



# Jennifer Kades

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## Education

**Ph.D. in Economics, Duke University, 2025 (expected)**

**Bachelor of Arts in Economics, Davidson College, 2015 (cum laude)**

## Research and Teaching Fields

Labor Economics, Development Economics, Applied Microeconomics

## Work in Progress

### **"Short & Steep: Wage Growth Maximizing Job Ladders with Heterogeneous Skills and Risk Preferences" (*Job Market Paper*)**

This paper explores the dynamics of wage growth through job transitions, focusing on the role of heterogeneous skills and risk preferences in shaping workers' career paths. Using detailed work histories from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) and multi-dimensional skill data from O\*NET, I construct a measure of "skill distance" to capture the difference between a worker's current skill set and the requirements of their new occupation. I combine this measure with data on risk tolerance to identify novel empirical patterns in the job transitions of young workers. In particular, I find that workers who make fewer but larger transitions, moving into roles where they are initially under-skilled ("short and steep" job ladders), experience the highest wage growth on average. However, these transitions are also riskier, as larger skill distance is associated with greater variability in post-transition job quality and wages. Consistent with this result, workers with higher risk tolerance are more likely to make these larger transitions. Finally, I propose and estimate a model of worker transition decisions to explain these patterns.

### **"The Relationship Between the 'Norm to Work' and Labor Market Outcomes" (*NSF funded*)**

This project explores how work norms may shape the labor market. Media narratives and existing research suggest such norms are important drivers of worker behavior and, ultimately, macro outcomes like wages, but this idea has not been tested empirically due

to the difficulty of measuring norms. I construct a novel measure of work norms using unstructured text data from Twitter, combined with a custom-built machine learning model to label the text. I then use this measure to examine the relationship between work norms and labor market outcomes such as labor force participation, employment, wages, and labor's share of income. I also use this measure to test the prevailing media narrative that Covid meaningfully changed attitudes towards work in the U.S., and that this shift in attitudes was one driver of the "great resignation" observed starting in late 2020.

**"Can Matching on Soft Skills Yield Better Firm-Worker Matches?", with Rob Garlick, Lukas Hensel, and Kate Orkin**

Many developing country labor markets have significant frictions that dampen productivity. Firm-worker matches are relatively unproductive and poorly-paid, partly because firms have limited information about workseekers' skills. These inefficiencies may deter firms from hiring and result in lower wages, slowing economic growth and exacerbating poverty among jobseekers. We develop and test a system to match workseekers to jobs based on soft skills. We aim to speed transitions out of unemployment, increase labor demand, increase productivity and wages, and improve labor market access for disadvantaged groups. We test this intervention in partnership with Harambee, Africa's largest employment services provider. We assess Harambee-recruited workseekers' soft skills using new online measures and conduct a randomized controlled trial to test whether matching workseekers to jobs based on soft skills, in addition to more traditional criteria such as education and work experience, improves labor market outcomes.

## Other Publications

Daniel Cristol, R. Fovargue, R. Hicks, and **J. Kades**. *Metapopulation Dynamics and Habitat Equivalency Analysis*. In progress.

Roger Brossy and **J. Kades**. *Retention Grants for C-Suiters*. Workspan July 2017: pages 54-56.

## Invited Seminars and Conference Presentations

**2022:** Duke GradX, UChicago Machine Learning in Economics Summer Institute (MLESI)

## Research Experience

Graduate Assistant to Prof. Rob Garlick (Duke), 2021 - Present

Research Assistant to Prof. Youssef Benzarti (UCLA), December 2017 - September 2018

Research Assistant to Prof. Rob Hicks (William & Mary) (*remote*), March 2017 - October 2017

## Teaching Experience

ECON 890-01: Special Topics in Economics (Python programming module) (Duke), Instructor of Record, Summer 2023

Duke Economics Analytics Laboratory (DEAL), Python Instructor, Fall 2022, Spring 2023

Development Economics: Theory, Evidence, and Policy (Duke), Teaching Assistant, Spring 2022

Intermediate Micro with Calculus (Duke), Head TA, Fall 2020, Spring 2021

## Other Experience

Semler Brossy Consulting Group (Los Angeles), Associate / Senior Associate, July 2015 - July 2019

## Awards, Fellowships, and Grants

### Duke University

NSF Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grant (Economics), 2023-2025 (\$25,000)

Weiss Fund for Research in Development Economics (for “Can Matching on Soft Skills Yield Better Firm-Worker Matches?” with Rob Garlick, Lukas Hensel, and Kate Orkin), 2023 (\$100,000)

Graduate School Competitive Summer Research Fellowship, 2023

Economics Department Summer Research Fellowship, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2024

Economics First Year PhD Fellowship, 2019-2020

### Davidson College

Omicron Delta Epsilon (International Economics Honor Society)

## Professional Service

### Duke University

Organizer, Labor Lunch Seminar, 2022 - 2023

Co-chair, Economics Graduate Student Council (EGSC), 2021 - 2022

Member, Economics Student Committee on Diversity and Inclusion, 2020 - 2021

## Other Information and Skills

**Programming:** MATLAB, Python, Stata, SQL

**Citizenship:** USA

Census Bureau Special Sworn Status