

Economics at Carolina

January 2021



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Department of Economics

UNC – Chapel Hill
107 Gardner Hall
Campus Box 3305
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3305

T: 919.966.2383
F: 919.966.4986
URL: econ.unc.edu

Administration

Donna Gilleskie
Chair

Erin Pelletier
Department Manager

Luca Flabbi
Director of Graduate Studies

Geetha Vaidyanathan
Director of Undergraduate Studies

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visit econ.unc.edu and click on "Donate"

To give by mail:
The Arts & Sciences Foundation
Attn: Cassie Diltz
523 East Franklin Street
Chapel Hill, NC 27514

A Message from the Chair



Donna Gilleskie '89

Economics students, faculty, and staff experienced a very different spring semester, summer sessions, and fall semester during 2020. The pandemic created more than a few bumps in the road – and road closures and detours – throughout the year. But sometimes such unexpected changes put us on roads less traveled and allow for new views and scenery. The new navigation: online teaching; communication mostly through Zoom; interactions with masks in sparsely occupied classrooms or offices.

Yet, despite the circumstances, we ably managed to continue providing excellent instruction, engage in innovative research, and offer many opportunities that serve our students, the profession, and our university, state and world.

We also explored new territory: in addition to providing educational content online, we contributed to UNC System faculty-curated, open educational resource collections developed over the summer by cross-institutional teams of UNC System faculty; we created a new course "Economics of Pandemics"; we published research on COVID-impacted economic behaviors and outcomes; and served on chancellor-appointed advisory committees tackling university response to the pandemic. I am grateful for the dedication and hard work of our faculty and staff, and the steadfastness of our students as they seek to achieve their educational goals.

As we experience 2021 with hope that the worst of the pandemic exists mostly in our rear-view mirror, I hope our return to pre-COVID activities will be positively impacted by the alternate routes we were forced to take last year. The challenges we endured have sown seeds of confidence and exceptional resolve to meet new challenges that may lie ahead for our economics community. Together, let's look forward to the resulting fruitful endeavors in 2021 and beyond.

I wish you much joy and peace this year.

Perhaps you'd like to support the efforts of the Economics Department in this new year. The newsletter may spark your interest or give you ideas of how you might contribute. We welcome any involvement, whether it be via time, money, or simply your ideas. We want to invest wisely in 2021 and beyond.

We would love to hear from you! Share your stories and experiences of life outside UNC. Email us at: ECON_Media@unc.edu

Undergraduate News

New Bachelor of Science (BS) in Economics

The UNC Economics Department is excited to announce that we are now offering a Bachelor of Science (BS) degree in Economics!

The new major will provide students with greater exposure to data analysis and quantitative techniques, making it a good potential match for students interested in employment or graduate schools that emphasize these skills. We will continue to offer the Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree for students who want to focus on the analytical approach of our current Economics major.

The BS degree was made available to Undergraduates during Fall 2020. This timing means that students graduating in May 2021 or later would be eligible for the BS, provided they fulfill all of the degree requirements.



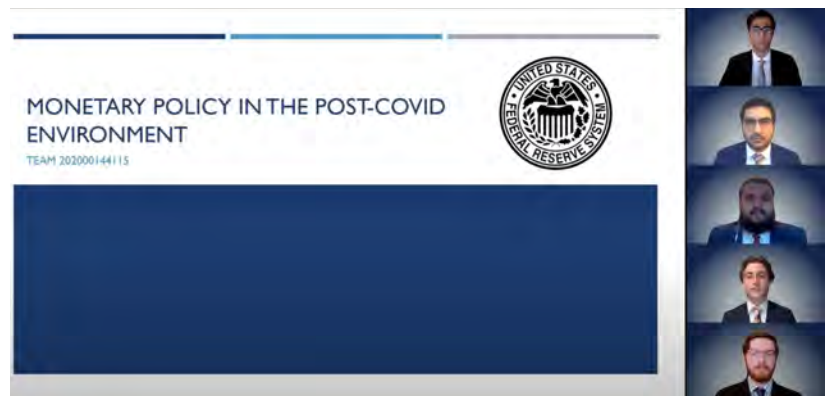
To learn more, visit econ.unc.edu/undergraduate

