

Kristin Vrona, Ph.D.

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Applied economist and econometrician with 7+ years of research experience. Consulting-oriented analyst who builds transparent, defensible models and converts complex evidence into decision-ready insights.

EDUCATION

Ph.D., Economics, Northern Illinois University **2025**

Dissertation title: “An Analysis of Mental Health and Workplace Absenteeism”

M.A., Economics, Northern Illinois University **2018**

B.S., Economics, *summa cum laude*, Northern Illinois University **2016**

Fields of Specialization: Labor economics, econometrics, health economics

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Doctoral Researcher **2021 – 2025**

Department of Economics, Northern Illinois University

- Conducted independent end-to-end research projects from theory to empirical analysis to policy implications.
- Investigated how employer benefit offerings mediate the robust relationship between mental health and worker labor supply.
- Integrated large-scale datasets from multiple sources such as the BLS, Census, and MEPS to analyze labor market trends and individual-specific patterns of employment (tenure, job switching, length of unemployment spells).
- Designed methodologies and maintained detailed documentation of workflows, allowing for reproducibility with new data or novel econometric methods.
- Diagnosed data/model quality issues and provided remedial frameworks.
- Translated empirical findings into actionable workplace policy implications; presented methodology and findings to both technical and non-technical audiences.
- Implemented data ETL pipelines in R and SAS and conducted statistical tests and econometric model estimation.

Graduate Research Fellow **2022 – 2024**

Institute for the Study of the Environment, Sustainability, and Energy, Northern Illinois University

Sponsored by Illinois Department of Natural Resources

- Advised IDNR on overhauling grant-scoring for \$59M in recreation funding, boosting allocations to distressed communities from 4.7% (2022) to 25.5% (2023).
- Combined interviews, meeting transcripts, and surveys with quantitative indicators (income metrics, accessibility mapping via GIS) to prioritize projects and justify allocations.
- Partnered with IDNR leadership and district agencies to ensure proposed projects met community-health priorities and environmental compliance standards.
- Prepared training and marketing-style materials and presented findings to state leadership and stakeholders.
- Findings directly contributed to the publication of IDNR’s Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan.

CONSULTING & INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE

Subject Matter Expert (Individual Contracting)

2024 – 2025

- Developed evaluation frameworks to assess the robustness of large language models for large tech firms.
- Identified limitations and recommended improvements for AI frameworks; compared relative model performance.

Cost Savings and Business Operations Analyst

2016 – 2017

MOL Logistics INC., U.S. Corporate Office (Lombard, IL)

- Converted projection process to regression-based forecasting, improving accuracy by 5–12% versus prior methods.
- Automated monthly and quarterly budget reporting in Excel/VBA (macros), streamlining budget processes and reducing turnaround time.
- Delivered ad hoc analysis for cross-functional teams and enterprise clients (e.g., Nike); authored SOPs and built operations dashboards to standardize methods and monitor performance.
- Trained technical and nontechnical teams on new workflows; prepared executive-level KPI briefs.

RESEARCH & PUBLICATIONS

Manuscripts in Preparation

“Diagnosis vs. Distress: Reduced-Form Evidence on Absenteeism and Employment Selection” – Job Market Paper

Models own-health absenteeism as a function of two distinct measures of mental health – pre-existing diagnosis and point-in-time symptomatology – controlling for job characteristics. The analysis examines how these measures interact to impact work attendance decisions. Using MEPS data (2010-2014), the methodology employs negative binomial models with correlated random effects and accounts for non-random selection into employment by unobserved factors. The findings suggest that diagnosed/high-symptom individuals miss fewer days than their undiagnosed but symptomatic peers; the results are robust in all model specifications. The policy implications for employers are that encouraging early screening/access can reduce absenteeism without encouraging presenteeism.

Working Papers

“Mental Health and Absenteeism: The Role of Fringe Benefits as Moderators”

Examines how job factors, including fringe benefits, influence absenteeism. Preliminary findings suggest that while fringe benefits may increase absenteeism initially, they help mitigate the long-term impact of mental illness on absence, supporting the value of wellness-oriented benefits in enhancing productivity.

