

INAUGURAL KANSAS HEALTH ECONOMICS CONFERENCE GOES VIRTUAL AMID COVID-19 PANDEMIC; DISCUSSES IMPLICATIONS OF CRISIS AND PATH FORWARD

The first annual Kansas Health Economics Conference went off via Zoom on March 23 amid the unfolding coronavirus pandemic and on the 10th anniversary of the Affordable Care Act’s having been signed into law by President Obama.

The event, hosted by Dr. David Slusky and funded in part by a 3-year National Science Foundation grant he obtained, obviously took on even greater significance in the wake of the global health crisis.

“The world is a very different place today than it was when this conference was put together last fall,” KU’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Dean Carl Lejeuz said in his opening remarks. “During this especially critical time and with many of these especially critical issues, it is important that this conference be held and that we are doing everything we can to keep a sense of normalcy.”

Dean Lejeuz, also a professor of psychology, said that he was very appreciative of KU’s strong Economics Department and its willingness to serve as part of the broader interdisciplinary effort necessary to evaluate the “downstream impact” of the crisis on people who are most vulnerable, noting that many of those issues related to mental health – his area of focus.

The conference featured two major morning sessions (one involving Medicaid and the second on issues of inequality); followed by “pitch presentation” sessions throughout the afternoon focusing on shorter and more targeted presentations involving multiple topics across the spectrum of health care, health insurance and health economics. The pitch presentations involved mostly preliminary work in progress and allowed researchers to quickly summarize their ongoing projects and subsequently get input from other participants in the special private chat rooms available on Zoom.



The 2020 Kansas Health Economics Conference was held via Zoom on March 23, as participants from around the country discussed a number of critical health policy issues, including the COVID-19 pandemic.

With public health insurance availability increasingly front and center as a societal issue, Dr Marie Hull from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, who received her undergraduate economics degree from KU, presented her fascinating research (“Public Insurance Coverage and Child Development: Evidence from Medicaid and CHIP Expansions”) analyzing the impact of each additional year of eligibility. She explained that her results found that each additional year had tended to boost both reading and math scores for students 13-14 years old; and that there had also been a statistically significant reduction in their levels of hyperactivity. She added that the data suggested having that extra year of eligibility during the especially important developmental ages from 0-4 was even more crucial.

Additional research (“The Value of Medicaid vs. Marketplace Health Insurance for Low-Income Families”) from

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Dr. Thomas Deleire

Texas A&M's Dr. Laura Dague used the natural experiment created by Wisconsin's 2014 elimination of Medicaid eligibility for parents with incomes between 100 and 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Dr. Dague, who also received her undergraduate economics degree from KU, said that the study was important in determining how individuals value public relative to private health insurance coverage, as

well as how they fare with respect to health care access under both types of coverage.

During lunch, many of the "breakout room" discussions focused on the larger societal impact of the pandemic, including its impact on higher education, families, and challenges associated with teaching and interacting online.

Georgetown University's Dr. Thomas Deleire provided the conference keynote just after the virtual lunch hour, presenting his paper on "Are the ACA Marketplaces Working?" – a question he said seemed especially relevant to ask on the law's 10th anniversary. His detailed research showed that the question should largely be answered in the affirmative. Dr. Deleire said that the marketplaces had in fact increased coverage, especially in non-Medicaid expansion states. He also said that consumers had appeared to respond to the premiums; that the premiums had adjusted in competitive markets; and that cost-sharing reductions had increased health care use and reduced out-of-pocket spending (also working as intended). He did note that his findings had determined that consumers tended over time to value larger networks and were in fact willing to pay higher premiums for access to broader provider networks. He also said that the marketplaces did not seem to be working very well as short-term transitional mechanisms filling part-year gaps in coverage and further suggested that some sort of marketplace redesign would be necessary for them to do so.

Later in the afternoon, Dr. Didem Tuzemen from the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City and Dr. Jake Cronin from the US Census Bureau's University of Missouri Research Data Center talked about how researchers and academicians could access certain information not otherwise publicly available, including National Center for Health Statistics data, by utilizing special federal statistical research data centers. They said that the data would often times be accessed on site in a "cold room" setting so as to help assure that certain individuals and businesses could not be identified as part of the analyses.

Informal discussions continued online by conference participants well into the evening as many top health and labor economists discussed how best to collaborate moving forward in the wake of the crisis.

Dr. Slusky said that keeping everyone who had participated together as an informal virtual working group was even more important in terms of formulating the correct

health economics questions that needed to be asked and answered.

"But I do very much look forward to seeing every one of you again in person and going out to dinner at some sort of follow-up event, perhaps as early as this fall," he said.



Dr. Tsvetan Tsvetanov discussed with *KU News* an important new study he co-authored with Dr. Dietrich Earnhart on water conservation efforts.

IMPACT OF WATER CONSERVATION EFFORTS ANALYZED IN IMPORTANT NEW STUDY

Some of the latest fascinating research by Dr. Tsvetan Tsvetanov and Dr. Dietrich Earnhart on water conservation efforts was featured by *KU News* in February. Their paper ("The Effectiveness of a Water Right Retirement Program at Conserving Water" – published in a recent issue of *Land Economics*) is believed to be

the first study to directly estimate the impact of water right retirement.

A five-year state pilot program initiative launched in 2008 known as Kansas Water Right Transition Assistance Program offered farmers up to \$2,000 per acre for permanent retirement of their water rights. The state ended up spending \$2.9 million over the five years the program ran, with about 6,000 acre-feet of water rights permanently retired.

The research distinguishes between two program components, creek sub-basins and designated high priority areas. The findings demonstrate that water right retirement in the high priority areas substantially reduced groundwater use, but did not reduce usage in the creek sub-basins in any meaningful way.