Fed Challenge and Fiscal Challenge

The Fiscal Challenge

The Fiscal Challenge is a registered 501(c)(3) educational non-profit founded in 2013 by Professor Mike Aguilar. The competition has been operating at the collegiate level since its founding, and expanded to high schools in 2016. Over 40 schools have participated nationally and internationally, and the Fiscal Challenge has received ample press coverage, as well as recognition from the *Journal of Economic Education* Vol. 46, Iss. 3, pgs 285-299.

For more information, visit: <http://fiscalchallenge.org>.



Pictured: Brady Gingrich, Sidd Mehta, Karl Vesely, Gabriel Juedemann, and Patrick Barley

Fed Challenge Team Advances to National Competition

The Fed Challenge Team, consisting of Patrick Barley, Brady Gingrich (Captain), Gabriel Juedemann, Sarah Larino, Sidd Mehta, Connor Muccio, Kent Schneider, Karl Vesely, and advised by Professor Michael Aguilar, advanced to the National competition in 2020.

The Fed Challenge, which aims to help students become more knowledgeable about decision making of the Federal Reserve, allows students to make policy recommendations by modeling the Federal Open Market Committee.

To learn more, visit: fedchallenge.web.unc.edu/

Commitment to Underrepresented Students interested in Economics

The Economics Department Underrepresented Majors (URM) Fund supports students from demographic groups that are underrepresented in the field of economics by providing opportunities to enhance and apply their economics training. Below are some experiences that were funded by the URM in 2020.

The Sadie Collective

The Sadie Collective was officially founded in August 2018 and named after Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander. Sadie Alexander was the first African American to earn her doctoral degree in economics in 1921 from the University of Pennsylvania. The Collective aims to bring together Black women at different stages in their academic and/or professional careers in the quantitative sciences to share resources, network, and advocate for broader visibility in the field.

Via our Underrepresented Majors (URM) Fund, the Economics Department sponsored the attendance of three UNC Economics majors to the second annual Sadie Conference on February 20-22, 2020 in Washington DC. Attending were Fridah Mbwaya, Victoria Quiett, and Hayle Tyson. We asked the women to share how the experience aided their application of tools and concepts that they are learning in the Economics major. We also wanted to know whether the experience provide ideas about projects or research in economics. Additionally, we wondered, in light of current events that are bringing racism to the forefront of people's minds, did they learn anything from the conference (or these events) that has changed the way they will approach their continued economics training.



According to Fridah, "This was an exciting entry-level conference that opened my eyes to the world of Academia, especially as a woman of color. This is an excellent opportunity for Black women to interact and learn from people who are just like them. It was inspirational to see the kind of potential that exists in the world, especially in the world of Academia, and interact with people who could support my journey to getting there. I would urge every Black woman who is studying Economics or any related field in research, to consider going for this conference."

Read the full interview at <https://econ.unc.edu/undergraduate/funding-opportunities/underrepresented-majors-fund/>

URM-Funded Research

"How Policy Affects Movement: Population Mobility and the Spread of COVID-19 in Europe"

Katie Baker

Abstract: Amid government lockdown policies and fear of contagion, populations have adjusted their day-to-day schedules in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We investigate the changes in mobility patterns of European populations using fixed effects regression models. We then show that new cases of the virus within each country and stringency of government policy response are key factors that influence mobility. We find that the marginal effect of policy stringency on mobility decreases over time, suggesting "quarantine fatigue" may limit the effectiveness of mobility-reducing policy to about 140 days. Similarly, we find the marginal effects of new cases of COVID-19 on mobility disappear within 80 days but begin to increase again near the end of the observation period. This suggests that rising numbers of new cases may have a "second wave" effect in reducing population mobility.

