

CRISTHIAN MOLINA

sites.google.com/view/cristhian-molina

(217)-819-8669 • Urbana, IL

cmolina3@illinois.edu

EDUCATION

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

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

Instructor

Microeconomic Principles

Introduction to Economics

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

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

- 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

- 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

Referee for *Pakistan Journal of Applied Economics*

SKILLS

Technical Stata , LaTeX , Python, R.

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

REFERENCES

Jorge Lemus

Professor of Economics
University of Illinois
jalemus@illinois.edu

Alex Bartik

Assistant Professor of Economics
University of Illinois
abartik@illinois.edu

Russell Weinstein

Associate Professor
School of Labor & Employment Relations
University of Illinois
weinst@illinois.edu

ABSTRACTS

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.