
Spring 2023

ECON 343 Economics of Immigration

Instructor information

Instructor: Sidonia McKenzie
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Office hours via **Zoom**: MW 5:00 - 6:30 PM
Pronouns: She/her/hers

Course information

Lecture times: MW 11 am - 12:20 pm
Lecture room: Tech Lecture Room 5
TA: [Yong Cai](#)
Discussion section: Fri. 11 am - 12:20 pm
Yong's student hours: Tuesday, 2-4 pm at KGH 3198
Prerequisite(s): ECON 281, ECON 310-1, and ECON 310-2

Course description

The course explores the economic determinants and consequences of immigration on markets, with a primary focus on the labor market. The course relies on the tools of econometrics and economic theory to explore key elements of international migration with an emphasis on the effects of immigrants on receiving countries. The course takes a mathematical approach to explore questions such as who migrates and why, how immigrants do in the receiving country and the effects of immigrants on natives.

We will weave in data analysis using software such as Stata or R, policy documents, empirical papers, and information from the media to enrich our understanding of immigration issues and highlight how economists are thinking about them. Immigration is a contentious issue that involves both positive and normative analyses. Although we may be presented with the same set of facts, we may arrive at different conclusions, which is absolutely fine. We all come from various backgrounds and bring different viewpoints and experiences to this community, which means that we have so much to learn from each other. The purpose of this class is to train you *how* to think, not *what* to think.

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, the student should be able to apply theoretical and econometric methods to evaluate and discuss the:

- (i) foundations of an individual's decision to migrate;
- (ii) difference between economic migrants and refugees, their different motivations and outcomes in the host country;
- (iii) factors affecting the economic performance of migrants in host countries;
- (iv) implications of economic assimilation for host country economies and
- (v) effects of government policy on migration flows.

Readings

Textbooks:

The growing cost of textbooks is alarming and raises concerns about affordability and equitable access to required course material. Consequently, there is no required text for this course. If you plan to pursue further studies in immigration economics or want to learn more about it, the suggested texts below are great resources. The lecture slides are also curated from these texts and many other open-access resources.

- Immigration Economics, George J. Borjas, Harvard University Press, 2014. **(GB; Suggested)**
- The Economics of Immigration. Bansak, Cynthia, Nicole B. Simpson, and Madeline Zavodny. Routledge, 2020. **(BSZ; Suggested)**

These materials include skeletal lecture notes, which you must fill in occasionally, and empirical papers. Please read the [reading guide](#) (available in Canvas) to help structure your review of the articles and know what is required of you during our class discussions.

Articles:

- We will read quite a few academic articles over eight weeks. These articles are listed in the course schedule section. All articles will be available for download in Canvas.
- Please follow the [reading guide](#) (available in Canvas) to help structure your review of the articles and know what is required of you during our class discussions.
- To keep updated on the latest policy developments concerning U.S. immigration, visit the [Center for Immigration Studies'](#) website. They are an independent, non-partisan think-tank devoted exclusively to the research of U.S. immigration policy. This can also be a great source for topic ideas. [Migration Policy Institute](#) is another great source of information and international migration data.

Assessments

This course has 5 components that will determine your final grade:

(i) **Midterms: 30%**

Midterms will typically consist of True or False, essay-type, and short answer questions based on the course content. An essential learning objective is to improve your critical thinking and problem-solving skills. As such, exams will be calculator-free, and no sheet cheats are allowed. You are strongly encouraged to form study groups to prepare for exams and collaborate on the problem sets.

(ii) **Problem sets: 30%.**

There will be three problem sets throughout the course, and at least one will involve the use of software such as Stata or R. The problem sets are meant to reinforce class materials and help you to think more deeply about research questions regarding immigration.

(iii) **Infographic: 15%.**

Each student will create an infographic about the immigrant population in one U.S. state or a developed country. State or country assignment will be determined by random draw). I will provide further information at the appropriate time, but a quick overview of what is expected is as follows:

- Create an infographic showing the percentage of immigrants in the state/country and the most common origins. Your job is to identify immigrants in the data you found, decide how to present the information and identify other areas worth analyzing based on the course topics.

