University of Alberta – Department of Economics – Winter 2026
ECON 431-531 – Labor Economics / Labour Economics I – Marchand

COURSE OUTLINE

Website

https://sites.ualberta.ca/~jmarchan/teaching.htm

Class Hours	Instructor	Office Hours
Monday and Wednesday	Joseph Marchand	Monday and Wednesday
HC 2-30: 12:30 – 1:50 pm	jmarchan@ualberta.ca	Tory 7-29: 2:00 – 3:30 pm

Description

Labor Economics (ECON 431) is a course serving as senior-level undergraduate exposure to the market for labor, in order to establish a comprehensive understanding of the field.

Labour Economics I (ECON 531) is a course serving as masters-level graduate exposure to the market for labour, in order to establish a comprehensive understanding of the field.

Labor Economics / Labour Economics I (ECON 431-531) is the blended course version.

This course will explore the fundamental topics of the field, including: an introduction; labor supply; labor demand; labor market equilibrium; compensating wage differentials; education; the wage distribution; labor mobility; and, labor market discrimination; all through the lens of local labor markets and policies from a North American perspective.

Undergraduate prerequisites are ECON 109, ECON 281, and ECON 399 (or equivalent).

Resources

There is one required textbook for this course: *Labor Economics, Ninth Edition* (2024), written by George J. Borjas and published under McGraw Hill. (https://www.mheducation.com/highered/product/labor-economics-borjas.html)

A hard copy version is available through the UofA bookstore or found elsewhere online. An ebook or digital rental is also available. For previous editions, I'd keep it to the 2020s.

In addition to the textbook, articles from academic journals that publish labor economics will be used, as well as working papers, mainly those included in the NEP-LMA (Labor Markets) series that I edit. (https://nep.repec.org/) (https://nep.repec.org/nep-lma.html)

Evaluation

Your numerical grade for the course will be calculated using the following weights:

Participation (in class)	15%	(attendance counts but participation worth more)
Assignments (at home)	25%	(various forms and times throughout the semester)
Mid-Term Exam (C1-5)	25%	(on Monday, February 23rd, 12:30 pm, 80 minutes)
Final Exam (C1-9)	35%	(on Wednesday, April 22nd, 1:00 pm, 120 minutes)

Your letter grade is then determined based on your absolute and relative performance to the rest of the class, with a historical grade point average of ~ 3.15 out of 4.0 (~ B+/B).

My approach to grading is to read all given answers to a question, and then rank them, with the best answer typically receiving full marks and a sliding scale then being used.

Due to the blended nature of the course, graduate status will also be taken into account. This leads to a higher expectation of graduate students across all levels of evaluation.

An A minus in any of my courses is the bare minimum requirement for a recommendation letter from me, but it does not guarantee it. I should not make exceptions to this rule.

Participation

Participation during class hours is encouraged. Grading will be based on the attendance of the lectures in person, and then on the contributions made during those lectures, through spoken comments. Please treat our time together like a language course: we will focus our discussions only on labor economics and labor markets, including your own.

Graduates are also encouraged to attend department seminars, which are typically at 3:00 to 4:30 pm on Fridays, and any other opportunities to experience economic research.

Assignments

Assignments will occur in various forms and at various times throughout the semester. These may directly relate to questions, problems, or the data explorer from the textbook. They may also relate to articles from academic journals or NEP-LMA working papers. For graduate students, assignment tasks may involve steps toward your own research and presenting in front of the class on a related topic during a particular time and place.

I purposefully have not set the assignments ahead of time, as I would like to arrive at them more organically. That said, because myself and a teaching assistant would like to grade assignments together, a ten percent per day late penalty will be used when needed.

Exams

All students must complete a mid-term exam and a final exam. A previous mid-term exam will be provided, with no answers, but a final exam has never circulated. The mid-term exam will cover the first five chapters of the textbook, and the final exam will cover the first nine chapters. The final exam may be deferred through your faculty, but approval requires that at least half of your assigned work had already been completed.

Schedule

Month	Date	Day	No.	Topic
January	5th	Mon	(1)	C0 – Course Overview
	7th	Wed	(2)	C1 – Introduction
	12th	Mon	(3)	C1 – Introduction
	14th	Wed	(4)	C1 – Introduction
	19th	Mon	(5)	C2 – Labor Supply
	21st	Wed	(6)	C2 – Labor Supply
	26th	Mon	(7)	C3 – Labor Demand
	28th	Wed	(8)	C4 – Labor Market Equilibrium
February	2nd	Mon	(9)	C4 – Labor Market Equilibrium
	4th	Wed	(10)	C4 – Labor Market Equilibrium
	9th	Mon	(11)	C5 – Compensating Wage Differentials
	11th	Wed	(12)	C1-5 – Mid-Term Exam Review
	16th	Mon	*	No Class (Statutory Holiday)
	18th	Wed	*	No Class (Reading Week)
	23rd	Mon	(13)	C1-5 – Mid-Term Exam (@ 12:30 pm in class room)
	25th	Wed	(14)	C6 – Education
March	2nd	Mon	(15)	C6 – Education
	4th	Wed	(16)	C7 – The Wage Distribution
	9th	Mon	(17)	C7 – The Wage Distribution
	11th	Wed	(18)	C7 – The Wage Distribution
	16th	Mon	(19)	C4-7 – Graduate Students Take Over
	18th	Wed	(20)	C4-7 – Graduate Students Take Over
	23rd	Mon	(21)	C8 – Labor Mobility
	25th	Wed	(22)	C8 – Labor Mobility
	30th	Mon	(23)	C9 – Labor Market Discrimination
April	1st	Wed	(24)	C9 – Labor Market Discrimination
	6th	Mon	*	No Class (Easter Monday)
	8th	Mon	(25)	C1-9 – Final Exam Review
	22nd	Wed	(FE)	C1-9 – Final Exam (@ 1:00 pm in class or exam room)

Policies

"Policy about course outlines can be found in the Evaluation Procedures and Grading System section of the University Calendar." [If there is a problem, let me know ASAP.]

"The University of Alberta is committed to the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. Students are expected to be familiar with these standards regarding academic honesty and to uphold the policies of the University in this respect. Students are particularly urged to familiarize themselves with the provisions of the Student Academic Integrity Policy and the Student Conduct Policy (on the University of Alberta Policies and Procedures Online (UAPPOL) website) and avoid any behaviour which could potentially result in suspicions of cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation of facts and/or participation in an offence. Academic dishonesty is a serious offence and can result in suspension or expulsion from the University. [Faculty Dean's office makes decisions.]

"Audio or video recording, digital or otherwise, of lectures, labs, seminars or any other teaching environment by students is allowed only with the prior written consent of the instructor or as part of an approved accommodation plan. Student or instructor content, digital or otherwise, created and/or used within the context of the course is to be used solely for personal study, and is not to be used or distributed for any other purpose without prior written consent from the content author(s)." [Includes picture taking too.]

[A distraction free learning environment would be ideal. First, keep conversations open and (relatively) on topic. Second, keep all electronics packed away (hall for emergencies). Third, keep any food and drink (relatively) scent free (as our class time is around lunch).]