

AEA Award for Outstanding Achievement in Diversity and Inclusion
University of Missouri, Columbia
Department of Economics

As the flagship campus of the University of Missouri system, our department is proud to be a leader in working for excellence in diversity and inclusivity. In order to attract and serve more students of all backgrounds, we have undertaken an across the board push to improve the quality of our undergraduate and graduate programs through curriculum reforms, [active recruitment of students](#) and a dedication to “customer service.” The center piece of this initiative has been our explicit and purposeful determination to create a more open and welcoming learning environment for under-represented students. These efforts have been wildly successful and in just over two years we have realized a 35% increase in overall student credit hours and a near doubling of our undergraduate majors and master’s students.

The Department of Economics at the University of Missouri-Columbia has made a concerted and broad-based effort to improve the diversity and inclusivity of our program. This effort has been developed on multiple fronts from the students’ classroom experiences to providing opportunities to meet with potential mentors and role models to faculty hiring decisions. Moreover, many of the actions we have taken are well-aligned with the American Economics Association’s recently published “Best Practices for Economists Building a More Diverse, Inclusive, and Productive Profession”, as documented below.

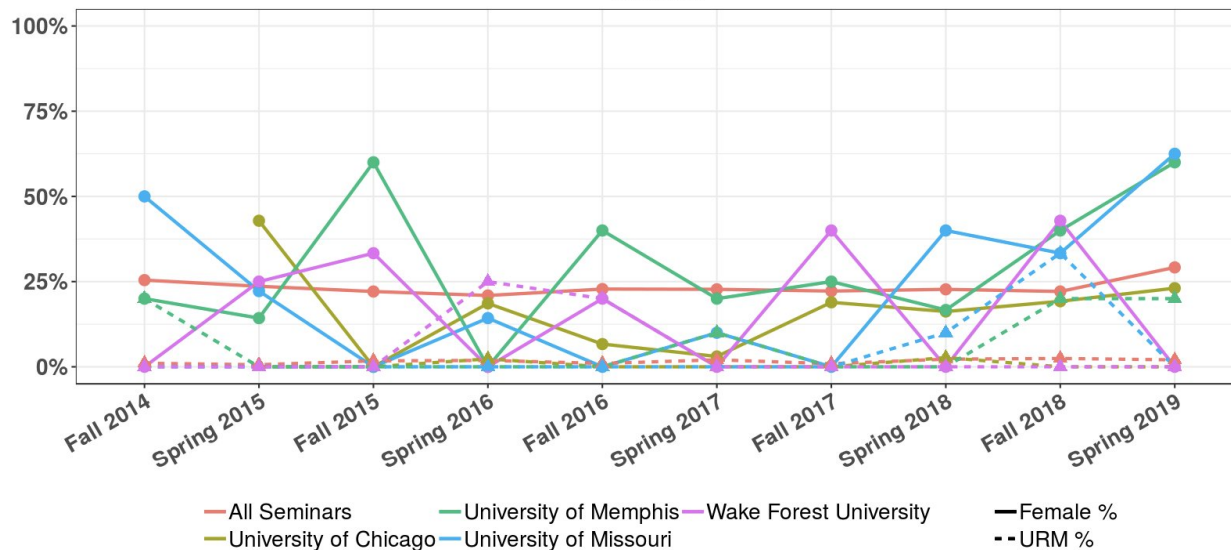
These changes began at the introductory level, and one of our first initiatives was to re-design our Principles of Microeconomics course curriculum to highlight diversity-related topics. Following the re-design, nearly every chapter covered in the course includes multiple examples that emphasize diversity and inclusivity issues; for example, the War on Drugs is used to illustrate an important policy implication of the total revenue rule of demand elasticity, while the disparate impact that the War on Drugs has had on different communities is emphasized in this discussion. Furthermore, the course includes an extended treatment of labor market discrimination that goes beyond the traditional economic model to include models of discrimination that are not necessarily competed away by the market over time. The course concludes with an entire lecture on economics, ethics, and public policy that covers topics of exploitation and fair and equal treatment and introduces the students to the social justice work of John Rawls, as well as other paradigms. As a result, our re-designed Principles course was approved as Inherently Diversity Intensive by the University of Missouri College of Arts and Science. We have also recently developed an upper-level Economics of Discrimination course (Economics 4846) that we will begin offering in upcoming semesters. This curricular work is directly in line with point two of “Working with Students” from the AEA’s best practices document – “Offer course content that is relevant for diverse students.”

Our second initiative was the creation of the Diversity in Economics seminar series. This program utilizes the Economics Department research seminar series as a platform to invite economists from diverse backgrounds to campus to present their research but also to speak to our large-lecture introductory classes and meet with smaller groups of undergraduate students. These visits result in many student touchpoints, as the guests typically speak to 700-1000 students per visit, and the goal of these interventions is to spark interest in economics among all of our students and particularly those who may not traditionally consider economics as a field of study. The seminar series has been a great success and even received significant social media attention when our first speaker, Damon Jones (University of Chicago), tweeted about his visit. (His Twitter thread discussing his visit can be read [here](#).) Subsequent guests have included Lisa Cook, Anne Winkler, Peter Blair, Jennifer Doleac, Trevon Logan, and Laura Gee, while Conrad Miller was scheduled to visit this fall but has had his trip postponed due to the global pandemic. The impact of these visits is reflected in the data reported at <https://econseminardiversity.shinyapps.io/EconSeminarDiversity/>, which was highlighted in this

[tweet](#) by Elizabeth Pancotti and is illustrated in the below chart. And although their data panel ends at the fall 2019 semester, our spring 2020 semester was off to a great start with visits from Trevon Logan and Laura Gee before the pandemic led to the cancellation of the remaining seminars. (It's also worth noting that the spring 2019 URM percentage should be 12.5%, as Peter Blair's visit does not appear to be included in the data.) This single initiative supports many of the AEA's best practices, including "Organize conferences, seminars, and visitor programs that are inclusive"; "Use outreach to counter stereotypes about economics and close other information gaps"; and "Build a sense of belonging for all students".