- You should show at least three additional descriptive statistics from the data. For example, you could consider other variables such as race, age, age at migration, years in the U.S., citizenship status, educational attainment, marital status, labor market participation, occupation, income, etc. Think carefully about the variables and how they are defined. You should always check the data dictionary to understand what each variable means and what it measures.
- This assignment is about clear and accurate visual data presentation. We often say a picture or a graph(ic), in this case, is worth a thousand words! The final infographic should provide an accurate insight into the data sample, and you should find creative ways to present the data by using charts, graphs, images, etc.
- You can use design tools such as Canva or Piktochart to create your infographic. You can use any reputable data sources such as [IPUMS USA](#) or [Google's Dataset Search engine](#), which aggregates datasets from a wide range of data repositories.
- Several examples of infographics are publicly available to find ideas on designing your own. For example, a simple Google search shows the [Infographic Layout Cheat Sheet](#) or specifically on [Pinterest for 'infographics'](#).

(iv) **Point-based Immigration System (Group proposal): 20%.**

A large part of our class discourse focuses on immigration policies and how we can apply economic tools to expand our understanding of and respond to the challenges and opportunities of immigration.

The United States has tried to reform its immigration system without much progress. It remains inflexible and restrictive while other countries have reformed their systems. For example, some countries have adopted point systems to gauge whether applicants should be issued work visas. Prospective immigrants earn points based on several characteristics, such as age, language skills, and job skills.

A U.S. senator has asked your group to design such a point system for the United States. The senator has requested that the system be designed so that 50 points will generally be enough for a visa.

- The goal is for you to utilize the knowledge and skills gained throughout the quarter to propose a comprehensive immigration policy for the U.S. There are many ways to approach this project, and your group will be tasked to use the course models, concepts, and empirical papers, along with other resources and data, to support your proposition.
- As part of your proposal, your group will prepare a presentation pitch for the senator that explains the logic behind your immigration point system. The presentation must include the economic reasoning behind your point system, and discuss whether non-economic characteristics were rewarded. Finally, the proposal (and presentation) must explicitly identify the point structure and criteria for awarding points.
 - To receive full points, you must also provide feedback on the paper presentations made by your classmates.
- Groups will be randomly assigned, and presentations will occur during the last week of classes. your group will have 10-15 minutes, and slides must be submitted as a pdf by class time. Further details and a grading rubric will be provided later in class.

(v) **Participation: 5%.**

The course is structured to encourage active student engagement with the lecture materials. It is critical that you not only read the empirical papers but participate in the discussions during class and the TA sections. Participation may look different for everyone. Whether you are an eager student who has an answer to every question or an observant wallflower, it must be clear to the instructor and TA that you are engaged with the course materials, either during lectures, TA sections, or office hours. The TA and I will monitor each student's participation throughout the course.

Occasionally, we will work on practice problems in class individually and/or in small groups. They will mostly be graded for participation/completion, with small credit for accuracy, but you must be present in class. Make-ups are only made if you make arrangements with me before your absence. If you expect to be absent, please communicate with me before missing class. If you make arrangements, I will work with you as long as you are willing to do the work to catch up.

Course policies

Grades

I strictly adhere to the Department's grading policy, where a curve *may be* applied to determine your overall grade. In other words, if applicable, the curve is usually computed when all problem sets, quizzes, and exam scores have been tallied *but can be applied after any exam during the quarter*. The Economics department determines the curve, so **the instructor has absolutely no input about this grade distribution**. The historical average grade for 300-level econ courses corresponds to a 3.05 GPA or a B, which is consistent with the average grade across all 200-level Econ courses. Please check the course [grade book](#) periodically to ensure that all your grades for assignments, quizzes, and exams are correct.

