“ALL YOU CAN EAT” LABOR ECONOMICS

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Session 5B, Innovative Frameworks, *JET SET* 2026

"Buffet" style of assessment

IMPACT Class of '14, Chuck Calahan

- Self-Determination Theory
  - Autonomy→Intrinsic Motivation
  - Edward Deci (Ryan & Deci 2000)
- Students choose how to earn their grades*
- Spring '25, Fall '25, Spring '26
  - Iterations

* What the rest of the talk is about.

Golden Corral® -ation

- Junior level elective
- Wide scope
  - Interest across topics not uniform
- Enrollment typically $n \approx 60$

Assessment Contract

"How are you going to earn your grade for this Module?"

- In D2L\Quizzes (see example).
  - D2L = Brightspace (Purdue's LMS)
  - Only a feasible score "unlocks" Content in D2L.
- Form expectations, manage instructional resources, i.e., graders.
  - 30-40 % points per Module
  - 3 Modules, 4-6 weeks long
- Incentivize planning ahead for students.

Constraints

Buffet with “nutritional guidelines”

- Minimum number of points from “hard” buffet items.
  - Fall ‘25 innovation
  - Exams, projects, in-class debates, *summative* assessments
- Incentives for adequate familiarity with all topics.
  - McGraw-Hill Smartbook, “generous” point values

Buffet items

Assessment	Note	Selection Proportion	Who Grades
Exams	"Math essay" format, Summative	30% per Module	Grad TA (w/ my instructions)
McGraw-Hill Smartbook reading assignments		≈ 100%	Self-grading
McGraw-Hill Data Explorer assignments,	IPUMS + Stata + Essay questions	20%	Grad TA
D2L\Discussions		50%	Grad TA
"An Economist Watches"		38%	Instructor
In-class debates	Summative	18%	Instructor
DIY Projects	Summative	20%	Instructor

DIY Projects

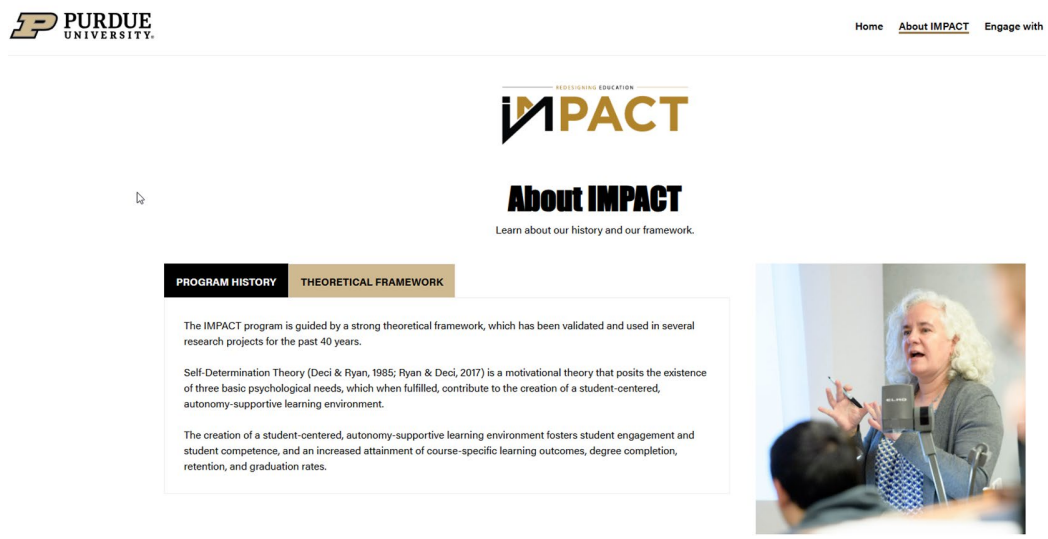
Each is a one-off

- Procedure:
  1. Student proposes topic, medium, and point value,
  2. Instructor reviews and approves, often with stipulations,
  3. Instructor creates rubric, shares with student,
  4. Student submits in D2L\Assignments at end of Module.
- Help for rubrics: Copilot agent.
  - Has class's learning objectives and formatting instructions
- Typical point value: 15-18 % points.
- Typical media: written paper with version history, slide deck with voice over narration, podcast, dataset with Stata code, class presentation.
  - Atypical but fun examples: board game, Google classroom (Ed. major).

Hindsight and iterative improvement

After 3 iterations

- Minimal confusion about the buffet rules.
- Anecdotally, less complaining about exam difficulty, due dates.
- Class GPA up,
  - about 3.5, up from about 2.8
  - Conjecture that students work harder
- Plenty of grading, especially projects.
- Scoring points with the CIE/IMPACT experts.
  - Autonomy and Self-Determination Theory.
- Question of how to optimize class time.



THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

I welcome your questions and suggestions.
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Assessment Contract Example

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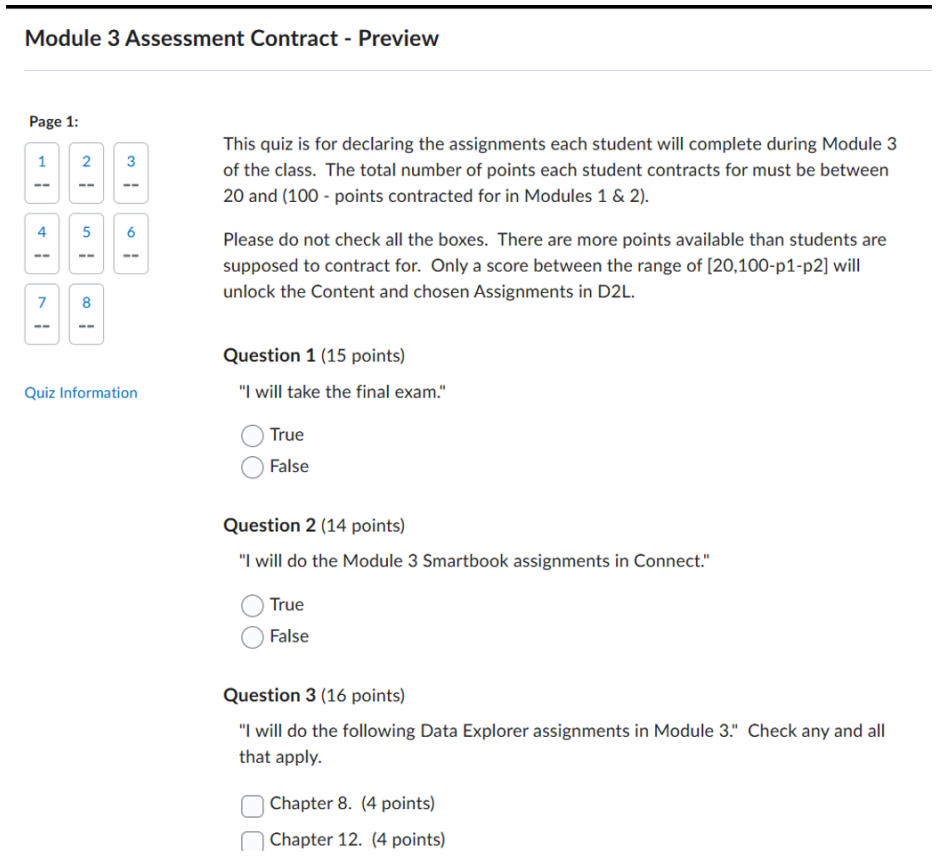

Module 3 Assessment Contract - Preview

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Quiz Information

This quiz is for declaring the assignments each student will complete during Module 3 of the class. The total number of points each student contracts for must be between 20 and (100 - points contracted for in Modules 1 & 2).

Please do not check all the boxes. There are more points available than students are supposed to contract for. Only a score between the range of [20,100-p1-p2] will unlock the Content and chosen Assignments in D2L.

Question 1 (15 points)

"I will take the final exam."

- ◯ True
- ◯ False

Question 2 (14 points)

"I will do the Module 3 Smartbook assignments in Connect."

- ◯ True
- ◯ False

Question 3 (16 points)

"I will do the following Data Explorer assignments in Module 3." Check any and all that apply.

- ☐ Chapter 8. (4 points)
- ☐ Chapter 12. (4 points)

An Economist Watches: instructions

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An Economist Watches - Module 2 --

Assignment

Available on Feb 13, 2026 12:01 AM. **Access restricted before availability starts.**

Available until Mar 27, 2026 11:59 PM. **Access restricted after availability ends.**

In this assignment students review a movie or episode of a TV show, through the eyes of a labor economist. There are 3 key tasks here:

1. Recap the plot of the movie (show) in a way that an audience of the uninitiated can understand and doing so concisely,
2. Identify the plot points on which a labor economist would fixate, explaining why the movie (show) relates to them and describing them with factual accuracy, and
3. Clearly and efficiently communicating this exposition and analysis in a 5- to 10-minute multimedia video essay.

This assignment is partly inspired by the series Honest Trailers, with an economics spin, and the student may wish to use Honest Trailers as a model for the overall style. My example did, with less charisma and more amateurish video editing.

After a student produces an episode of "An Economist Watches," (s)he should upload the video to the Media Gallery in D2L. Then either **insert the hyperlink to the video or embed it in the Submission box below** and click Submit.

The movie "The Pursuit of Happyness" is permanently off limits for this assignment, and any submission of a review of this movie will earn a zero on the assignment.

Discussions

Rubric

Online Discussion Rubric ECON 385

Criteria	Novice	Proficient	Exemplary	Criterion Score
Interactivity	0 points Student neglects to refer to the postings of other students or does refer to at least one other student in an unprofessional way.	2 points Student makes passing but limited references to the postings of other students. Evidence of only limited reading of other students' posts.	3 points Student ties their comments to the postings and observations of other students. Evident that the student read others' posts.	/ 3
Use of Information	0 points Student neglects to tie posts to outside information or to the course content, or does so in an inaccurate of misleading way.	2.67 points Student ties their posts to outside information and course content, in at least a superficial way.	4 points Student shows they have read and understand readings linked from the prompt and brings in information from other credible sources, such as lecture notes, the textbook, or articles written by economists.	/ 4
Participation	0 points Student neglects to address the prompt(s) or addresses them in only a superficial way.	2 points Student contributes non-trivially and repeatedly to only one thread or makes solitary contributions to several threads. Or timing of posts is irregular, e.g., all posts are in the last hours before the due date and limit others' ability to read them.	3 points Student contributes non-trivially and repeatedly to several threads and does so uniformly over the duration of the discussion. Evidence of regular interaction with the discussion as it evolves.	/ 3
Total				/ 10

Rubric Assistant (Copilot)

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