The Economics Department has a web-page dedicated to Undergraduate Summer Research and Other Funding, including an archive of research papers. You can read this full paper and others like it by visiting

econ.unc.edu/undergraduate/funding-opportunities/

2020 Undergraduate Award in Economics



Evelyn (Evie) Morris has received the Economics Department's annual award for the 2020 Best Undergraduate Major. Evie, a Morehead/Cain Scholar, is one of our most inquisitive and accomplished Economics seniors whose achievements extend beyond academics. In her honors thesis, Evie bridged economic theory and data by empirically investigating the influence of health and health history on fundamental decision-making attributes such as risk aversion, discounting, and expectations about longevity.

Evie's interest in foundational economic thinking led her to develop and teach a course to undergrads on the history of economic thought through the C-START program at Carolina. She also served as a research assistant for Kenan-Flagler's Prison Business Education Initiative and a teaching assistant in an Elements of Politics class. For over two years, she actively volunteered at Enrich ELL as an English Language Facilitator and Co-Chair where she helped adult immigrants practice English. As an Arete Fellow, she helped to build the Effective Altruism movement on campus. Evie helped organize the first Bike to Strike for climate action and represented UNC by participating in the UN Climate Change Conference in Spain in December 2019. If that is not enough, she also competed for the Club Water Polo team and the Club Triathlon team.

Evie's coursework and her experiences outside the classroom have helped define her next steps after graduation: additional research experience at Brown University before pursuing an advanced degree.

Associated Programs



Shuford Program in Entrepreneurship

The Shuford Program in Entrepreneurship was created in 2004 to encourage arts and sciences students from diverse backgrounds and with different interests to learn to view the world through an entrepreneurial lens. It is the only undergraduate entrepreneurship program in the country that is housed within a College of Arts and Sciences, which allows a diversity of thought and perspectives from many different majors across the College. Focus is on teaching the Entrepreneurial Mindset, which is a way to identify opportunity. Students are given the tools to help them craft their ideas and bring them to fruition.

For more information, visit: shuford.unc.edu/

The Philosophy, Politics & Economics (PPE) Program

The PPE Program's mission is to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of social, economic, political and moral problems. In doing this, PPE follows in the tradition of great thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, David Hume, Adam Smith, Karl Marx, Thomas Malthus, John Stuart Mill, and David Ricardo.

With this in mind, PPE students cross the borders of key academic disciplines, integrating the methods, tools, and insights into philosophy, politics, and economics.

For more information, visit: ppe.unc.edu

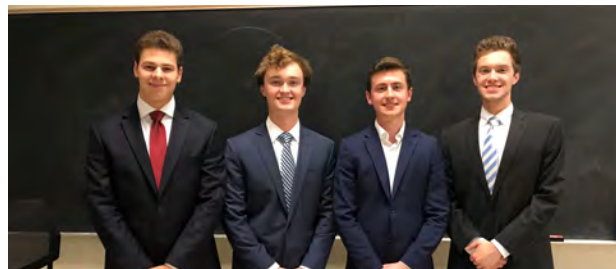


Carolina Economics Club (CEC)

Last semester CEC hosted several events dedicated to the enrichment of students interested in Economics. According to Professor Rita Balaban, CEC faculty advisor, "We co-hosted an information session about the B.S degree with Carolina Women in Economics, launched our first reading group, held a career panel with alumni working in public and private research, hosted a trivia night, and Dr. John Komolos spoke about Racism in Economics. Adapting to a virtual environment was tough, but we're thankful to all the members that participated and are looking forward to an even better spring semester."

The reading group read selections from *The History of Economic Thought: A Reader by Medema and Samuels about Smith, Marx, and Keynes*.

