

# Scholar Spotlights!

## A Curricular Intervention to Enhance Students' Perceptions of Relevance and Belonging in Principles of Macroeconomics

James M. Murray  
Department of Economics  
University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

Allied Social Science Associations Annual Meeting  
January 6, 2024



## Did you know?

Economics is not  
only dead ideas  
from dead  
economists.



Do principles of economics students know this?

- Do they feel economics content is *relevant*?
- Do they know the economics discipline is alive?
- Do they feel people like themselves become economists?

SCAN ME!



Subset of Table 1 from Bayer et al. (AEA Papers and Proceedings, 2020):

## Student Perceptions of Relevance

| (Percentage strongly agreeing)   | White Male | Female or URM* |
|----------------------------------|------------|----------------|
| Professor uses relevant examples | 40.2%      | 29.4%          |
| Important real-world issues      | 31.4%      | 31.4%          |
| Framework for real-world issues  | 27.5%      | 27.7%          |

## Student Feelings of Belonging

| (Percentage strongly agreeing)       | White Male | Female or URM* |
|--------------------------------------|------------|----------------|
| People like me can become economists | 41.7%      | 20.7%          |

\* URM: Student who is an underrepresented ethnic or racial minority

SCAN ME!



The economics discipline suffers from underrepresentation of women and ethnic and racial minorities:

- Buckles (2019): Women are 56% of all U.S. undergraduate students, but account for less than 30% of economics majors
- Lundberg and Stearns (2019): Women are 35% of economics PhD students, 30% of economics assistant professors, no progress 2003-2018
- Bayer and Rouse (2016): Less than 14% of economics undergraduate degrees awarded to minority students, while 28% of other undergraduate social science degrees are awarded to minorities
- Stansbury and Schultz (2023): Underrepresentation in economics doctoral programs of people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds

SCAN ME!



## Diverse Population of Instructors Helps

- Instructor identity can influence academic performance gaps
- Fairlie et al. (2014), Price (2010): URM instructors reduce ethnic/racial gaps in academic performance
- Carrell et al. (2020), Hoffmann and Oreopoulos (2009), Price (2010): Female instructors reduce gender gaps

## Belonging Interventions

- Murphy et al. (2020), Yaeger et al. (2016), Broda et al. (2018): Belonging interventions improved URM academic performance
- Purdie-Vaughns et al. (2008): Valuing diversity builds trust
- Bayer et al. (2019): Showcasing diversity in research and researchers led to more student diversity in economics classes

SCAN ME!



## Existing Innovations

- Bayer et al. (AEA Proceedings, 2020): "Visible Hands in Economics" is a diverse team of undergraduate teaching assistants trained to promote an inclusive environment
- Bayer et al. (JEE, 2020): New principles of economics curriculum that is based on scholarly inquiry, real world applications, timely social issues
- Bayer (2021): <https://diversifyingecon.org>

## This Project: Scholar Spotlights

- Show examples of diversity in scholarship and scholars
- Demonstrate that I value diversity
- Emphasize scholarly inquiry, real world applications, timely social issues
- With every topic, in every week

SCAN ME!



- 1 Current: Scholarship from last five years
- 2 Diverse representation
- 3 Photo of the scholar
- 4 Mix of well-known and not-so-well known scholars
- 5 Scholars at my own institution (even me!)
- 6 Framed at a principles level
- 7 Standard textbook principles content
- 8 Modern issues including economic inequality, climate change, automation, education, health, and economic development
- 9 Embedded and integrated in the curriculum (not an aside at the end of class)
- 10 Included in active learning exercises

SCAN ME!





## TO THIS! ↴



↲ FROM  
THIS



SCAN ME!



## Can addressing inequality unleash economic growth?

*Business Economics*, Spring 2021.

### Inequality and Innovation

- U.S. Patent Data: 1870-2010
- Unequal access to innovation 1870-1960 led to negative outcomes for affected individuals and the overall U.S. economy
- Improved access 1960-2010 accounts for 25% of growth in U.S.
- Still work to be done to get a better representation of women and minorities in innovation



**Dr. Lisa Cook** (left)  
Federal Reserve Board of Governors  
Professor, Michigan State University



**Dr. Nela Richardson** (right)  
Chief Economist, ADP Research



## Housing Prices and Import Competition (with Joachim Zietz)

Working paper, April 2023.

### Trade Liberalization with China

- New trade agreement with China in October 2000 led to more imports of Chinese goods
- Less demand for similar U.S. produced items led to less employment in some industries
- Less employment  $\rightarrow$  less income  $\rightarrow$  less demand for housing
- Housing prices fell 6-8% in *heavily trade-exposed counties*



**Dr. Sheida Teimouri**

Associate Professor of Economics  
University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

SCAN ME!



