

# CRISTHIAN MOLINA

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## EDUCATION

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University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign

**PhD in Economics**

Fields: Labor Economics, Economics of Education

ILLINOIS, UNITED STATES

*Anticipated May 2026*

Université de Lorraine

**Master en Ingénierie des Systèmes Complexes**

Distinction in grad exams

NANCY, FRANCE

2015

Universidad de Santiago

**Master of Engineering Sciences, Industrial Engineering**

Maximum distinction in grad exams

SANTIAGO, CHILE

2015

**Bachelor in Engineering Sciences**

Maximum distinction in grad exams

2015

## RESEARCH

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Job Market Paper

**“Signaling Quality or Gaming the System? Evidence from College-Major Accreditation”** *with*  
*Rocío Valdebenito*

Works in Progress

**“School Starting Age and the College Application Margin: Evidence from Chile”**

**“Grading the Graders: Competition and Quality Inflation in Certification Markets”**

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

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Instructor

**Microeconomic Principles**

**Intermediate Microeconomics**

*Universidad de Santiago de Chile*

*Spring 2018, Fall 2018, Spring 2019*

*Spring 2019*

Teaching Assistant

**Microeconomic Principles**

**Intermediate Microeconomic Theory**

*University of Illinois*

*Fall 2020, Spring 2021, Fall 2021*

*Fall 2023, Spring 2023, Fall 2024, Spring 2025*

## OTHER EXPERIENCE

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Research Assistant

**Dr. Joshua Shea**

**Dr. Alex Bartik**

**Dr. Adam Osman**

**Dr. Jorge Lemus**

**Dr. Marieke Kleemans**

**Dr. Rebecca Thornton**

*University of Illinois Department of Economics*

*Summer 2025, Fall 2025*

*Summer 2024*

*Spring 2024*

*Summer 2023, Spring 2024*

*Summer 2022*

*Summer 2021, Spring 2022*

Research Assistant

**Dr. Damian Clarke**

**Dr. Gabriel Romero**

*Universidad de Santiago de Chile*

*Spring 2017, Fall 2017*

*Fall 2017*

## CONFERENCES & PRESENTATIONS

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- Contribution to an automatic design of a hierarchical Fuzzy Rule Classifier** 2015  
*7th International Joint Conference on Computational Intelligence (IJCCI)*, 2, pp. 150-155.
- University of Illinois, Economics Department, Applied Micro Seminars** 2021-2025
- Universidad de Chile, Economics Department, Mini TOI** 2018

## AWARDS & HONORS

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- Kleiner Labor Economics Prize, University of Illinois** 2023  
**List of Excellent Teachers, University of Illinois** *Spring 2023, Fall 2023, Fall 2024, Spring 2025*

## ACADEMIC SERVICE

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Referee for *Pakistan Journal of Applied Economics*

## SKILLS

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**Technical** Stata , LaTeX , Python, R.

**Languages:** Spanish (*native*), English (*fluent*), French(*intermediate*).

## REFERENCES

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### **Jorge Lemus**

Professor of Economics  
*University of Illinois*  
[jalemus@illinois.edu](mailto:jalemus@illinois.edu)

### **Alex Bartik**

Assistant Professor of Economics  
*University of Illinois*  
[abartik@illinois.edu](mailto:abartik@illinois.edu)

### **Russell Weinstein**

Associate Professor  
*School of Labor & Employment Relations*  
*University of Illinois*  
[weinst@illinois.edu](mailto:weinst@illinois.edu)

## ABSTRACTS

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### **Job Market Paper: “Signaling Quality or Gaming the System? Evidence from College-Major Accreditation”**

In markets with asymmetric information, quality certification is intended to reduce uncertainty. But what happens when firms can strategically manipulate the signal? This paper studies the full lifecycle of a quality signal, from its strategic creation by institutions to its ultimate effect on student choice. We first document that universities in Chile engage in “window dressing” before seeking accreditation, as they improve malleable, evaluated metrics like on-time graduation rates rather than making deep, structural investments. Using administrative data and exploiting staggered accreditation decisions in a difference-in-differences framework, we then test how students respond to this potentially gamed signal. Despite the institutional gaming, students react strongly. First-time accreditation increases applications by 10.2% and enrollment by 7.3%, attracting academically stronger students and improving student-program match. Remarkably, these effects are equitable, appearing just as strong for students from low-income backgrounds. The power of the signal, however, is context-dependent, amplified by institutional reputation and weakened under mandatory regimes. These results provide a more complete view of disclosure markets and offer lessons for the design of effective quality assurance policies.