To be consistent with other Econ 300-level courses, the nominal grade cutoffs shown below *may* be used or cutoffs consistent with *the department's curve*. Further explanation of the curve is available on page 6.

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|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| • A $\rightarrow \geq 95\%$ | • C+ $\rightarrow 77\% - 79\%$ |
| • A- $\rightarrow 90\% - 94\%$ | • C $\rightarrow 74\% - 76\%$ |
| • B+ $\rightarrow 87\% - 89\%$ | • C- $\rightarrow 65\% - 73\%$ |
| • B $\rightarrow 84\% - 86\%$ | • D $\rightarrow 61\% - 64\%$ |
| • B- $\rightarrow 80\% - 83\%$ | • F $\rightarrow \leq 60\%$ |

Exams & Assignments

All midterms and the final exam are administered in person in our classroom. **For students with ANU accommodations, you will make your own arrangements with the ANU office to write your exams at their designated testing site, where all your testing accommodations are honored.**

Exam grading protocol:

We use [Crowdmark](#), an online grading software, to grade all exams. You already have access to this platform using your NU login credentials. On exam days, you will be sent a unique Crowdmark link to upload each exam page, including the name page. We typically allot 5 - 10 minutes at the end of each exam for you to properly upload each page. To upload your exam, take a photo of each page separately, then click on your unique Crowdmark link sent to your email or Canvas inbox. The link will take you to a blank version of the exam. You will populate the exam by uploading the photos under the correct page. That is, **your photo of page 1 should be uploaded under page 1, your photo of page 2 should be uploaded under page 2, etc.** This is relatively straightforward, but be sure that the page you're uploading matches the page number in Crowdmark. This [video](#) walks you through the steps to submit an assignment on Crowdmark.

Exam content:

ECON 343 is an upper-level college-level class, and we expect you to apply economic reasoning and tools (the models and theoretical concepts) taught in class to current events and new settings or solve new kinds of problems. In academia, we refer to this as 'Mastery.' While the structure of questions rarely changes, *each exam will look different and may have nuances you haven't seen before* as I develop various ways to assess your level of mastery. Therefore, **do not expect to pass the class by memorizing the answers to problem sets.**

Requests for re-grading:

Regrade requests must be submitted to me in writing up to one week after your work is returned. Your written explanation should address legitimate concerns such as mistakes or oversight. Please do not approach me or the TA with an oral request before making the written request. Further details of this policy are explicitly outlined [here](#).

Late assignments:

Owing to the dynamic nature of higher education and advancements in technology, instructors are often tasked with pivoting in creative and efficient ways while ensuring that learning goals and course objectives are achieved. One of the ways instructors have adapted is through course norm-setting. Our classroom is not just a safe space for difficult and diverse discussions; it is also an equitable class environment where everyone can work toward achieving their desired grade outcomes. Resources will be openly available for everyone to fully engage with the course, regardless of their background or exposure to economics. To this end, I will not extend the deadline to individual students. Aside from University-approved accommodations, it would be unethical to make exceptions for some and not for others and certainly unfair to those who respect this policy and do not ask for special accommodations. Please make use of the wild card grade options to accommodate life's unexpected events or if you need a break from assignments.

Final Exam:

This course is governed by the policies and stipulations outlined by the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences (WCAS). As expected, WCAS has a strict policy on final exams. Specifically, **final grade changes are ONLY permitted to correct a clerical or computational error**. [Grade changes](#) requested for the following reasons are not allowed:

- Redoing work or submitting extra work;
- Reexamination;
- A makeup examination administered without authorization by the Office of Undergraduate Studies and Advising;
- Reevaluation of one student's work after the grades of others in the class have been submitted to the Registrar's Office.

