



Department of Economics News

The year 2020 has been full of surprises for us. We started the year with ambitious plans and found ourselves adapting quickly to change. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we abruptly transitioned to online learning in mid-March. Our faculty, most of whom had never taught an online course, did a remarkable job of adapting to a new instructional environment. In collaboration with our staff, we celebrated the **Economics Class of 2020**, with a series of virtual receptions and recognition of accomplishments on our website.

As we continue the Fall semester, many of our classes will still be online and not all students are returning to campus, to lessen the population density on campus. Our faculty have spent this summer preparing the tools and approaches for a high-quality online learning experience for our students and we have developed event programming to support student socialization within our academic community. All our seminars and many other engagements will also be online.

Despite these adjustments, major successes continue to energize the department. We have two new faculty members, **Dr. Stefan Hoderlein**, who recently worked as a chief data scientist at Amazon, and **Dr. Melvin Ayogu**, who has extensive experience in teaching, college administration, and consulting. We also have four new **graduate students** joining our Ph.D. program.

We also made major progress in our programs with the approval of three new innovative degree programs: a joint major with Human Health, which is now available to students, a 4+1 BA/MA degree, and the new joint major in economics and computer science. The latter two programs are expected to enroll students in 2021-22 and are designed to provide graduates with a cutting-edge education and a significant comparative advantage in the job market.

We hope that you visit our **department web page** and participate in some of our online activities. Please also consider **making a gift to the Department of Economics**. Your gift will make a difference to students, research, and teaching.

Undergraduate Emory students of all majors are invited to participate in Emory Connects: Career Discovery Days. This program is designed to help Emory students learn what “it is really like” to work in a particular job, industry, or organization by providing the opportunity to virtually shadow a professional for a day. If you are interested, please do not hesitate to reach out to discoverydays@emory.edu.

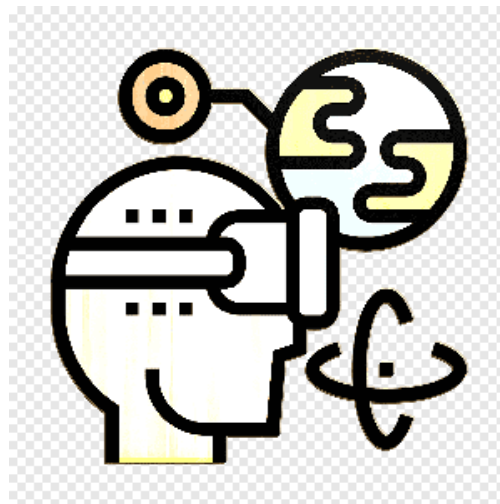
We look forward to keeping you updated on our department’s achievements and developments.

Best,

Hashem Dezhbakhsh

Chair and Goodrich C. White Professor

Alumni News and Notes



In a time of physical distancing due to the COVID-19 pandemic, two economics alumni, Nahiyan Ahmad 04C and Jean Jung 14C, have creatively applied virtual reality to promote social interaction for two unique audiences: 2020 college graduates and pediatric hospital patients.

Nahiyan’s passion for merging film and economics started early in his college career. While at Emory, he completed several film courses in addition to his major. He was a gifted economics student and wrote an honors thesis on the topic of “*Movie Star Power on Box Office Revenues.*” After graduating Emory, he began his career as a political strategist, earned his MBA at Duke’s Fuqua School of Business, and worked as a management consultant where he closely collaborated with the CEO of a virtual reality startup, Jump Into the Light.

Through this project, Nahiyan was able to further explore his interest in

technology and VR innovation and later joined Jump Into the Light as a managing partner. This past spring, Nahiyian and his team were tasked with the unique challenge of recreating the New York University's honored pre-Commencement block party called Grad Alley. Approximately 5,000 students created avatars and attended the VR gathering, which simulated carnival games in New York City's Washington Square Park, a climbable version of the Empire State Building, and a maze featuring trivia about NYU literary alumni in the library. Nahiyian hopes that the VR Grad Alley event opens the door for virtual reality to serve as a means to encourage additional social interaction for college students.

Jean, a recent graduate of Harvard's T.H. Chan School of Public Health with a Masters in Healthcare Management, is using virtual reality to tackle social isolation among pediatric patients with chronic conditions. She launched a non-profit with three other graduate students from Harvard and M.I.T. called DreamworldVR, designed to provide social interaction and therapies for pediatric patients. Since the launch in 2018, the team grew to 25 people after receiving seed fundings from winning various Entrepreneurship Competitions which include Harvard Chan Innovation Award (Winner), Harvard Innovation Lab's Social Impact Award (Winner), Harvard Business School's New Venture Competition (Social Entrepreneur Track 2nd Place), Harvard President's Innovation Challenge (Semi-finalist), and MIT 100K (Semi-finalist).

Currently pediatric patients around the country are testing Dreamworld VR and Jean and her team are exploring manufacturing options with the intention of launching new products tailored to adult patient population as well by the end of the year. Since COVID-19, DreamworldVR has been able to enroll x10 more patients through various hospitals, foundations, and clinics.