"Our first thought was, 'That's not what we expected,'" Dr. Tsvetanov told *KU News* (see <https://today.ku.edu/2020/02/12/study-details-effectiveness-kansas-program-pays-farmers- conserve-water>).

"The creeks are the geographic majority of what's being covered by the policy," he said. "The high-priority areas are called that for a reason – they've been struggling for many years. Our best guess is that farmers there were more primed to respond to the policy because there is an awareness things are not looking good, and something needs to be done. So as soon as a policy became available which compensated them for the reduction of water use, they were quicker to take advantage of it."

Dr. Tsvetanov noted that the results might be especially relevant for the eight states, including Kansas, that sit atop the rapidly depleting High Plains Aquifer. He suggested that water right retirement programs could be at least a partial solution but could not be expected to stabilize the depletion from irrigation on an ongoing basis.

PHD STUDENTS PRESENT AND DEFEND THIRD-YEAR PAPERS

As one of the changes implemented recently in the Economics Department's doctoral program, a number of third-year PhD students in December were required to submit and defend research papers in front of a 3-member faculty committee. The fascinating analysis unveiled in these papers, often developed in consultation with faculty mentors, may well end up forming the basis for the students' future job market papers or even becoming a chapter in their dissertations. More importantly, getting constructive feedback, input and suggestions from faculty helps the students prepare for even more intensive review of their work that they will be facing down the road when defending their dissertations.

The electronic presentations providing executive summaries of the research findings occurred in Snow Hall in mid-December just prior to the start of finals on campus. Dr. David Slusky advised the students to get used to jotting down notes during presentations in response to questions from faculty, since doing so immediately tends to leave a favorable impression – something that will be crucial when they are ultimately presenting job market papers.

During his presentation ("Monetary Unions in a Global Game Setting"), Bozhidar Radev said that the policy implications of his research might be especially relevant for certain African nations currently considering different forms of monetary or currency unions.

Sohee Park ("Forecasting Inflation and Credit-Card Augmented Divisia Monetary Aggregates") said that her research investigating the performance of Divisia monetary aggregates in forecasting US inflation at the 12-month horizon was suggesting that using credit-card augmented Divisia "inside money" provided better inflation forecasts than did other indices.

Another paper ("Effects of Military Service and Price Increase on Smoking Behavior among Korean Men") looked at the extent to which a major price increase initiated by the South Korean government in 2015 may have been particularly effective in reducing the level of cigarette consumption among men who are often conscripted into the military for two years in their early 20s. Hojin Park said that such men were believed previously to have had very high rates of smoking while in the military because of stress, boredom and peer pressure; but that the 2015 price increase appeared to have alleviated the smoking-encouraging effects of being in the military.

Director of Graduate Programs Dr. Tarun Sabarwal noted that successful completion of the third-year paper requirement represented an especially important milestone for students' progressing towards their doctoral degrees.

Hojin Park	Effects of Military Service and Price Increase on Smoking Behavior among Korean Men <i>Committee: Slusky, Ginther, Kim</i>
Bozhidar Radev	Monetary Unions in a Global Game Setting <i>Committee: Keating, Sabarwal, Jalali</i>
Sohee Park	Forecasting Inflation and Credit-Card Augmented Divisia Monetary Aggregates <i>Committee: Barnett, Keating, Zhang, Sabarwal</i>
Mike Easterday	Do Pink Slips Cause Bad Hips? The Effect of Mass Layoffs on Disability and Retirement <i>Committee: Ginther, Slusky, Lugovskyy</i>
Haoyi Wei	Concealed Carry Policy and Campus Crime Rate: A Difference-in-Differences Approach Analysis <i>Committee: Ginther, Slusky, Tsvetanov</i>
Misun Park	The Effect of Fertility Subsidies on Births in South Korea <i>Committee: Slusky, Ginther, Tsvetanov</i>
Seoyeon Jo	The Effect of Paid Family Leave Reformation on Korean Women's Work Supply <i>Committee: Ginther, Slusky, Tsvetanov</i>
Van Nguyen	Divisia Monetary Aggregates for Singapore <i>Committee: Barnett, Keating, Kim</i>
Hyun Park	A Study of Credit Card-Augmented Divisia and GDP by Using VAR Model <i>Committee: Barnett, Keating, Kim</i>

SABARWAL PROMOTED TO FULL PROFESSOR

KU announced in March that Dr. Tarun Sabarwal (Associate Chair, Director of Graduate Studies and currently the De-Min and Chin-Sha Wu Associate Professor of Economics) had been promoted to Full Professor, effective for the 2020-21 academic year.

Dr. Sabarwal also has been busy developing adaptation strategies in the wake of the pandemic, launching a special online Analytical Research in Economics Workshop that was expected to continue to meet via Zoom on Thursdays for the balance of the spring semester.



DUTRA OUTLINES ANTITRUST RESEARCH AT SPECIAL KU LAW SYMPOSIUM



Dr. Jéssica Dutra returned to the KU campus in November to discuss antitrust issues during a special symposium at the KU Law School.

Settling nicely into her role as senior economist with Economists Incorporated specializing in antitrust, Dr. Jéssica Dutra returned to the KU campus on November 8 as a featured speaker to unveil some of her fascinating research at a special symposium hosted by the KU Law School – Antitrust Law and Policy in the 21st Century.

Jéssica, who received her PhD from KU in May of 2019, explained that her presentation (“Paradigm Shifts on Merger Efficiencies in Antitrust Analysis”) had been inspired for the symposium from one of the chapters of her dissertation. She added that she was no stranger to Green Hall, since she had taken several antitrust law classes while completing her doctoral degree in economics.

Dr. Dutra’s presentation included keyword text mining analysis covering the history and evolution of merger reviews in the US since the late 1960s in a quantitative manner. She said it was clear that the notion of efficiencies has experienced a non-linear trajectory in antitrust.