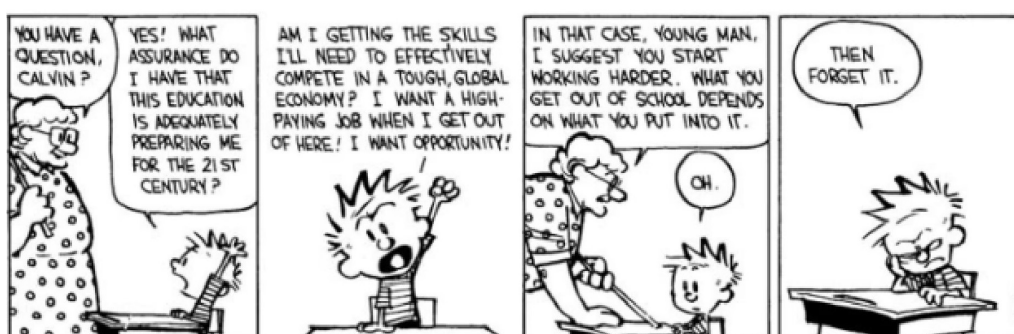
As a student, you have the right to see your graded work and to receive an explanation of any grade based on the published grading policy in a class. This is the main reason we grade via Crowdmark and have [student hours](#). Please utilize them as frequently as you need.

Responsibility

As the instructor of the course, I take responsibility for providing timely and consistent uploads of the relevant course content and resources that will facilitate the achievement of the course objectives. I am committed to a fair, equitable, and transparent grading process to help you achieve mastery of the course content and motivate you. To this end, I will maintain a flexible schedule to provide academic assistance and adjust, where feasible, to the vicissitudes of life.

I reserve the right to resolve any remaining ambiguities and revise the course schedule and other pertinent aspects of the course as needed.

You are responsible for taking the initiative to participate in all aspects of the course that will enable your successful completion. This is not a self-paced course! You have to complete the weekly readings and problem sets and study for the exams. If you are looking for a class you can visit for a few minutes each week, read papers at the last second, and still pull an A or Pass, then this class is *definitely not it*. However, if you are looking for a course that helps you gain a deeper understanding of how to apply economic tools to the topic of immigration and contribute to policy debates, then this is that course and so much more! If you put in the effort, I think your hard work will pay off, and you will leave the class knowing way more than you did when you started.



Contract¹

A **syllabus is a contract** between students and the instructor that provides information about the course and provides a commitment device to prevent arbitrary behavior. I will assume that you are familiar with, and agree to, all policies delineated in this contract.

In the event that new guidelines issued by the Provost are released once the quarter has started and supersede the class policy, the weights, percentages and assessments are subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.



¹Inspired by Professor Sara Hernandez-Saborit

Frequently asked questions and answers

Q: What are your basic expectations for the class?

A: **Professional conduct is always expected, regardless of the mode of delivery.** I expect that you will arrive at lectures on time, participate in and be respectful towards each others' views during class discussions. We are part of a respectful college community, so comments and language should be appropriate for this setting, including addressing your instructor appropriately (Professor or Professor McKenzie). Tolerance and respect towards each other must always be displayed. We all come from various backgrounds and bring different viewpoints and experiences to this community, which means that we have so much to learn from each other. We can show respect for differences by seeking to understand, asking questions, clarifying our understanding, and/or respectfully explaining our own perspectives. This way, everyone walks away with a new perspective of seeing an issue and respecting others with different values or beliefs.

I firmly adhere to Northwestern's policy on [institutional equity](#). Our classroom is a safe space where students from different backgrounds can connect around the common goal of learning and applying economic concepts to create a measurable impact on our lives and those around us.

I also hope you will study for at least 2-3 hours and complete reading assignments for every lecture hour. I want you to challenge yourself and have fun while doing it! This can be a really rewarding class! We all have to make decisions at one point. The materials taught in this course can help you beyond your university life by exposing you to tools that will help you make sense of this dynamic and complex world.

Q: I am sick on the day of the exam or have a personal emergency and can't make it to class on exam day. What should I do?

A: Firstly, if you are unwell while on campus, you should contact the [Student Health Services](#) immediately and your student advisor or the [Office for Student Assistance & Support Services](#) (SASS).