Seminar Representation Over Time, by School

All Schools



At the undergraduate level, we have also started a mentorship program that pairs incoming students with juniors and seniors in the major and provides them with events designed to foster enhanced engagement and interaction, as well as give the students professional development and other training opportunities. We have worked hard to ensure that we have mentors from a diverse range of backgrounds, so that the incoming students can benefit from their broader experiences. We plan to extend the mentorship program so that the juniors and seniors can be paired with recent alums to help provide them with advisement as they move from the university into the workforce. As with the current mentorship program, our goal will be to include alums from diverse backgrounds in this program. As with the seminar series, the mentoring program supports many of the AEA's "Working with Students" best practices.

From a departmental standpoint, we have made several administrative and policy changes in support of diversity and inclusion. In 2019, we appointed one of our faculty members, Oksana Loginova, as the Department's first Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. In this role, Dr. Loginova has worked to create a graduate Women in Economics group (which is highlighted on our departmental [website](#)) to support our female graduate students. We also have plans to create a parallel group at the undergraduate level. In addition, the Department has developed a [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion statement](#) and highlighted accomplishments from [distinguished alumni](#) who have enhanced the diversity of our field and served as pioneers and trailblazers at our institution and in economics more generally.

We have also worked to diversify our faculty, with our two most recent tenure-track faculty hires and our recent appointment to Associate Director of Graduate Studies increasing the faculty's gender diversity. We

are also helping to train a more diverse pool of future faculty with our recent post-doctoral appointments. As with many departments, however, funding and labor supply constraints have impacted our ability to accomplish more along this dimension.

We are also working to leverage the increased diversity of our majors to broaden our recruitment moving forward. For example, the College of Arts and Science at the University of Missouri promotes an A&S Professor of the Day event where recent alums are invited to campus to speak to undergraduate students. As that is not possible during the current pandemic, we are using pre-recorded classroom videos and follow-up Zoom calls with interested undergraduates in place of the campus visits. The two recent alums we have selected this semester as our Professors of the Day have excellent academic records and should serve as outstanding role models for our current undergraduates who are considering pursuing an economics degree. One of the two, [Helen Bass](#), completed a Master's Degree in Law and Economics at the University of Reading in England after finishing her undergraduate degree here and currently attends law school at Stanford, while the second, [James Bohnett](#), is currently participating in our Department's Data Fellows program in partnership with the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, having recently completed four undergraduate degrees (economics, mathematics, statistics, and political science).

Despite these successes, however, we have several weaknesses and face several challenges in achieving our goals. Although we have worked to diversify our faculty ranks, we have had only limited success along this dimension especially with respect to URM faculty members. Even prior to the pandemic, funding for new faculty hires was difficult to come by at our university, and the significant budget cuts that our institution (like many others across the nation) is currently facing makes it even less likely that we will be able to bring in new faculty members in the coming years. Moreover, a limited supply of qualified candidates and stiff competition for their services across institutions has made this goal even more difficult to fulfill. More generally, the relatively small size of our department has also served as an impediment towards reaching our goals, as our resources are stretched thin on the teaching and research fronts, making it difficult to find the labor resources necessary to fully develop the new programs.

That said, in addition to the continuation of the initiatives described above, we have several new programs that we are hoping to develop in the coming years to support and further enhance the efforts we have already made. One of these initiatives is the development of a Freshman Interest Group (FIG) centered on economics. This would be a new addition to the ongoing FIGs program at Mizzou that is designed to help ease student transitions to college and promote a sense of community among incoming freshman. In this program, a group of freshmen live together in the same residence hall and also take three of the same classes during the fall semester of their freshman year. They also take a one-hour pro-seminar that covers freshman orientation topics, as well as content centered around the FIG's theme. Our proposed FIG is titled "Economics and Social Problems", and we plan to use the pro-seminar (in conjunction with the material that students will be learning in Principles of Microeconomics, one of the required FIG courses) to inform students on the economic approach to many social problems and ways that economists have worked in the policy realm to improve these issues. We believe that this framework will prove to be of particular interest to student demographics that may not generally consider economics as a first-choice major. Furthermore, as with many of our current initiatives, this proposal is well-aligned with many of the AEA's best practices for working with students.

Another initiative that we hope to pursue in the future is to partner with the undergraduate programs at regional HBCUs, for example Lincoln University and Harris-Stowe State University in Missouri, to help build a pipeline from their undergraduate programs into graduate programs both here at the University of Missouri-Columbia and elsewhere. The long-term goal of this partnership would be to increase the number of URM

graduate degree holders, which would help to loosen the labor market constraints discussed above and could provide broad diversity benefits to the field as a whole that have the potential extend well beyond our own department. This potential initiative directly supports point 3 of the AEA's best practices for leading departments and workplaces, "Implement an inclusive process for admitting and developing graduate students." In fact, it goes beyond simply creating an inclusive process and actively works to enhance inclusivity and diversity of the graduate student body and, thus, the future faculty ranks.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Milyo
Chair and Professor
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