A Monte Carlo simulation she developed using 72,000 randomly generated mergers suggests that the US might not necessarily be picking the best mergers to investigate. She said that the findings indicate that in the presence of efficiencies, the Herfindahl Hirschman Index and purely concentration-based measures may not be able to fully cap-



ture gains in market power and the likelihood of harm to consumers in the presence of merger efficiencies.

“Moving to more structural-based models and unilateral effect estimates may offer better merger screening,” she said.

Dr. Dutra noted that additional research outlined in her paper (“Antitrust Analysis with Upward Pricing Pressure and Cost Efficiencies” with Dr. Tarun Sabarwal) has in fact shown that upward pricing pressure with efficiencies can give especially accurate estimates. (For a more in-depth summary of research on improving antitrust merger screening, see page 5 of the Fall 2018 *KU Economist*).

Finally, she said that one of the key questions begged by the analysis was whether antitrust should be determined by using the consumer welfare standard employed in the US and many other countries; or the total welfare standard utilized in Canada and New Zealand.

In addition to Jéssica’s talk, the KU Law School event featured a number of prominent law school faculty from around the country, an expert from the Federal Trade Commission, and even a perspective on Kansas-specific antitrust developments from Kansas Attorney General Derek Schmidt. Her paper as well as those from other speakers will be published in a special issue of the *Kansas Law Review*.

ASIEDU RECEIVES SADIE COLLECTIVE HONOR

KU’s own Dr. Elizabeth Asiedu in February received a special award from the Sadie Collective for Academic Excellence and Mentoring. The Sadie Collective is the first US non-profit organization aimed specifically at increasing the representation of black women in economics and quantitative related fields.

The entity is named in recognition of Dr. Sadie T.M. Alexander, the first black woman to receive a PhD in



Dr. Elizabeth Asiedu is honored at a special event by the Sadie Collective for her work in founding AAWE.

economics in the United States. Dr. Asiedu received special recognition at an event in Washington, DC acknowledging her role as the founder of the Association for the Advancement of African Women Economists (AAWE).

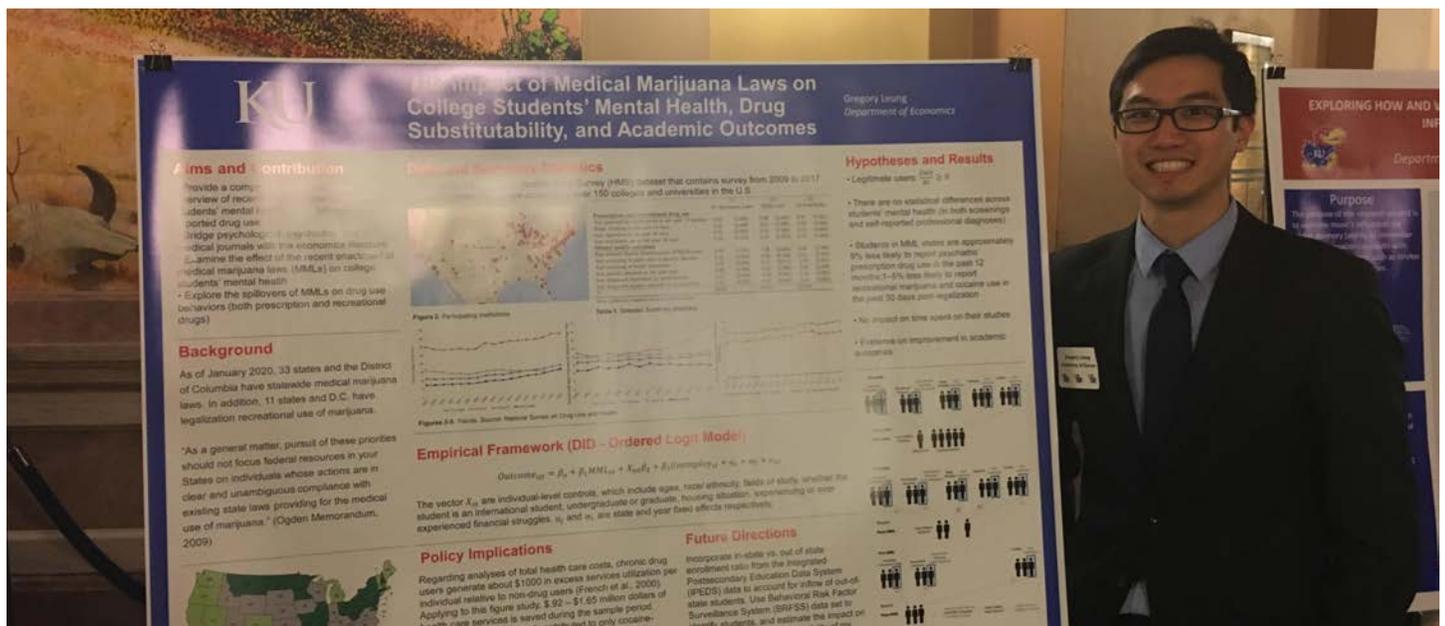
HIGGINS RECEIVES UGRA TO REVIEW IMPLICATIONS OF MISINFORMATION IN NETWORK GAMES



KU announced in late December that John Higgins, a senior majoring in economics and math, had received a prestigious Undergraduate Research Award (UGRA) for the Spring 2020 semester. Mentored by Dr. Tarun Sabarwal, John’s research is especially relevant for the election year and the new decade, as it examines the propagation of misinformation in network games and has direct applications to misinformation campaigns on social networks.

The UGRA program, which was initiated in 1986, provides \$1,000 scholarships to students pursuing specific research under the guidance of faculty mentors. A rigorous application process includes submission of a four-page research proposal that helps develop the students’ grant-writing skills.

John and other UGRA recipients were scheduled to present their research in late April at a special symposium, originally set for the Kansas Memorial Union.



