Michael Cobar

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EDUCATION

Tulane University, New Orleans, LA

Ph.D., Economics — Expected May 2027

Committee: Kevin Callison (Chair), Jonathan Holmes, Mary K. Olson, Felipe Gómez Trejos

M.S., Economics — 2023

Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA

B.S., Economics, *summa cum laude* — 2018

RESEARCH FIELDS

Health Economics, Behavioral Economics, Applied Microeconomics

WORKING PAPERS

"Healthy Skepticism? Medical Mistrust and Health Behaviors" **(Job Market Paper)**

*Abstract***:** Trust in the medical system has eroded substantially in recent years, yet its role as a determinant of health and health care use remains understudied. In this paper, I estimate the effect of medical mistrust on health behaviors and sources of health information using NielsenIQ Consumer Panel data. First, I use a causal forest strategy to predict heterogeneous changes in medical mistrust, drawing on plausibly exogenous variation arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. Then, I show that individuals with larger predicted increases in mistrust reduced their use of physicians for both medical treatment and health information and increased their reliance on natural or alternative treatments and online health information. These findings represent the first causal evidence that medical mistrust shapes patient decision-making across a broad, demographically diverse sample, with effects that persist even after accounting for education, income, and race. This shift away from clinical decision makers and toward online information and non-traditional treatments increases patients' exposure to misinformation and to care that lacks professional oversight. Because mistrust operates independently of conventional socioeconomic factors, policies aimed at improving health care access such as reducing costs or expanding insurance coverage, may fail to address the trust problem driving these shifts.

"Clearer Lungs, Clearer Minds? Analyzing the Effects of Tobacco 21 Laws on Youth Smoking Behavior and Mental Health"

"Yearning to Breathe Free? Cigarette Taxes, Smoking Bans, and the Well-Being of Smokers." (with Kevin Callison, Silda Nikaj, and Rujun Zhao)

WORK IN PROGRESS

"When Storms Strike: Air Pollution and Health Effects of Electricity Sector Disruptions" (with Felipe Gómez Trejos and Xiaochen Sun)

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Certification

Graduate Pedagogy Certificate, Center for Engaged Learning and Teaching 2025

Instructor of Record

ECON 1010: Intro to Microeconomics Fall 2025

Teaching Assistant 2022-2026

ECON 1010: Intro to Microeconomics; ECON 1020: Intro to Macroeconomics; ECON 3010: Intermediate Microeconomics; PECN 3010: Positive Political Economy; ECON 4410/6410: Mathematical Economics; ECON 4550: Using Big Data to Solve Economic Problems

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Junior Analyst- Convergence Strategy Group 2025

- Compiled secondary data to use in proprietary modeling, performed descriptive data analysis, and created reports communicating findings to gaming and leisure consulting clients

Research Analyst- Lewis, Terrell & Associates 2020-2021

- Gathered data for economic modeling and generated data-centered internal reports for economic impact reports on the landfalls of hurricanes Laura and Delta in Louisiana

Production Analyst- DOXA Land Services 2019-2020

- Analyzed oil and gas production cards, well files, and field orders to create and update cumulative production reports used in project dossiers for clients

PRESENTATIONS

Tulane Economics Lunch Seminar 2026

Southern Economic Association Annual Meeting; Association for Public Policy Analysis & Management Annual Fall Research Conference 2024

Tulane Economics Lunch Seminar 2023

FELLOWSHIPS, GRANTS, AND AWARDS

Tulane University

Data, AI, and Community Research Grant, Connolly Alexander Institute for Data Science 2025
Graduate Student Summer Research Award, School of Liberal Arts 2025
Graduate Student Summer Write-up Award, School of Liberal Arts 2024
J.E. Land Grant, School of Liberal Arts 2024
Graduate Student Fellowship, School of Liberal Arts 2021-2026

Louisiana State University

Outstanding Economics and ITF Majors Award in Econometrics 2018
University Medal 2018

REFERENCES

Kevin Callison (Chair)
Associate Professor
Department of Health Policy and Management and Department of Economics
Program Director, MPH in Health Policy and Management
Tulane University
kcallison@tulane.edu

Donata Henry (Teaching)
Senior Professor of Practice and Associate Chair
Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology
Faculty Fellow, Center for Engaged Learning and Teaching
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Jonathan Holmes
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Department of Economics
University of Ottawa
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