If for **valid reasons, with proofs (a note from the Dean's office or other school advisors)**, you miss an exam, **please notify me immediately**. Advanced notice is always preferred, and **proofs must be emailed within 36 hours of the missed exam to validate your absence**. Viva voce reports will not be accepted, and you will earn zero on the missed exam(s). Missing class for work, a job interview, or a prescheduled family event **would not** constitute an excused absence.

Under no circumstances will individual exceptions be made when determining grades. This applies to extending deadlines if you forgot to complete an assignment. I will not make individual exceptions unless you have an officially approved absence from the university (health center, academic advisor, etc.). The grading methods described above are designed to facilitate life's unexpected events. Therefore, if you miss an exam with **valid proofs**, your score will be reweighted. If you don't report your missed exam **and** provide valid proofs, you will earn zero on the exam. **There are no exceptions to this.**

If you miss both Midterms, you will have to drop the class since we will not have sufficient evidence to assess your performance.

Q: I arrived late for an exam. Will I be given extra time?

A: Unfortunately, no. The classrooms and exam proctors are usually only available during the allotted time. We simply don't have enough resources to facilitate extra time beyond the end of the exam. That said, please make every effort to arrive at the exam on time.

Q: How does the grading work?

A: A central theme in my pedagogical approach is to create an equitable class environment where everyone can work toward achieving their desired grade outcome. Some students are incredibly talented, but an exam may reflect something else. The variation in assessment type encourages metacognitively aware students to excel in areas of their greatest strengths, which acts as a compensating adjustment for weaker areas.

Due to the structure of the course, you must take the midterms to receive an overall score in CAESAR. Exams will not be rescheduled for any reason unless apocalyptic. Exams will not be rescheduled if you miss one.

You can opt for a Pass/No Pass option (see further details on your grading options [here](#)). If you select this option, **to pass the class, you will need to score 70% (C-) or better on each component of the course assessment.**

Q: What do you mean by a “curve” and why does it seem so ambiguous?

A: A curve, more formally grading on a curve, means adjusting students’ scores after an exam based on a predetermined distribution, usually a bell curve (see the illustration below). The Department of Economics determines this distribution to mitigate the vicious cycle of [grade inflation](#), which has permeated higher education. Though this practice is evidently contentious, in the words of renowned Economist Thomas Sowell, “there are no solutions, only trade-offs”.

To understand grade curving in the context of this class, it is best to consider your “*real score*” (r), that is, the nominal score (i) adjusted for grade inflation or a measure of your performance relative to the class (π). Conceptually, this is the Fisher equation applied to grading. That is,

$$r = i - \pi$$

where π can be negative or zero. In very rare cases, π could be positive. The ambiguity of grading on a curve is that π is unknown and difficult to predict *ex-ante*. ***In this course, π is determined after all exams have been graded, the measures of central tendency for the class are derived, and the department’s grade distribution is considered.***



Cristina Spaso

Q: Will you be lenient if I'm caught cheating, using ChatGPT, plagiarizing, or engaging in unethical behavior?

A: No. You will likely get an "F", and your case will be escalated to the Dean, who will take further action. While you are encouraged to form study groups to discuss assignments and lecture notes, your graded work must result from your independent effort. In fact, **any form of cheating, including improper use of content generated by artificial intelligence, constitutes a violation of Northwestern's academic integrity policy**. Turnitin, which is already in use at Northwestern, is expanding its system to include artificial intelligence detection. You are required to comply with the policies found in the booklet, "Academic Integrity at Northwestern University: A Basic Guide", which can be found here: <https://www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies/academic-integrity/index.html>

Q: Should I email you if I have questions about an assignment or exam?