Gregory Leung presents research (“The Impact of Medical Marijuana Laws on College Students’ Mental Health, Drugs Substitutability and Academic Outcomes”) at the Kansas Statehouse in Topeka on February 26 as part of the prestigious Capitol Graduate Research Summit.

LEUNG PUBLISHES ANALYSIS OF MARIJUANA LAW IMPACTS ON FATAL TRAFFIC CRASHES

The unique expertise doctoral candidate Gregory Leung has developed about the implications of rapidly evolving marijuana laws was on full display in a fascinating article (with Amanda C. Cook and Rhet A. Smith: “Marijuana Decriminalization, Medical Marijuana Laws, and Fatal Traffic Crashes in US Cities, 2010-2017”) published in January in the online *American Journal of Public Health*.

The authors examine the impact of both medical marijuana laws (MMLs) and cannabis decriminalization on fatal crashes by the age and sex of the driver. Using a Poisson difference-in-differences approach to exploit temporal and geographic variation in decriminalization laws, the research found that cities experienced a 13 percent increase in fatal crashes involving 15- to 24-year-old male drivers after decriminalization. This impact was immediate and strongest on weekend nights. At the same time, there was no discernible impact of decriminalization on female drivers or older male drivers.

On the other hand, MMLs were associated with fewer fatal crashes for both males and females, a result that was most pronounced in the 15- 24-year-old age group.

The article suggests that an important public health implication takeaway is the fact that the travel incentives of the two types of laws have heterogeneous effects on traffic safety (given that most MMLs stipulate consumption occur at home; whereas decriminalization simply lessens the penalty for possession).

Greg has previously presented research on the impact of marijuana laws on the mental health of college students in an effort to bridge economics literature with a number of psychology and medical journals.

SPECIAL STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM ON HEALTH CARE IN SWEDEN TEMPORARILY PUT ON HOLD

KU and the Economics Department had announced in January that Dr. David Slusky would be one of the faculty members teaching in a special program this summer being offered by KU Study Abroad and Global Engagement on "Health Care and Social Policies in Sweden". The program, which was last offered in 2017, allows students to spend two weeks in and around Stockholm getting an up-close view of one of the best health care systems in the world. Originally scheduled to run from May 24 through June 7, KU announced in late March that this particular event and all others with a departure date of June 30 or sooner would be suspended at least temporarily in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Dr. Slusky and KU Study Abroad officials said they were continuing to evaluate the feasibility of getting the program rescheduled for as soon as early August.

Although Sweden spends roughly half of what the US does on health care, it features comprehensive publicly financed health care and social services and leads the world in a number of major health outcomes, including infant mortality and adult life expectancy.

Students completing the program are eligible to receive 3 hours of undergraduate credit for ECON 450 in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; or 3 hours of graduate credit for HP&M 880 in the School of Medicine.

Dr. Slusky has lived in Stockholm multiple times, worked as a Research Assistant at Sveriges Riksbanken (The Swedish Central Bank) in 2010, and has presented his research at conferences in Gothenburg, Uppsala, and Copenhagen.

COVID-19 CALENDAR CHANGES

At presstime, decisions were still being made about the status of a number of future events discussed in this publication. For the latest information, please look to the KU and Economics Department websites:

<https://coronavirus.ku.edu/>
<https://economics.ku.edu/>



Dr. Tarun Sabarwal

DUTRA AND SABARWAL PUBLISH IMPORTANT STUDY OF ANTITRUST MERGER SCREENING MEASURE

The Economics Department in early January announced that *PLOS ONE* had published important research that could improve antitrust merger screening ("Antitrust

Analysis with Upward Pricing Pressure and Cost Efficiencies" – Dr. Jessica Dutra and Dr. Tarun Sabarwal).

A key component in antitrust policy involves the notion that regulators should block mergers that are anticompetitive but not interfere with those that are in fact procompetitive. Antitrust officials therefore spend a great deal of time and resources on trying to determine the impact a given merger would have on the post-merger competitive landscape. One of the tools increasingly employed in recent years to estimate the anticompetitive effects of horizontal mergers is known as Upward Pricing Pressure (UPP).

Given that the use of UPP as a screening mechanism was formally incorporated into US Department of Justice and Federal Trade Commission horizontal merger guidelines in 2010 (followed in subsequent years by the inclusion of UPP into the antitrust screening protocols of a number of other nations, including the United Kingdom, France, Denmark, Japan, Brazil and Chile), the paper investigates its accuracy as a tool in antitrust analysis when cost efficiencies result from horizontal mergers.

The research includes merger-specific cost efficiencies in a tractable manner in the model and extends the standard UPP formulation to specifically account for the efficiencies. Using a Monte Carlo simulation of 40,000 mergers (5,000 mergers in each of 8 scenarios) to gauge the efficacy of the new UPP formulations, the authors find substantial gains in both the prediction of post-merger prices and in merger screening accuracy. The results are robust to several additional analyses and show that including cost efficiencies in a manner guided by the theoretical model may yield substantial improvements in the accuracy of UPP as a tool in antitrust analysis. The implications of this are especially important, given that over 2,000 potential antitrust merger cases had been at least initially evaluated in the US in 2018.

ALUMNI NEWS

Alums and friends of Economics at KU, we want to hear from you! Please keep us updated on what is happening in your lives. We look forward to including your news and events in the next *KU Economist*.

Mail

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 University of Kansas
 Lawrence, Kansas 66045

Email Your News

econ@ku.edu
 Subject Line: Alumni News



*** ALUMNI PROFILES ***

DR. STEVEN C. AGEE

Steven Agee and Sue Ann Arnall

A prominent KU alum and leading authority in energy economics, banking, monetary theory and macroeconomic policy, Dr. Steven C. Agee currently serves as Dean and Professor of Economics at Oklahoma City University's prestigious Meinders School of Business.