For more information on the CEC, visit econ.unc.edu/undergraduate/economics-club



February 2020 CEC Case Study Competition Winning Team: Kent Schneider, Trent Lupton, Gabe Juedemann, Karl Naomi



February 2020 Case Study Competition Finalists

Student Spotlight: Emilia Mazzolenis '21



Emilia is a Senior Economics and Psychology double-major with a minor in Statistics and Analytics. She was recently interviewed for the Department of Psychology and Neuroscience's online Undergraduate Research Series, which highlights students who are conducting research alongside UNC Faculty. Emilia is an Undergraduate Research Consultant with Economics Professor, Jane Fruehwirth. Emilia Describes her research with Dr. Fruehwirth the interview:

"Under Dr. Fruehwirth's guidance, I spent the summer researching the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on first-year UNC students' mental health. I conducted research on the prevalence of Generalized Anxiety Disorder and Major Depressive Disorder, as well as students' help-seeking behavior. I worked on providing a breakdown of such categories based on students' racial or ethnic groups, binary gender, sexual or gender minorities, and first-generation college status. Thanks to previous research that Dr. Fruehwirth had conducted, the team and I were able to isolate the impact of COVID-19 on mental health across student demographics, and I am using such data to provide recommendations to University officials.

In addition to her research with Dr. Fruehwirth, Emilia works as a Research Assistant in Dr. Bharathi Zvara's laboratory in the Gillings School of Public Health.

Read the full interview: psychology.unc.edu/2020/09/15/meet-emilia-mazzolenis/

Graduate News

Job Market Candidates 2020-2021



Lucas Argentieri Mariani

"Government-owned Banks and Development: on Unintended Consequences of Bank Privatizations"

Macroeconomics, Finance, Development economics



Andrey Minaev

"Consumer Data and Consumer Welfare: Evidence from the Hotel Booking Market"

Industrial organization, Applied microeconomics, Microeconomic theory

Dean's Distinguished Dissertation Award

Siddhartha Biswas

"Federal Student Loans, College Choice, and Student Welfare"

Applied microeconomics, Labor economics, Economics of education, Health economics



Mauricio Salazar-Saenz

"A Household Search Model of the Labor Market with Home Production"

Labor economics, Applied micro-econometrics



Ayushi Singh

"Heterogeneous Consumption Response to Fiscal Spending Shocks in Developing Countries"

Macroeconomics, Development economics, Finance



Zhechen Yu

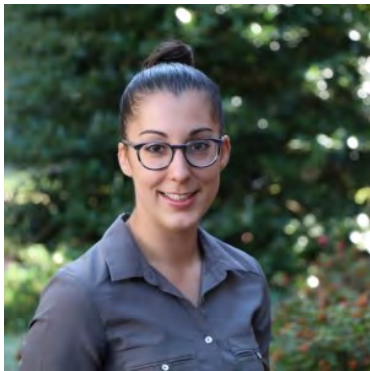
"Uncertainty and Incomplete Contracts in Procurements"

Industrial organization, Public economics



To learn more about our Job Market Candidates, or to read full Job Market papers, visit econ.unc.edu/graduate/2020-2021-job-market-candidates

Placements of our Ph.D. Graduates in 2020



Anessa Custovic
Cardinal Financial
Advisor: Eric Gysels



Andrew Hanson
University of Tennessee- Knoxville
Advisor: Toan Phan



David Leather
Chapman University
Advisor: Neville Francis & Jacob Sagi



Alina Malkova
University of Missouri (postdoc)
Advisor: Klara Peter



Ray Wang
CNA
Advisor: Luca Flabbi



Quinton White
United States Treasury
Advisor: Jon Williams

2020 Incoming Graduate Cohort

Samuel Barker

B.S. Pfeiffer University
M.A. University of Chicago

Daniel Cho

B.A. Yonsei University
M.A. Seoul National University

Seungwhan Chun

B.A. and M.A. Korea University

Yi Cui

B.A. Fudan University

Tianyao Deng

B.A. UC Berkley

David Kim

B.A. and B.S. Chung-Ang University
M.A. Korea University

Roberto Mondragon Lagos

B.S. National Autonomous University
of Honduras
M.A. Duke University

Irisa Lee

B.A. Mount Holyoke College

Xinglin Li

B.A. Jilin University
M.S. University of South Florida
M.A. University of Wisconsin Madison

