Laura Pittalis

Department of Economics, University of Chicago
1126 E. 59th Street, Chicago, IL 60637, USA
Email: laurapittalis@uchicago.edu

Application for the NBER Digital Economics and AI Tutorial

Graduate Study

I have been a Ph.D. student in Economics at the University of Chicago since 2024 and am currently in my third year. My coursework includes the Price Theory, Theory of Income, and Empirical Analysis sequences, together with Monetary Economics, Macroeconomics with Heterogeneous Households, Firm Dynamics and Economic Growth, Industrial Organization, and Public Economics. I have also participated in the following advanced workshops, including the Princeton Macro-Finance Initiative (September 2026), the AIESI Summer School at the University of Chicago (August 2026), and the NBER Boot Camp on Fiscal and Monetary Policy (May 2026).

Research Interests

My primary research interests include macroeconomics, monetary economics, heterogeneous-agent models, household finance, and price setting. I also have a sustained interest in the political economy of European's economic stagnation.

Research in Progress

Third-year paper: Credit Regulation, Household Debt, and Savings in Europe

European households hold substantially less consumer debt and maintain much larger liquid buffers than American households. This divergence presents a puzzle for standard macroeconomic models, which primarily attribute savings to precautionary motives: given Europe's extensive public insurance, the need for precautionary savings should theoretically be lower, not higher. This paper investigates how much of this cross-country gap is driven by credit regulation and evaluates who would gain from relaxing it. I develop a heterogeneous-agent model with incomplete markets and equilibrium default in which lenders price individual loans and key European institutions are explicitly embedded -namely, the absence of a fresh start after default, interest-rate ceilings, limited credit information, and robust public insurance. Through counterfactuals that relax one rule at a time while holding preferences constant, I quantify how far debt and savings converge toward U.S. levels, assess the distribution of welfare gains and losses, and analyze household responses to a credit crunch.

AI Methods for Macroeconomic Microfoundations

My recent empirical work using granular CPI microdata documents that firms respond to large inflationary shocks primarily by increasing the frequency of price adjustments rather than the size of those adjustments. Because standard time- and state-dependent pricing models struggle to match this muted size response, a central question is what latent pricing rules at the firm level can rationalize this behavior. Since classifying pricing behavior across millions of individual price spells is high-dimensional and noisy, I am exploring how machine learning and pattern recognition can systematically uncover structures and firm-level pricing rules where conventional econometric approaches fall short.

I think it's a great timing for me to attend this tutorial because I am at the precise stage in my doctoral training where exposure to frontier AI research will have the highest marginal impact on my trajectory. Following my participation in the AIESI Summer School at the University of Chicago in August 2026, I am applying to the NBER Digital Economics and AI Tutorial to further develop this toolbox. The opportunity to learn from and interact with frontier research leaders at this tutorial and the adjacent NBER meetings will provide the structured methodological exposure I need to effectively integrate digital economics and advanced AI tools into my research.