Dr. Agee received both his Master's degree (1979) and PhD (1982)

from KU before launching his long and fascinating career by jumping directly into the private sector. He spent 24 years as president of an independent oil and gas exploration and production company during a number of very volatile years in the energy sector.

After selling his company in 2006, he returned to academia at Oklahoma City University. But he also served for six years (2007-2012) on the Board of the Kansas City Federal Reserve's Oklahoma City Branch, including the last three as Chair.

"This was a very interesting time in our economic history during the Great Recession," Dr. Agee said. "Given that I had written my dissertation on the Great Depression and had conversations during my tenure at the Fed with (former Fed Chair) Ben Bernanke, it was a remarkable experience for me."

Dr. Agee said that he had many fond memories of his days at KU, including playing on an Economics Department faculty/student intramural basketball team and even getting in a few rounds of golf with (former Chair and now Professor Emeritus) Dr. Tom Weiss.

"I very much enjoyed my entire graduate career at KU and in fact became close to many of my professors, including Joe Sicilian, Tom Weiss, Gordon Sellon and David Faurot," he added.

He said that one of his favorite memories came some years after he had left KU when Dr. Weiss, who had also been his dissertation chair, invited him back to the area to attend the 1988 Final Four when the men's basketball team won the national championship at Kemper Arena in Kansas City.

"I had received my undergraduate degree from Oklahoma, so when KU and OU were playing for the title, my alma mater was going to win no matter what," he laughed. "KU, of course, won the title in a big upset. It was a fun weekend to come back for all of the festivities."

Besides serving as Dean of the Meinders School, Dr. Agee continues to put his decades of energy economics expertise to use by teaching a graduate course in energy management at OKCU.

DR. JIACHENG HE

Dr. Jiacheng He in March moved to Seattle to join Amazon as an Applied Scientist. He joined the Transaction Risk Management Systems (TRMS) section, where some 60 Applied Scientists build machine learning and statistical models to minimize financial transaction risk across the entire bundle of Amazon's services. Detection of stolen accounts or credit cards attempting to make purchases is one key part of the TRMS mission. He had worked since last March in Chicago at Conversant, a personalized digital marketing company, as a Data Scientist.

Dr. He, who received his PhD from KU in 2019, said that his background in applied econometrics had given him a unique skill set (especially as it relates to thinking in a causal framework while maintaining institutional knowledge) to contribute and collaborate under the multi-disciplinary environment found in tech companies.

VERMA RECEIVES PRESTIGIOUS TRUMAN SCHOLARSHIP NOMINATION



KU announced in mid February that junior Sneha Verma was one of four KU students who had been nominated for Harry S. Truman Scholarships, which provide up to \$30,000 for graduate study. The awards are given each year to college juniors showing exceptional leadership in public service.

Nominees must have an extensive record of campus and community service, commitment to a career in government or the nonprofit and advocacy sectors, communication skills and a high probability of becoming a "change agent," and a strong academic record with likely acceptance to the graduate school of the candidate's choice.

Verma, from Wichita, is majoring in economics and minoring in mathematics. She has worked as a research and teaching assistant and served as the director of policy and development for KU's Student Senate.

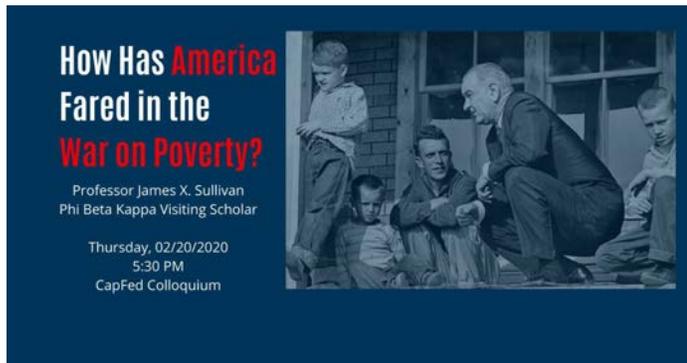
Truman Scholars receive priority admission and supplemental financial aid at premier graduate institutions; leadership training, career and graduate school counseling; and special internship opportunities within the federal government.

Since 1981, 20 KU students have become Truman scholars. Samuel Steuart was the most recent KU student to receive the honor in 2019.

Congress originally established the Truman Scholarship Foundation in 1975 as a memorial to former President Harry S. Truman.

PHI BETA KAPPA VISITING SCHOLAR DISCUSSES WAR ON POVERTY

The relative success of the War on Poverty is often hotly debated. But KU got to hear a unique perspective in February from Dr. James X. Sullivan as part of a special lecture presented by the Phi Beta Kappa Society and co-hosted by the Economics Department (“How has America Fared in the War on Poverty?”).



Dr. James X. Sullivan discussed the best ways to measure success of America's War on Poverty during a Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholar Lecture on February 20.

A professor of economics at Notre Dame and serving this year as Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholar, Dr. Sullivan said that the question of whether America has “won” the war on poverty is not a simple one to answer, notwithstanding frequent proclamations from politicians and others over the years suggesting that many of LBJ's Great Society programs had failed to achieve their stated goals.

During a special presentation at Capitol Federal Hall on February 20, he explained that there are a number of problems with the poverty measure developed originally during the 1960s. One of the issues involves the notion that consumption-based measures do a better job of measuring well-being than do income-based measures. Consumption-based measures incorporate taxes and federal and state transfers and avoid bias due to under-reporting of certain types of income.

He also said it was clear that implementation of the earned income tax credit had succeeded in lifting large numbers of people out of poverty; and that Social Security and Medicare had been critical in assuring that millions of elderly Americans were better off than they were several generations ago.

The lecture also was hosted by the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the University Honors Program, the Department of History, and the Office of First-Year Experience.

Phi Beta Kappa's Visiting Scholar Program has been giving undergraduates the opportunity to spend time with some of the nation's most distinguished experts since 1956. Dr. David Slusky is President of the KU chapter, while Dr. Dietrich Earnhart serves as Historian.

