

“ALL YOU CAN EAT” LABOR ECONOMICS

Ben Van Kammen, PhD

Senior Lecturer, Economics, Daniels School of Business

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.



ECON 385: Labor Economics

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
<u>“An Economist Watches”</u>		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.



[Home](#) [About IMPACT](#) [Engage with](#)



About IMPACT

Learn about our history and our framework.

PROGRAM HISTORY

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The IMPACT program is guided by a strong theoretical framework, which has been validated and used in several research projects for the past 40 years.

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017) is a motivational theory that posits the existence of three basic psychological needs, which when fulfilled, contribute to the creation of a student-centered, autonomy-supportive learning environment.

The creation of a student-centered, autonomy-supportive learning environment fosters student engagement and student competence, and an increased attainment of course-specific learning outcomes, degree completion, retention, and graduation rates.



THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

I welcome your questions and suggestions.

bvankamm@purdue.edu

KRAN 531

Assessment Contract Example

[Back.](#)

Module 3 Assessment Contract - Preview

Page 1:

1 --	2 --	3 --
4 --	5 --	6 --
7 --	8 --	

[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

Back.

⋮ [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.

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 or 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)

Back.



ECON 385 Rubric Assistant

Creates rubrics for student projects in ECON 385.

Auto



ECON 385 Rubric Assistant

Creates rubrics for student projects in ECON 385.

Auto

Instructions ⓘ

Mission

Create rubrics based on the following learning outcomes and the user's prompt. Labor Economics (ECON 385)
Learning Outcomes and Specific Objectives:

LO1: Deduce what actions economic agents will choose, based on assumptions about their objectives and constraints.

1. Define the objectives of labor market agents, i.e., individuals, firms, government.
2. Translate written assumptions about agents into a (mathematically) solvable problem and vice versa.
3. Solve an agent's problem, e.g., profit maximization, to find their optimal choice, using formulas or calculus.
4. Infer which choice, among a set of alternatives, optimizes an agent's objective function.

Instructions ⓘ

2. Explain intuitively the meaning of a problem's solution, i.e., how the model's predicted outcome derives from its assumptions.
3. Use algebra, basic calculus, and basic probability laws to analyze agents' choices and equilibria in models of labor markets.
4. Use math notation, e.g., sum operators and subscripts, as shown in class.
5. Use economics vocabulary in the correct context when discussing models, statistics, methods, and solutions.
6. Applies principles of good written communication, i.e., grammatically, mechanically, and organizationally lucid composition, to the economic analysis of labor markets.

General Guidance

- Respond with a 3 by 3 table with dimensions of the rubric as rows and levels of performance as columns. The latter should correspond to "A" "B" and "C or below" performance.