Yi Liu

B.A. Illinois Wesleyan University
M.S. University of Illinois

Meagan Madden

B.S. Davidson College
M.A. Duke University

Pablo Picardo

B.A. and M.S. Universidad de la
República

Cecilia Rodriguez Ingold

B.A. University of Bayreuth
M.S. Universidad de la República

Rachel Spady

B.S. Princeton University

Huan Wu

B.A. Southwestern University of
Finance and Economics
M.A. Duke University

Faculty News

Faculty Spotlight: Jane Fruehwirth



Professor Jane Fruehwirth is an associate professor of Economics; she began at UNC-CH as an assistant professor in fall 2015, after achieving the position of reader (associate professor with tenure) at University of Cambridge. Her research specialties are in the areas of social economics and economics of education, with strong technical skills in analysis of individual and peer behaviors. She is currently preparing a CURE first-year seminar that educates students in the research applications of economics, focused around studying the determinants of success in university. She served as facilitator of our undergraduate honors thesis sequence for the past two years, helping nearly 40 of our majors to engage in independent research investigation and to graduate with honors or highest honors. Her recent efforts to involve undergraduates in her own research activities examining the pandemic's impact on college student mental health are the subject of this newsletter spotlight.

What prompted your interest in college students' mental health?

America's colleges are struggling to respond to a growing mental health crisis on their campuses, a crisis that is further exacerbated by the recent, unprecedented challenges surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. The importance of this crisis is magnified by the understanding of adolescence as a key developmental period when symptoms of poor mental health begin for many who experience mental illness as adults. Evidence suggests that the consequences of mental illness are far-reaching—not only is it negatively correlated with college completion, academic success and wages, and key metrics colleges use to measure success, it also impacts physical health, socioeconomic achievement and the quality of social and familial relationships.

How is your work different?

While research on college student mental health has considered other important university-level

determinants, such as mental health services provision, we seek to provide evidence on preventive measures that universities can take by studying the role of different types of stressors. There is some evidence to support that these preventive measures may be crucial in the fight against mental illness on campus, by catching the problem at its source. As an economist, one contribution I hope to make is to distinguish the stressor (the event) from the stress (the experience of the event). This is important for targeting policies to underlying determinants. I also seek to bring quasi-experimental evidence to bear in order to separate the causal effect of the stressor from underlying factors that may be correlated with the stressor and mental health.

How did you involve undergraduates in this research?

I worked with two different teams of undergraduates. The first team was funded by the Office of Undergraduate research through their Undergraduate Research Consultant Team program and was

an interdisciplinary, diverse team of undergraduates who helped develop and administer the initial survey. The purpose of this initial survey (Wave I) was to study determinants of mental health in the first year at UNC-CH. We happened to conduct the first survey prior to the pandemic and so it provided a unique opportunity to study the effects of COVID-19. After the pandemic hit, the economics department funded the incentives for a follow-up survey so that I could continue the research with a new team of economics majors. I chose 5 students who are from groups that are under-represented in economics and who had expressed interest in being involved in research. This team helped me develop and administer a follow-up survey (Wave II), which we sent out about four months into the pandemic June/July 2020. Wave II included information about Covid-19 related stressors, such as difficulties with distanced learning, work reductions of self and parent and Covid-19-related diagnosis/hospitalization.

Both surveys included clinically-validated measures of anxiety/depression symptoms, and psychosocial supports (e.g., perceived social support from family, friends and significant other, resilience and resilient coping), so that we could explore changes in anxiety/depression symptoms and psychosocial support from before to four months into the pandemic and analyze the effect of Covid-19 stressors.

Do you have any findings so far?