During his visit to KU, Dr. Sullivan also gave a special presentation at the Economics Department the previous day (“Can Intensive Case Management Move People Out of Poverty? Evidence from a Randomized Controlled Trial Evaluation”).

He said that he had very much enjoyed his travels around the country as a Visiting Scholar and was especially complimentary of the intellectual curiosity of KU's undergraduates.



Hayley Koontz in February was named a University Scholar and will be mentored by Dr. Donna Ginther.

KOONTZ NAMED UNIVERSITY SCHOLAR

KU announced in late February that sophomore economics major Hayley Koontz had been named to the 39th class of University Scholars.

Hayley said that she was still in high school when she decided to major in economics, as her interest was sparked by a special Economics for Leaders summer camp.

“I am interested in the way that economics draws information from multiple disciplines, including mathematics and history, to solve complex problems and explain how markets function,” she added.

Competitively selected from KU's sophomore class, University Scholars earn their distinction through rigorous academic achievement, intellectual promise, curiosity and leadership. Scholars receive a \$1,500 scholarship and are assigned a faculty mentor to support the development of their academic interests and engagement with research. Hayley, one of 30 members of the prestigious program in 2020, is being mentored by Dr. Donna Ginther.

“I am so thankful to have the opportunity to work with Dr. Ginther as my mentor,” Hayley said. “I am hoping to attend law school after completing my undergraduate degree.”

She also said that she very much enjoyed her History of Economic Analysis (ECON 505) course last fall, which allowed her to more closely connect many economic principles she had learned in other courses with the writings of famous economic theoreticians, including Adam Smith and David Ricardo.

The University Scholars program was founded in 1982 under the leadership of retired U.S. 10th Circuit Chief Judge Deanell Tacha, then KU's vice chancellor for academic affairs, along with longtime University Honors Program director Francis Heller.

FACULTY NEWS

Tarun Sabarwal had his research featured by *KU News* in January (“Economists employ game theory to predict outcomes when incentives are used to steer behavior”; see <http://news.ku.edu/2019/01/22/economists-employ-game-theory-predict-outcomes-when-incentives-are-used-steer-behavior>). Recent publications have included “Global Games with Strategic Complements and Substitutes” (with Eric J. Hoffmann in *Games and Economic Behavior*); and “Antitrust Analysis with Upward Pricing Pressure and Cost Efficiencies” (with Jessica Dutra in *PLOS ONE* – see page 6). He presented in December at the 15th Annual Conference on Economic Growth and Development in New Delhi, India; in November at the Southern Economic Association’s 89th Annual Meeting in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in October at the NSF/NBER/CEME Mathematical Economics Conference at the University of California at Berkeley. Dr. Sabarwal continues to serve on KU’s Executive Council of Graduate Faculty, the Chancellor’s Doctoral Fellowship Committee, and the Argersinger Dissertation Award Committee. As Associate Chair and Director of Graduate Studies, he has overseen a number of enhancements in the Economics Department’s graduate programs, including third-year paper requirements for doctoral students (see page 3); successful new admissions outreach initiatives; and implementation of new summer scholarships and enhanced travel support for graduate students. Dr. Sabarwal notes that the doctoral program changes are having a significant impact on outcomes, given that median time-to-degree for a PhD in economics at KU has fallen by about one year, from 6.2 years (during 2010-12) to 5.3 years (2016-18). An international authority on game theory, he also is again organizing the 11th Annual Kansas Workshop in Economic Theory (schedule to be announced).

Dietrich Earnhart recently published “The Effect of Environmental Enforcement on Labor: Environmental Workers and Production Workers” (with Zach Raff) in the *Journal of Regulatory Economics*; “The Effectiveness of a Water Right Retirement Program at Conserving Water” (with **Tsvetan Tsvetanov**) in *Land Economics*; “The Effects of Enforcement on Corporate Environmental Performance: The Role of Fairness” (with Donna Ramirez Harrington and Robert Glicksman) in *Review of Law and Economics*; and “The Value of Hiring a Lawyer” (with Sandra Rousseau) in *International Review of Law and Economics*. An authority on environmental economics, Dr. Earnhart has been instrumental in establishing new partnership networks involving both environmental non-governmental organizations and environmental public sector agencies in order to secure input on interdisciplinary research projects.

Donna Ginther, recently named Director of KU’s Institute for Policy & Social Research, has made a number of presentations, including “Career Prospects in Academic Science and the Rise of Teamwork” (at an Association for Public Policy and Management Conference in Denver and also at

the KU Medical Center); and “Do State TANF Policies Affect Child Abuse and Neglect?” (at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, the Institute for Research on Poverty in Madison, Wisconsin, and at the Kansas Conference on Poverty in Topeka). Dr. Ginther’s most recent publications include “Can Mentoring Help Female Assistant Professors in Economics?” (with Janet M. Currie, Francine D. Blau, Rachel T.A. Croson) in *American Economic Review Papers and Proceedings* (forthcoming); and “Medically Necessary but Forbidden: Reproductive Health Care in Catholic-Owned Hospitals” (with Elaine Hill and **David Slusky**) in *Journal of Health Economics*. An increasingly valuable resource for state policymakers, Dr. Ginther gave testimony to the Senate Commerce in March and serves as the lead academician for the Governor’s Council on Tax Reform.

Eungsik Kim recently published “Determinate Perfect Foresight Forecasting in Overlapping Generations Models” (with Stephen Spear) in *Economic Theory*. Dr. Kim, who specializes in computational economics, macroeconomics, political economics and economic theory, joined the KU Economics Department faculty in 2019. He currently teaches courses in macroeconomics (Econ 522) and money and banking (Econ 600).