“Labor Supply Dynamics Among Employed Workers with Mental Illness”

Explores how physical and mental health interact to impact absenteeism, using standard negative binomial estimation and a correlated random effects negative binomial to account for the unbalanced panel of data and within-individual heterogeneity. Results indicate that medical intervention increases absenteeism on average, but simultaneously prevents severe absenteeism outcomes.

Web-based Publications

Vrona, K. (2025). *An Analysis of Mental Health and Workplace Absenteeism*. [Doctoral dissertation, Northern Illinois University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

AWARDS & HONORS

Dissertation Fellowship, NIU Graduate School (Runner-up)	2022–2023
Outstanding Graduate Student Award, NIU Graduate School	2018
Outstanding Master’s Student Award, NIU Department of Economics	2017
MOL Spot Award, MOL Logistics, Inc.	2017
Kellstadt Graduate Scholarship, DePaul University Kellstadt Graduate School of Business, <i>declined</i>	2017
Honors in Economics, NIU; Dean’s List, NIU	2012–2016

TECHNICAL SKILLS

Statistical & Econometric Software: R, SAS, Stata

Programming & Markup: Python, SQL, VBA, LaTeX, Git

Tools & Platforms: Microsoft Office, LLM, Oracle BI, Tableau

TEACHING & ADVISING

Adjunct Instructor **2025 – Present**

Department of Economics, Northern Illinois University

- Facilitator of Principles of Microeconomics for 52 undergraduate students.
- Leveraged instructional technology (Blackboard, Kaltura) to enhance accountability and active participation in an asynchronous online setting.

Teaching Assistant **2018 – 2022**

Department of Economics, Northern Illinois University

- Led macroeconomics core course for undergraduate economics majors for four semesters.
- Executed weekly recitation sessions for graduate students, clarifying lecture content through applied examples.
- Coordinated lessons and assignments, managed grading for exams and quizzes, and conducted student tutoring sessions.

Undergraduate Academic Advisor **2017 – 2019**

Department of Economics, Northern Illinois University

- Monitored academic progress for at-risk students and student-athletes; coordinated interventions and accountability check-ins.
- Conducted advising sessions and published semester roadmaps; managed enrollments and required documentation.

DEPARTMENTAL & UNIVERSITY SERVICE

Website development and management; created promotional materials for **2017 – 2019**
the NIU Department of Economics

Discussant, NIU Department of Economics, Seminar in Health Economics 2020

Transfer Student Advisor, NIU Open House (Oct 18 & Nov 11) 2019

Organizer & Representative, NIU Major and Minors Fair (Sep 18) 2019

Transfer Student Advisor, NIU Open House (Oct 8 & Nov 12) 2018

Campus Presentations & Talks

“An Analysis of Mental Health and Workplace Absenteeism”, NIU ECONference 2025

“Mental Health and Absenteeism: the Role of Fringe Benefits as Moderators”, NIU Economics Department Graduate Colloquium 2021

“Moderate to Severe Diagnosed Mental Disorders and Absenteeism”, NIU Economics Department Graduate Colloquium 2018

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & CERTIFICATIONS

Certification: CITI Program Human Subjects Research Training Certification (Feb 2024-Feb 2029)	2024-2029
Retirement Confidence Survey: Results and Insight Webinar, Employee Benefit Research Institute (EBRI)	2024
CSWEP Mentorship Seminar	2022
CSWEP Successfully Navigating Your Economics Ph.D.	2020

REFERENCES

Dr. Virginia Wilcox (chair) Department of Economics Northern Illinois University DeKalb, IL 60115 Email: vlw@niu.edu	Dr. Maria Ponomareva Department of Economics Northern Illinois University DeKalb, IL 60115 Email: mponomareva@niu.edu	Dr. Anna Klis Department of Economics Northern Illinois University DeKalb, IL 60115 Email: aklis@niu.edu
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