We are proud of Nahiyian and Jean's accomplishments after Emory and wish them the best of luck as they continue to expand the applications of virtual reality to maintain social connections among people.

If you are interested in networking or mentorship opportunities, **update your contact information**. Submit your career development news to eeichin@emory.edu to be featured in a future newsletter.

We want to ensure you are aware of **Emory's Alumni Career Services** if your employment has been affected by recent current events. The Emory Alumni Association is invested in your professional success and has a plethora of resources to assist you with career transition.

2020 Faculty Additions



We are thrilled to announce our new faculty who are joining us in the 2020-2021 academic year:

- **Melvin Ayogu** - Melvin earned his Ph.D. in economics from The Ohio State University. Professor of Pedagogy Ayogu has taught and served in administration for several universities and most recently worked at Ideas & Questans as a Principal.
- **Stefan Hoderlein** - Stefan earned his Ph.D. in economics from Bonn University and the London School of Economics. Professor Hoderlein most recently worked at Amazon as a Senior Principal Economist and his research interests include big data and econometrics.

Recent Faculty Achievements



- **Nels Lind**, Assistant Professor, received a National Science Foundation grant for a series of projects based on his recent research in trade and growth. This research develops new models exploring important questions in

international economics.

- **Sara Markowitz**, Professor and Director of Graduate Studies, has been elected to the Board of Directors of **ASHEcon** (American Society of Health Economists) for a four-year term. The American Society of Health Economists is a professional organization dedicated to promoting excellence in health economics research in the United States. Dr. Markowitz also had her research on Earned Income Tax Credit and infant health published as a summary titled "**Economic Policies Make a Difference for Babies' Health**" by the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD).
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Graduate Program



The Department welcomes four new Ph.D. students this year: **Pablo Estrada**, **Jung Jae Kim**, **Katie Leinenbach**, **Noah MacDonald**, and would like to congratulate our current graduate students on their recent accomplishments:

- Graduate students **Juan Estrada** and **Diego Rojas** had their paper "**Survival Analysis of Banknote Circulation: Fitness, Network Structure, and Machine Learning**" (joint with **David Jacho-Chávez** and Kim P. Huynh) accepted for publication in the *Advances in Econometrics, Volume 42: The Econometrics of Networks* edited by **Áureo De Paula** (UCL), **Elie Tamer** (Harvard), and **Marcel Voia** (University of Orleans).
- **Diego Rojas** also had another recent paper, "**Data Science in Stata 16: Frames, Lasso, and Python Integration**," (joint with **Anson Ho**, **Kim P. Huynh**, and **David Jacho-Chavez**) accepted for publication in the *Journal of Statistical Software*.
- The Atlanta Economics Club awarded one of this year's **Joseph K. Heyman**

Undergraduate Program



Over the past several months, members of the Emory Economics Class of 2020 were the recent recipients of several prestigious honors, including:

- Sienna Nordquist, winner of the **Elizabeth Long Atwood Undergraduate Research Award** from Emory Libraries for her senior honors thesis “*The Effects of Targeted Foreign Aid on Clientelism: The Case of the European Recovery Program in Italy.*”
- Solmon Ahn, named Undergraduate Student Leader of the Year by **Emory Student Involvement, Leadership, & Transitions (SILT)**.
- Josh Kaplan, named a 2020 **Harry S. Truman Scholar** for his work promoting economic justice for marginalized communities.
- Aleksei Kaminski, recently selected as a **2020-21 Fulbright grantee** to study and conduct research at Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro. His research will focus on shifting voting patterns in Brazil.
- This year’s Department **Undergraduate Awards** recipients were: Andrew Teodorescu (The Jack and Lewis Greenhut Prize), Max Krauskopf (The W. Tate Whitman Prize in Economics), Miaomiao Zhang (The George Benston and Richard Muth Prize for Excellence in Economics), and Hannan Sylla (Outstanding Undergraduate Teaching Assistant).

Upcoming Events



Despite the need for physical distancing, we plan to have a socially interactive semester with virtual activities. Please stay up-to-date by viewing the [Events Calendar](#) section of our website and feel free to join us for seminars or other events that you are interested in.

Support the Economics Department



Your support for the Research and Teaching Fund plays a crucial role in strengthening the department by providing resources for core academic initiatives. The fund helps us recognize talented and hardworking economics students by rewarding their efforts and pushing them to reach their potential. The fund also allows us to invite prominent scholars to share their expertise with faculty and students. Through the generous contribution of our late colleague, Professor Kafoglis, we recently established the Milton and Virginia Kafoglis Nobel Laureate Lecture Series Fund. This fund allows us to bring Nobel laureates and other high-profile scholars to campus to benefit the entire community. This fund is open for additional contributions. Your contribution to this fund will enhance the department's ability to achieve eminence. To support our funds, please visit the [giving section of our website](#).

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