Examples of Code violations include: plagiarism, cheating on examinations, copying problem set answers from unauthorized answer-keys, using test materials without faculty permission, falsifying records to dishonestly obtain grades, and using AI to complete assignments.

Do not assume that the use of AI is allowed. Rather, consult me and I will provide guidance for each assignment.

Submissions that are identical copies will not be graded and will automatically receive a zero. Copying and allowing other students to copy your work are both violations of the Code.

Student Well-being

Many of us may feel overwhelmed, anxious, or depressed for various reasons. At any point, if you feel unable to complete work for class, do reach out to me. Please know that I care about your well-being.

The Hamilton College community cares and has various resources on campus: Counseling Center (315-859-4340), Campus Safety (315-859-4000), Student Support Care Team (studentsupport@hamilton.edu, 315-859-4020), Associate Dean of Students for Academics Adam Van Wynsberghe (315-859-4600, avanwyns@hamilton.edu), your faculty advisor, your RA, or Area Director in your residence hall.

Students with Disabilities

Hamilton College will make reasonable accommodations for students with properly documented disabilities. If you are eligible to receive an accommodation and would like to make a formal request for this course, please discuss it with me as soon as possible. All conversations will remain confidential. You will also need to contact and provide appropriate documentation of your disability to Allen Harrison, Assistant Dean for Accessibility Resources (*aharriso@hamilton.edu*, 315-859-4021, Elihu Root House).

Disclaimer: The syllabus and course schedule are subject to change.

ECON490 Spring 2026 Schedule (tentative)

Week	Date	Day	Content	Assignments
0	22 Jan	Th	Introduction, Syllabus	Ungraded Workflow Assignment
1	27 Jan	Tu	Labor Market Facts and Trends Claudia Goldin, “Labor Markets in the Twentieth Century”, The Cambridge Economic History of the United States, Vol. III, CUP 1988.	
	29 Jan	Th	Labor Market Facts and Trends Lawrence Mishel, Josh Bivens, Elise Gould, Heidi Shierholz, Chapter 1 of “The State of Working America”, Cornell University Press 2012.	
2	3 Feb	Tu	Difference-in-difference	Empirical Assignment 1 posted
	5 Feb	Th	Topic: Government Programs Technique: Difference-in-differences Andrew Garin, Jonathan Rothbaum, “The Long-Run Impacts of Public Industrial Investment on Local Development and Economic Mobility: Evidence from World War II”, QJE 2024.	
3	10 Feb	Tu	Critical discussion 1	Critical summary due before class

	12 Feb	Th	Topic: Government Programs Technique: Difference-in-differences Martha J Bailey, Hilary Hoynes, Maya Rossin-Slater, Reed Walker, “Is the Social Safety Net a Long-Term Investment? Large-Scale Evidence from the Food Stamps Program”, ReStud 2024.	
4	17 Feb	Tu	Class Canceled.	Empirical Assignment 1 due
	19 Feb	Th	Critical discussion 2	Critical summary due before class
5	24 Feb	Tu	Instrumental Variables	Empirical Assignment 2 posted
	26 Feb	Th	Topic: Robots and Automation Technique: Instrumental Variables Daron Acemoglu and Pascual Restrepo, “Robots and Jobs: Evidence from US Labor Markets”, Journal of Political Economy 2020.	
6	3 Mar	Tu	Critical discussion 3	Critical summary due before class
	5 Mar	Th	Topic: Robots and Automation Technique: Instrumental Variables	

			Osea Giuntella, Yi Lu, Tianyi Wang, “How do Workers Adjust to Robots? Evidence from China”, Economic Journal 2025.	
7	10 Mar	Tu	Critical discussion 4	Empirical Assignment 2 due Critical summary due before class
	12 Mar	Th	Topic: Gender Technique: Instrumental Variables Patricia Cortes, Ying Feng, Nicolas Guida-Johnson, Jessica Pan, “Automation and Gender: Implications for Occupational Segregation and the Gender Skill Gap”, Working Paper 2024.	
	17 Mar	Tu	Spring Recess	
	19 Mar	Th	Spring Recess	
	24 Mar	Tu	Spring Recess	
	26 Mar	Th	Spring Recess	
8	31 Mar	Tu	Critical discussion 5	Critical summary due before class
	2 Apr	Th	Topic: Gender Technique: Instrumental Variables	

			Kerwin Kofi Charles, Jonathan Guryan, Jessica Pan, "The Effects of Sexism on American Women: The Role of Norms vs. Discrimination", Journal of Human Resources 2022.	
9	7 Apr	Tu	Critical discussion 6	Critical summary due before class
	9 Apr	Th	Topic: Assortative mating/marriage Technique: Natural Experiment Marc Goni, "Assortative Matching at the Top of the Distribution: Evidence from the World's Most Exclusive Marriage Market", AEJ Applied Economics 2022.	
10	14 Apr	Tu	Critical Discussion 7	Regression Discontinuity Video Lecture Posted Empirical Assignment 3 posted
	16 Apr	Th	Topic: Assortative mating/marriage Technique: Regression Discontinuity Lars Kirkeboen, Edwin Leuven, Magne Mogstad, Jack Mountjoy, "College as a Marriage Market", Working Paper 2025.	

11	21 Apr	Tu	Critical discussion 8	Critical summary due before class
	23 Apr	Th	Topic: Leadership Technique: Natural Experiment Andreas Ferrara, Christian Dippel, Stephan Heblich, “Frontline Leadership: Evidence from American Civil War Captains”, NBER Working Paper 2025	
12	28 Apr	Tu	Critical Discussion 9	Empirical Assignment 3 due
	30 Apr	Th	Topic: Leadership Technique: Regression Discontinuity Michela Giorcelli, “The Effects of Business School Education on Manager Career Outcomes”, Working Paper 2024	
13	5 May	Tu	Critical Discussion 10	Critical summary due before class
	7 May	Th	Carlo Medici, “Closing Ranks: Organized Labor and Immigration”, Working Paper 2025	
14	12 May	Tu	Critical Discussion 11	Critical summary due before class

	14 May	Th	End of semester	