A: Though I welcome all your questions, **I strongly suggest you post all questions relating to assignments, exams queries, or anything you need clarification on via the class discussion board on Canvas**. There will be a discussion post created and monitored by the TA for each problem set. This is a great way for us to interact and learn from each other. We will not answer class-related questions via email. Of course, **for personal matters**, please don't hesitate to contact me and **put "ECON 343: [subject of email]" in the subject line of your email**. Due to the many emails I receive daily, I will likely miss your email if you don't adhere to this. **Please allow 24 - 48 hours to receive a reply**.

Dr. P.M Forni once said *"We respect other people's time when we learn to value it as much as our own. Even better, we can get to a point where we won't distinguish between our time and the time of others."* In other words, please be respectful of your instructor's time by arriving at lectures and office hours on time and sending emails during the **work week (Monday - Friday) before 10 pm**.

Q: I won't be able to attend class, can I ask my friend to record the lecture?

A: No. Unauthorized student recording of classroom or other academic activities (including advising sessions or office hours) is prohibited. Unauthorized recording is unethical and may also violate University policy and state law. Students requesting the use of assistive technology as an accommodation should contact [AccessibleNU](#). Unauthorized use of classroom recordings – including distributing or posting them – is also prohibited. Under the University's [Copyright Policy](#), faculty own the copyright to instructional materials – including those resources created specifically for the purposes of instruction, such as syllabi, lectures and lecture notes, and presentations. Students cannot copy, reproduce, display, or distribute these materials. Students who engage in unauthorized recording, unauthorized use of a recording, or unauthorized distribution of instructional materials will be referred to the appropriate University office for follow-up.

At the *instructor's discretion*, portions of the class will be recorded for educational purposes and made available to students enrolled in the class. Your instructor will communicate how you can access the recordings.

Q: I'm interested in general academic advising. Where should I go?

A: Right to [our advising](#) page to schedule an appointment. I might as well add a shameless plug for Economics major! If you are interested in majoring in the dynamic and versatile field of [Economics](#), [here](#) are a few short videos from three of the coolest and smartest faculty (in my opinion) in the Economics Department, starting with the Director of Undergraduate Studies, [Professor Mark Witte](#), and Professors [Jim Hornsten](#) and [Sara Hernandez-Saborit](#). Still not convinced? No worries, we would still love to meet with you to discuss your options.

Q: I'm interested in connecting with other Econ students in a more social, relaxed setting. Are there any clubs for this?

A: You bet! There is [Womxn in Economics](#) (WiE), a passionate group of undergraduates who seek to encourage female-identifying members of the community to pursue their interests in economics through a variety of events and learning opportunities. You also have [Undergraduate Economics Society](#) (UES). They have both teamed up to host weekly coffee chats for first and second-year students to receive guidance from juniors and seniors on classes, activities, academia, internship recruiting, and more. Visit their web page, [UES-WiE Advising](#), for the updated Fall schedule. It'll be informative and so much fun!

Q: What are additional student support resources that I need to know about?

A: Northwestern has abundant resources to meet your basic needs for a holistic college experience. Below, I list a few that I think you should know about.

– **NUHelp**: Students can find useful resources for safety and security, academic support, and mental and physical health and well-being at the [NUhelp website](#) and [App](#).

– **AccessibleNU**: Northwestern University is committed to providing the most accessible learning environment as possible for students with disabilities. Should you anticipate or experience disability-related barriers in the academic setting, please contact AccessibleNU to move forward with the university's established accommodation process (✉ accessiblenu@northwestern.edu; ☎ 847-467-5530). If you already have established accommodations with AccessibleNU, please let me know as soon as possible, preferably within the first two weeks of the term, so we can work together to implement your disability accommodations. Disability information, including academic accommodations, is confidential under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

– **Wellness and Mental Health**: Northwestern University is committed to supporting the wellness of our students. Student Affairs has multiple resources to support student wellness and mental health. If you are feeling distressed or overwhelmed, please reach out for help. Students can access confidential resources through the [Counseling and Psychological Services](#) (CAPS), [Religious and Spiritual Life](#) (RSL) and the [Center for Awareness, Response, and Education](#) (CARE).