We have several research manuscripts in progress, one on the effects of the pandemic on mental health, another on alcohol use during the pandemic and another on how students with eating disorders were affected by the pandemic. The rates of increase in anxiety and depression symptoms we observed for students was alarming, and this was just four months into the pandemic!

We found a particular role of academic difficulties and social isolation in contributing to anxiety/depression symptoms. I presented these findings to the Board of Governors of the UNC System this fall. They continue to be invested in finding ways to address mental health on campus and were particularly interested in the implication of our findings for supporting a broader approach beyond just mental health services to combatting mental illness.

What additional research aims stem from this work?

I look forward to continuing to involve undergraduates in future work, and am working with undergraduates on several potential manuscripts associated with the survey. My team and I are working to acquire grants to conduct another follow-up of our UNC-CH sample to understand

the lasting effects of the pandemic. We also have plans to link to administrative records to study the relationship between the pandemic stressors and student attainment.

How has the research experience been enhanced by the involvement of undergrads?

I have greatly valued the perspective the undergraduates bring to the work! I have been fortunate to work with very engaged students who really care about learning about research and using that research to make a difference. Many are particularly concerned about how to support students who are struggling with mental illness. Their energy and dedication are amazing! I look forward to continuing to learn from them and engage issues around mental illness on campus with them.

Meet the Team



Jane Cooley Fruehwirth
Principal Investigator
Professor
Economics



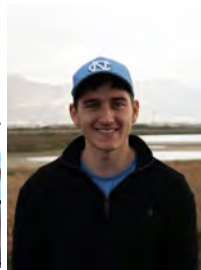
Krista Perreira
Co-Principal Investigator
Professor
School of Medicine



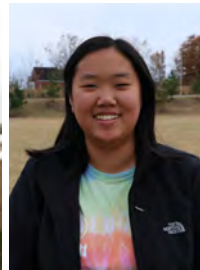
Tiffany Eden
GRA
Health Behavior



Benjamin Gorman
URCT Team Member
Neuroscience,
Communications



Luke Hargraves
URCT Team Member
Public Policy, Music,



Susan Huynh
URCT Team Member
Psychology, History



Sarah Parker
URCT Team Member
Economics, Computer
Science



Brittany Wiafe
URCT Team Member
Health Policy Management



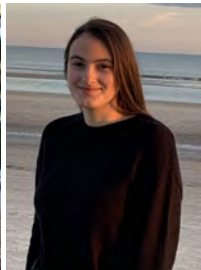
Siddhartha Biswas
PhD Student
Economics



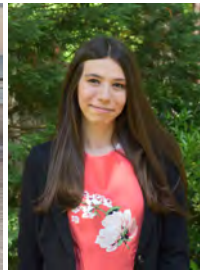
Michael Almaguer
Undergraduate Team
Member
Economics, Mathematics



Caroline Carptenter
Undergraduate Team
Member
Economics, Public Policy



Gabriela Goodman
Undergraduate Team
Member
Economics, Public Policy



Emilia Mazzolenis
Undergraduate Team
Member
Economics, Psychology



Caroline Carptenter
Undergraduate Team
Member
Economics, Global Studies

For More info, visit
transitions.web.unc.edu

Not Pictured: **David Lambert**, Data/Project Manager, Economics

Welcoming New Faculty



Paige Weber

Assistant Professor

Paige Weber is an environmental economist with a PhD in Environmental Economics from Yale University ('19). She focuses primarily on Environmental Economics and Industrial Organization. Paige is teaching her first course at UNC this Spring, titled "Environmental Economic Theory." The course will provide "a rigorous economic analysis of environmental issues, with particular emphasis on the problem of designing appropriate institutions and regulations under private information and the interaction between economic and ecological systems. Topics include emission fees and marketable permits, pollution models, carbon regulation, and ecosystem service markets."

Faculty Research 2020

Despite challenges due to COVID-19, our faculty continued their research, and have even taken on new endeavors during this time. Below are some of their achievements.

