

A Workshop to Enhance Inclusivity in Economics at Liberal Arts Colleges: 2018

Organizers

Amanda Bayer, Swarthmore College (liaison)
Fernando Lozano, Pomona College
Lucie Schmidt, Williams College

Description

This workshop continues and expands the collaborative work we began in 2015 to enhance inclusivity in economics at liberal arts colleges. Thanks to an award we received from AALAC that year, economists from fifteen liberal arts colleges (Barnard College, Furman University, Grinnell College, Haverford College, Middlebury College, Oberlin College, Occidental College, Pomona College, Smith College, Swarthmore College, Vassar College, Washington & Lee University, Wesleyan University, Wellesley College, and Williams College) have been exploring ways to diversify the group of students majoring in economics at liberal arts colleges. Our activities include meetings (in February 2016 and January 2017), sharing curricula and strategies, and conducting coordinated, randomized evaluations to generate credible evidence on whether our approaches are effective.

Intended audience and rationale

Thirty-one department chairs and faculty members from fifteen liberal arts colleges attended our meetings in 2016 and 2017. In 2018, we expect to involve these same individuals and institutions, and we also have been in touch with economists at other AALAC institutions, who have expressed interest in joining our group. The current group of participants includes:

Belinda Archibong, Barnard College	Vis Taraz, Smith College
Nuria Quella Isla, Barnard College	Amanda Bayer, Swarthmore College
Nathan Cook, Furman University	Syon Bhanot, Swarthmore College
Jessica Hennessey, Furman University	Dustin Frye, Vassar College
Ken Peterson, Furman University	Paul Johnson, Vassar College
Keith Brouhle, Grinnell College	Gisella Kagy, Vassar College
Anne Preston, Haverford College	Sarah Perlman, Vassar College
Peter Matthews, Middlebury College	Tim Diette, Washington & Lee University
Barbara Craig, Oberlin College	Katie Shester, Washington & Lee University
Mary Lopez, Occidental College	Kristin Butcher, Wellesley College
Kirsten Wandschneider, Occidental College	Akila Weerapana, Wellesley College
Eleanor Brown, Pomona College	Joyce Jacobson, Wesleyan College
Michael Kuehlwein, Pomona College	Melanie Khamis, Wesleyan College
Fernando Lozano, Pomona College	Ken Kuttner, Williams College
Michael Steinberger, Pomona College	Lucie Schmidt, Williams College
Roisin O'Sullivan, Smith College	

The importance of diversity and inclusiveness in economics education and policymaking is unquestionable. Research suggests that the lack of diversity in our classrooms and in our profession results in suboptimal creativity and limited problem solving (e.g., Phillips, Northcraft, and Neale 2006, Woolley, Chabris, Pentland, Hashmi, and Malone 2010, Freeman and Huang 2015). A recent survey of members of the American Economic Association suggests that women and men have very different perspectives in issues ranging from monetary and fiscal policy to the environment and the gender wage gap (May, McGarvey, and Whaples 2013).

Nevertheless, the economics profession includes very few women and members of racial and ethnic minority groups, relative both to the overall population and to other academic disciplines. The disparities

are stark at the undergraduate level, where, in 2014, only 28 percent of U.S. economics majors are women and 14 percent are members of historically underrepresented groups (Bayer and Rouse 2016). We fall short in creating inclusive environments for our students and often alienate women, students of color, and low-income students. This workshop allows us to develop and test different instructional methodologies to broaden participation in the study of economics and enhance the educational experience of all students.

Schedule and format

We will meet for a full day on January 4, 2018 in Philadelphia, PA. This date is the day before the start of the meetings of the American Economic Association, which many of our participants will be attending.

We thus, efficiently, minimize travel expense and time. Our tentative agenda is as follows.

8:00–9:00 am	Breakfast and introductions
9:00–10:00 am	Recap of past meetings and activities
10:00–11:00 am	Update on ongoing collaborative projects
11:00–12:00pm	Discussion of successes and challenges to date
12:00–1:20 pm	Lunch and small group discussion
1:30–2:30 pm	Focused discussion of values affirmation
2:30–3:30 pm	Focused discussion of communities of learning
3:30–4:30 pm	Focused discussion of implicit messages in economics
4:30–5:30 pm	Proposals for additional initiatives and activities
6:00–8:00 pm	Dinner

Goals and intended impact

Through this workshop, we aim to evaluate our ongoing interventions and to construct and implement new approaches to increasing inclusivity of our departments. Our coordinated efforts allow us to streamline the process of implementing interventions and to gain enough data to say something definitive about their effectiveness. We have IRB approval for our research and are disseminating findings through presentations and publications. Thus, the knowledge generated via the AALAC workshop impacts our own departments as well as economics departments at colleges and universities around the country. Constructing, implementing, and evaluating the interventions take much work, so we also hope to renew our bonds and good will as we meet together.

Anticipated follow-up activities

Our group will continue to communicate via email as we implement and evaluate interventions between AALAC-sponsored meetings. We aim to publish the results of our research in academic journals.