CRISTHIAN MOLINA

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EDUCATION

University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign — ILLINOIS, UNITED STATES
PhD in Economics — *Anticipated May 2026*
Fields: Labor Economics, Economics of Education

Université de Lorraine — NANCY, FRANCE
Master en Ingénierie des Systèmes Complexes — *2015*
Distinction in grad exams

Universidad de Santiago — SANTIAGO, CHILE
Master of Engineering Sciences, Industrial Engineering — *2015*
Maximum distinction in grad exams
Bachelor in Engineering Sciences — *2015*
Maximum distinction in grad exams

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 — *Universidad de Santiago de Chile*
Microeconomic Principles — *Spring 2018, Fall 2018*
Introduction to Economics — *Spring 2019*
Intermediate Microeconomics — *Spring 2019*

Teaching Assistant — *University of Illinois*
Microeconomic Principles — *Fall 2020, Spring 2021, Fall 2021*
Intermediate Microeconomic Theory — *Fall 2023, Spring 2023, Fall 2024, Spring 2025*

OTHER EXPERIENCE

Research Assistant — *University of Illinois Department of Economics*
Dr. Joshua Shea — *Summer 2025, Fall 2025*
Dr. Alex Bartik — *Summer 2024*
Dr. Adam Osman — *Spring 2024*
Dr. Jorge Lemus — *Summer 2023, Spring 2024*
Dr. Marieke Kleemans — *Summer 2022*
Dr. Rebecca Thornton — *Summer 2021, Spring 2022*

Research Assistant — *Universidad de Santiago de Chile*
Dr. Damian Clarke — *Spring 2017, Fall 2017*
Dr. Gabriel Romero — *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
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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.