- "Profiting from Most-Favored Customer Procurement Rules: Evidence from Medicaid"
Luca Maini, et. al.
shorturl.at/cwxlj
- *Putin's Russia: Economy, Defence and Foreign Policy*
Steven Rosefielde
World Scientific Publishing
- "Binary Choice with Asymmetric Loss in a Data-Rich Environment: Theory and an Application to Racial Justice"
Andrii Babii, Eric Ghysels, et. al.
<https://arxiv.org/abs/2010.08463>
- "Liquidity Guided Machine Learning: The Case of the Volatility Risk Premium"
Eric Ghysels, et. al.
https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3726743
- "A New Parametrization of Correlation Matrices"
Peter Hansen, et. al.
<https://www.econometricsociety.org/system/files/16910-2.pdf>
- "Biosimilar Entry and the Pricing of Biological Drugs"
Luca Maini, Jacob Klimek (UNC Economics Graduate Student), et. al
shorturl.at/CFHN6
- "Outright bans can sometimes be a good way to fight climate change"
Andrew Yates
The Economist
- "A Model of Crisis Management"
Fei Li, et. al
Cowles Foundation Discussion Paper No. 2266, Yale University
<https://lifei.weebly.com/research.html>
- "The Unholy Trinity: Regulatory Forbearance, Stressed Banks and Zombie Firms"
Anusha Chari, Lakshita Jain (UNC Economics Graduate Student), et al.
<https://anushachari.weebly.com/research.html>
- "Expected Health Effects of Reduced Air Pollution from COVID-19 Social distancing"
Andrew Yates, et. al.
NBER Working Paper No. 27135
- "Broadband providers adjust as Internet use spikes under COVID-19"
Jonathan Williams
<https://college.unc.edu/2020/05/broadband-williams/>



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more faculty and
departmental news!

Alumni News

Connecting with Students



The Economics Department Advisory Board (EDAB) is a group of alumni of UNC Economics that convenes each semester to learn more about the research, teaching, and service in Economics at Carolina and to advise the faculty on issues related to student development. These advisers, both graduate program and undergraduate alums, are individuals who care passionately about their alma mater and about the students currently studying Economics at UNC. They have proven to be a valuable asset to our department's faculty and students as we innovate in the major to provide our students with the best possible preparation for "the real world" whether that is finding a job, preparing for graduate school, or simply learning deeply about the economic workings in sectors of the world's economy. For example, the picture above shows board members engaged with students during a resume workshop that offered advice to over 80 Econ majors. Members also participated in an informational panel about careers

of Econ majors organized by Women in Economics.

Members of the board met virtually in November for their semi-annual meeting. In addition to discussing departmental happenings, development, and ideas, board members heard from Economics students from each class (first year, sophomore, junior, senior, and Ph.D. program) regarding their experience of "Carolina in a Virtual World". We were joined by Anyele Sewavi '21, Valeria Ricaurte '22, Ryan Chaffin '22, Parisa Vahid '23, Nate Worley '24, and 3rd year grad student Megan McCoy. The students shared their pre-pandemic educational experiences, described their extra-curricular experiences working and socializing, discussed their hopes and fears about future educational and employment plans, and spoke about their health, happiness, and well-being during this time.

After a brief Zoom break, board members joined breakout sessions to engage in deeper conversation

about diversity and inclusion initiatives, extracurricular opportunities for students, and strengthening our economics community (students, faculty, staff, and alumni) in a virtual world. The Economics Department is grateful for the time, ideas, and support provided by members of the Advisory Board. And we welcome new members eager to mentor, brainstorm, solution-seek, and support the Economics Department! Involvement from alumni who are underrepresented in Economics will enable greater outreach to current students exploring economics as a major. If you would like to know more, please contact Donna Gilleskie (Department Chair, donna_gilleskie@unc.edu) or Cassie Diltz (Director of Development, cassie.diltz@unc.edu).