David Slusky has had four papers recently accepted for publication, “Children’s Health and Income: Evolution of the Gradient” (with Conner Falke, KU Class of 2019) in *Applied Economics Letters*; “The Impact of the Flint Water Crisis on Fertility” (with Daniel Grossman) in *Demography*; “Did UberX Reduce Ambulance Volume?” (with Leon Moskatel) in *Health Economics*; and “Reproductive Health Care in Catholic-Owned Hospitals” (with Elaine Hill and **Donna Ginther**) in *Journal of Health Economics*. As one of the area’s leading health economists, Dr. Slusky has made multiple presentations, including testimony given in January to the Kansas Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare on research associated with state Medicaid expansion. He also gave the prestigious Seaver Lecture at the Hall Center for the Humanities in early March (see page 10). He also organized the inaugural Kansas Health Economics Conference (page 1), a major new event backed by the National Science Foundation and the Economics Department. Dr. Slusky also has been named recipient of the Eckstein Prize, recognizing the best article published in the *Eastern Economic Journal* over a two-year period.

Additional Faculty Information

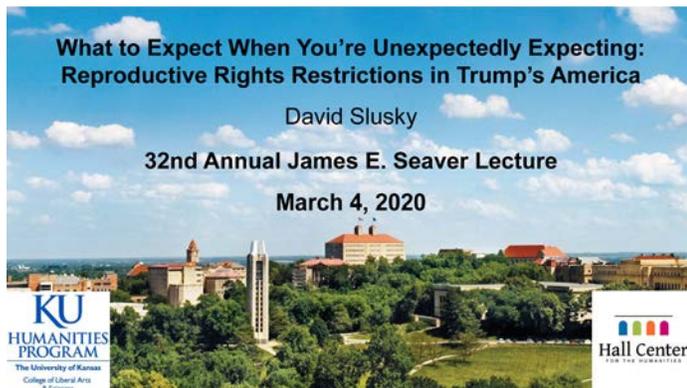
Information on faculty, their areas of research interest, and recent activities and publications may be found at <http://economics.ku.edu/faculty>.

Additional information on current working papers also is available at <http://econpapers.repec.org/paper/kanwpaper/>.

SLUSKY ANALYZES REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS RESTRICTIONS IN SEAVER LECTURE

Economists have a unique and ongoing role to play in the often emotionally and politically charged debates over reproductive rights, a leading health economist said at a special lecture given in early March at KU's Hall Center for the Humanities. Dr. David Slusky told a broad interdisciplinary audience at the 32nd annual Seaver Lecture ("What to Expect When You're Unexpectedly Expecting: Reproductive Rights Restrictions in Trump's America") that Americans may now be facing a future landscape where abortions are completely unavailable in many parts of the country and access to contraception is severely limited.

"Economists use natural experiments to evaluate consequences," Dr. Slusky said. "The last decade, which has seen multiple policy changes lead to clinic closures, has given us the opportunity to analyze data and determine those consequences."



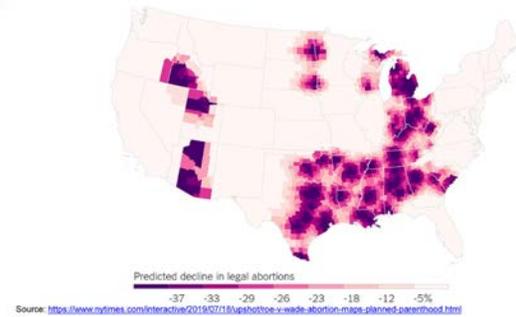
He explained that research looking at the impact of additional regulations and restrictions that led to clinic closures had in fact led to increased birth rates, fewer abortions, less preventive care and additional financial stress for households.

Some of Dr. Slusky's own fascinating research ("The Impact of Women's Health Clinic Closures on Fertility" (with Yao Lu) in the *American Journal of Health Economics*) analyzed closure data throughout Texas from 2008-13 in the wake of multiple restrictions and funding limitations on health organizations affiliated with abortion services, finding that each 100-mile increase to the nearest clinic tended to increase the overall fertility rate by 1.2 percent – virtually all of which was driven by a 2.4 percent increase for unmarried women.

More broadly, he observed that much of the ongoing research helped inform what the future might look like should the 1973 *Roe v Wade* decision ever be overturned by the US Supreme Court.

"Thankfully, economics has an excellent working paper culture as it relates to the sharing of the latest not-yet-published research," he added. "And I think it is clear that economists have an important role to play in quantifying the implications of even more drastic restrictions and facil-

What happens if *Roe v. Wade* were overturned?



ity closures that would be occurring if *Roe v. Wade* were to no longer be the standard."

Dr. Slusky said that he always told his students that economists as "natural experiment hunters" can bring a great deal of important analysis to the table on any number of issues. He mentioned several other examples of his own oft-cited research, including papers on the health outcomes of the Flint, Michigan water crisis; and on the impact of the introduction of ride-sharing services on ambulance usage in certain cities.

The James E. Seaver Lecture, which gives KU faculty the opportunity to present research on continuing and important issues in Western Civilization, is one of the most prestigious lectures given on campus each year. The late Dr. Seaver, a KU professor of history for 27 years, was a renaissance man who also produced a weekly radio show ("Opera is My Hobby") for 59 years, believed to be one of the longest-running, continuously-produced programs in broadcast history.



KU ECON GRAD PROGRAM NAMED TOP 50

The KU Economics Department received another honor in March when the *US News & World Report* "Best Graduate Schools" rankings for 2021 named KU's graduate programs in economics as being in the top 50 nationally among public universities. A total of 48 KU graduate programs were named in the publication's top 50, more than all other Kansas universities and colleges combined.

"We look to rankings as one way to track our progress, and these *US News* rankings highlight the many different ways we contribute to the state and region," said Chancellor Douglas A. Girod. "As a leading research university, our graduate programs are an important part of who we are. We remain focused on our broader mission and goals to help elevate these efforts across our university."