## Multiplier Effect of Education Expenditure

CEPR Working Paper, 2022 (with Simona Hannon & Damjan Pfajfar)

### Expenditure Multipliers of Pell Grants

- Pell grants: \$30 billion federal program to help low income students attend college in the United States
- Estimated local multiplier effects: Additional income earned in cities and towns with colleges and universities with Pell grant recipients
- Expenditure multiplier  $\approx 2.5$
- Larger than most estimated multipliers, including defense spending multipliers



**Dr. Maarten De Ridder**  
Assistant Professor  
London School of Economics

SCAN ME!



## Population

- Public regional comprehensive institution with 10,000 students, 79% from Wisconsin
- Principles of Macroeconomics class, with no prerequisites
- 10% of students identify as students of color
- 25% of students first generation
- 58% of students are female

## Survey

- Surveyed students at the end of Fall 2022 & Spring 2023
- 68 responses, about 30% response rate
- Surveyed students on their perceptions of relevance, feelings of belonging, and demographic information

SCAN ME!



## Belonging: Students rated agreement on the following

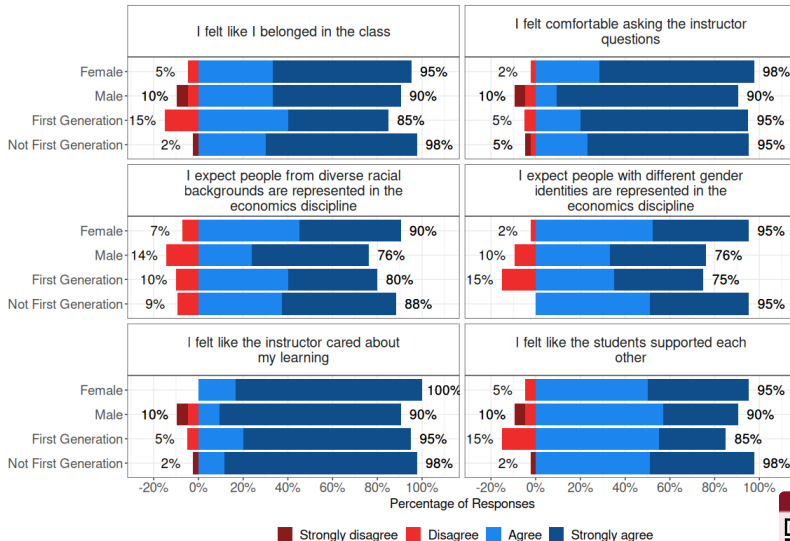
- The students in the class supported one another.
- The instructor cared that I was learning the material.
- People from diverse racial backgrounds are represented in economics.
- People with different gender identities are represented in economics.
- I felt like I belonged in the class.

## Relevance: Students rated agreement on the following

- I could find examples that related to my life.
- I could find examples that may relate to my future career.
- We discussed important real-world issues in class.
- The class gave me a useful framework for important issues.

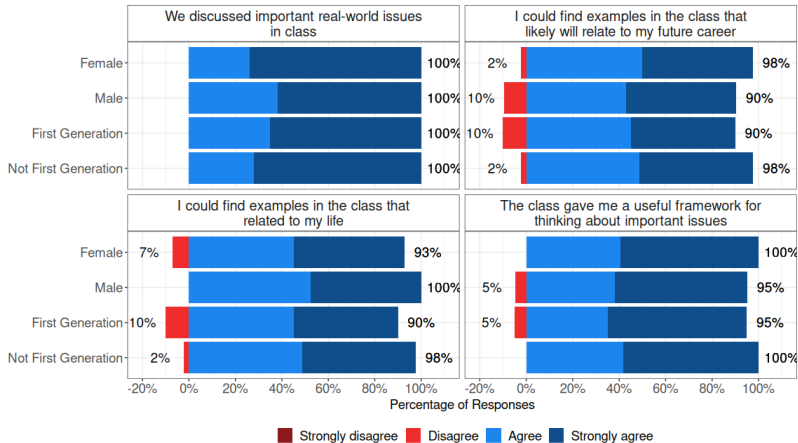
SCAN ME!





SCAN ME!





SCAN ME!





- Innovative curricular strategy, grounded in existing research, to enhance relevance and belonging
- Incorporated in standard principles content
- Survey evidence reveals high levels of perceptions of relevance and feelings of belonging
- Still some gaps in belonging, particularly among non-first-generation students
- Hardly causal evidence. Buckles (2019) suggests:

*"Those willing to work toward greater diversity and inclusion in economics should not ignore the wealth of resources and inventive strategies that do not (yet) meet this standard [for convincing causal evidence]."*

SCAN ME!