UNC Alumna: Lizzie Tong

Interview with alumna Elizabeth “Lizzie” Tong ‘20, who recently graduated as a Morehead-Cain Scholar, studying economics and computer science at UNC, with an interest in applying data science to solve challenges tied to urban sustainability.



Describe your current work as a research assistant at the Chicago Fed.

I am currently a research assistant for the Community Development and Policy Studies team at the Chicago FED. In my daily responsibilities, I support economists on their long-term research projects and short-term policy projects. Most days, I spend time reading academic papers, getting a better grasp of theory and literature, and conducting data cleaning and analysis. Topics for my long-term projects include models of discrimination (utilizing implicit and explicit bias), alternative mortgage financing, and banking segregation. In my short-term policy projects, I support Project Hometown, a bank initiative that convenes civic leaders, researchers, and FED staff to support an inclusive economic recovery

What aspects (tools and concepts) from your undergraduate economics major are most useful for this work?

In order to complete my daily responsibilities, I rely on languages and programs like Python, Stata, SAS, and Tableau (although, what tools you use vary by team, some teams prefer R).

For most projects, good programming foundations are helpful. For other projects, like a new project that I work on with a dataset over several terabytes, a baseline understanding of data structures and time complexities has helped me understand how large datasets can be processed faster and more efficiently. My background as a computer science major provided me with good foundations for learning technical skills; however, a lot of training is provided to research assistants and many of these techniques can be picked up on the job. Thus, I actually found that developing an interest in research and an innate desire to ask questions as better skills to pick up throughout college.

How did your experiences (curricular or extracurricular) at Carolina prepare you well for this job?

At UNC, my first formal research experience was assisting a professor in the Department of City and Regional Planning. That experience prepared me for my first independent research project (my senior economics honors thesis) and I have carried lessons from those projects to support me in my current work. [Lizzie's thesis, "The Effect of Greenspace on Physical Activity and Social Cohesion in Baltimore" sought a causal link between the built environment and individual well-being. She applied Baltimore Ecosystem Survey data to a fixed effects analysis to answer this question and was advised by Boshamer Distinguished Professor David Guilkey '73.] Outside of research, I took on leadership roles with Duke-UNC's China Leadership Summit and UNC-Chapel Hill Initiative on Poverty and Inequality, and was a contributing member to the Carolina Planning Journal. These roles allowed me to explore topics in international and domestic social policy, which have influenced my research interests. Finally, I was a member of Women in Economics - a great opportunity to get access to career advice and professional panels - providing me with the first push to look into an Economics PhD.

Is there anything you wish you had been exposed to in your undergraduate studies that would have better prepared you for the work you are doing now?

As an economics and computer science major, I spent a good deal of time honing my technical skills. I picked up useful skills like natural language processing and machine learning, which are slowly being introduced into academic research, but I rarely apply these skills at work (I once used NLP sentence encoding for a policy project). I wish that I had spent more time studying fields adjacent to economics - psychology, public policy, sociology, and public health - so that I am better able to highlight how the unique lens of economics ties together these interdisciplinary topics. Additionally, I wish that I had built a stronger foundation in math and statistics.

How has this job shaped your plans for the future?

My role on the Policy Studies team has placed me at the intersection of research and policy. It has informed my love of research and has shaped my dedication to the pursuit of the “truth”. Simultaneously, it provided me with the opportunity to chat with a myriad of economists and explore different fields and career paths. Currently, I am still considering a PhD in economics; however, I am also looking into paths in public policy and urban planning.

Anything else that you think might be useful or interesting for current or former economics majors?

I found that participating in different types of internships (across nonprofit and private sector) has been helpful to identifying my preferred type of work environment and whether or not I enjoy research.

Invest in the Department of Economics

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Cassie Diltz
Director of Development
The Arts and Sciences Foundation
cassie.diltz@unc.edu
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The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Department of Economics
107 Gardner Hall
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