SEVENTH INTERNATIONAL SEM CONFERENCE SET FOR CANADA, AUGUST 28-30



The Society for Economic Measurement (SEM) has set its seventh annual conference for Banff, Alberta Canada on August 28-30. The conference, hosted by the University of Calgary and co-sponsored by the Bank of Canada, University of Alberta, and Lethbridge University, is being held at a spectacular venue - the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, located within Canada's first national park (which is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site).

SEM, which represents one of many major initiatives undertaken by Dr. William A. Barnett, Oswald Distinguished Professor of Macroeconomics at KU, was founded as a unique entity in 2013 to promote research on economic measurement using advanced tools from a variety of economic and statistical disciplines to facilitate communication among researchers. The society's long-run objective is to meet the data standards established for the physical sciences, notwithstanding the fact that economics as a social science is subject to certain inherent limitations.

In addition to invited sessions with multiple speakers being arranged by a special organizing committee, the Banff conference will feature a number of prominent key-

note speakers, including Ernst R Berndt, MIT; Kaye Husbands Fealing, Georgia Institute of Technology; Robert Hall, Stanford University; James Hamilton, University of California at San Diego; Lutz Kilian, Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas; Ellen McGrattan, University of Minnesota and Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis; and Dr. Barnett, who will be featured as the Conference Dinner Speaker.

Dr. Barnett also directs a Center for Financial Stability program designed to oversee and develop national and international databases rigorously founded in economic aggregation and index-number theory (such as Divisia monetary aggregates). Following this lead, a number of important papers have emerged in recent years on the relevancy of monetary aggregation to New Keynesian and New Classical macroeconomics. The rapid growth of SEM since its founding in 2013 and the fact that many Federal Reserve staff economists are now counted as members is indicative of the progress that has been made.

Two additional KU economics professors, Dr. Zongwu Cai and Dr. Jianbo Zhang, are invited session organizers for the conference, which also is expected to include research from other KU participants. Final decisions on submissions were expected to be announced in late April.

Information about registration, travel and other details about the conference may be found at SEM's website (<https://sem.society.cmu.edu/home.html>). SEM also has announced that its eighth annual conference will be held in Milan, Italy from June 30-July 2, 2021.



SEM's Annual Conference is currently set for late August at the spectacular Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, located in Canada's first national park.

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR



Greetings, and I hope everyone is staying safe, sane and healthy!

As we all continue to adjust to our rapidly changing perceptions of the “new normal” in the wake of the global crisis, I am very pleased to bring you the latest issue of the *KU Economist* – the publication we launched some years ago to improve and expand on our alumni outreach efforts. I think it is even more important than ever for all of our students, alumni, faculty and other stakeholders to have some sense of normalcy and reflect on all the positive goings on in and around the Economics Department, even as the entire university, nation and world grapple with the short-, medium- and long-term implications of the pandemic.

Moreover, I am comforted by the thought that economists are going to be instrumental in helping society navigate this crisis and its aftermath. Whether we are talking about the immediate health crisis or the unfolding impact it is having on the economy and so many other areas of society, we very much value the expertise the economics profession brings to the table in terms of identifying trends in advance; how events and happenings can be best quantified and best understood; and what advice can be given to policymakers seeking to get ahead of the curve. And when looking around the Department in general and reviewing the spring edition of this publication in particular, I am excited to see how many of our faculty members and students have the skill sets to be on the front lines in so many ways moving forward – whether we are talking about expertise in health, labor, energy, environmental economics, game theory or in accurately measuring money supplies. And how appropriate is it that one of our doctoral candidates, Gregory Leung, has already accepted a position at the CDC?

Another point of emphasis for this newsletter has always been keeping everyone up to date on the growing national reputations of our award-winning faculty and students alike, and I very much hope you enjoy reading about their latest successes and research.

Even as a number of conferences, workshops and other events we were planning on holding this spring are being delayed or moved online, we are making plans and looking forward to the future. In terms of some

major news, I am pleased to report that our colleague Tarun Sabarwal, who also serves as Associate Chair and Director of Graduate Studies, has been promoted to full professor by Chancellor Girod. And we are excited to announce several new hires for the upcoming 2020-21 academic year. John Zhu, whose research interests are in contracts, game theory, and corporate finance, joins the Economics Department after visits last year at Yale and Berkeley Haas. He received his PhD in mathematics from Berkeley and previously taught at the University of Pennsylvania. His work has been published in *Econometrica*, *Review of Economic Studies* and *American Economic Journal*. John will be joined by Shahnaz Parsaeian, a PhD candidate in economics at the University of California who specializes in studying the effect of model instability (structural breaks) on forecasting performance. Using econometric techniques, she proposes a new method to forecast macroeconomic and financial time-series datasets, such as predicting equity premium, U.S. industrial production and inflation under any unexpected change that might have happened in the economy. Shahnaz received her M.S. degree in socio-economic system engineering from Sharif University of Technology, and her B.S. in computer engineering in Iran. Her research interests lie in the areas of econometrics, financial econometrics and empirical macroeconomics. We are also very fortunate to be able to retain Josephine Lugovskyy as an Assistant Teaching Professor in the Economics Department, a newly created position responsible for the teaching of introductory economics courses, as well as supervising, training and evaluating all graduate teaching assistants in the Department.

I know that we are all looking forward to having our campus bustling with activity and, yes, hopefully more social interaction as soon as possible. If you are in Lawrence this fall, please drop by our office in Snow Hall to say “hello” – or even consider sitting in on one of our fascinating guest lectures we host featuring the latest research from prominent visiting economists from around the world.

In the meantime, please do keep us posted on your latest news (econ@ku.edu), as we want to stay in touch with everyone on an ongoing basis. We would love to feature you in your own “alumni update” in the fall issue.

Rock Chalk!

– Milena Stanislavova

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