

To: Texas A&M Department of Economics

From: James Lovell, J. L.

Subject: Proposal for Research into Improved Diversity

Date: 11 October 2020

**Purpose**

The purpose of this memo is to propose a research study on the lack of diversity, and particularly sexual diversity, in the Texas A&M economic department. I am seeking to conduct research to ensure that the economics department is in line with Texas A&Ms diversity initiatives.

**Summary**

Texas A&M’s diversity statement states, “We define diversity as the inclusion and support of individuals from all groups, encompassing the various characteristics of people in our community” (Texas A&M University). This proposed research project will dive into several different areas of evaluation to see if the economics department is doing everything they can to promote diversity in the department.

The economics department enrollment, and particularly the undergraduate enrolment, is skewed heavily towards men. Several years ago, some female students took note of this disparity and made an organization called “Women in Economics” to specifically highlight and address this issue. Though they have had some success, still today, economics, and specifically the Texas A&M Department of Economics, has many more male students than female students.

Because of this, I am proposing research into this issue, in hopes that the leadership in the Texas A&M Economics Department will take the data found into account and consider addressing this problem. I propose to do research into the initiatives and techniques that the department already has to encourage more female undergraduates. This includes comparing Texas A&Ms initiatives with those of other schools, in order to obtain better insight into what we could be doing better. This also includes assessing more precisely the actual disparity of enrolment based on data I will acquire.

**Introduction**

On September 22, 2019, it came to my attention how pervasive this problem of a lack of diversity is in the field of economics. The average 17-year-old girl is often completely unaware of the field of economics, and that there are many jobs they would be able to get with an economics degree from a good college like Texas A&M. This problem also extends to women already inside the field. Woman in economics often feel underrepresented which can have serious impacts on their work performance and overall happiness in a position for several reasons. There has been an issue of “hotel interviews” in which a woman has to meet with a board of men in a hotel room for an interview for employment, this happens because the men find a hotel room a convenient place to hold meetings when they are at conferences and similar places because they don’t have their normal offices available. Though the men’s intentions are often innocent enough, and they are just trying to use their space efficiently, this can be hugely intimidating to many women. They are almost forced to go into what they perceive as dangerous situations just for the opportunity to interview for a job. This of course could be made better by a larger number of females entering the field of economics, so they could make choices that better take into account women’s issues that men sometimes have trouble perceiving.

There is also, of course, the importance of feeling accepted and represented in a workplace. A pillar to a person’s happiness is that they feel understood and accepted. Again, men often only have the best intentions, but they simply had a different experience coming into the field, so they can have trouble relating to the females. Because of this, the females often feel misunderstood. So, a higher number of females in the field would improve the culture of the already existing workplaces.

Because of problems like these, I am proposing I perform these four research tasks:

* Contrast A&Ms econ departments outreach methods to get potentials female students interested with that of other schools
* Assess more precisely the actual disparity between male and female enrollment in economics at A&M
* Identify potential roadblocks to females applying to the economics program
* Examine the ways that the Texas A&M Department of Economics encourages female students to stay engaged with econ department

**Proposed Tasks**

Should my proposal for research be approved, I will execute these four tasks.

Task 1: Contrast A&Ms econ departments outreach methods to get potentials female students interested with that of other schools

* Many schools have more progressive diversity initiatives than Texas A&M. The point of this research task is to get better insight into how other schools have addressed this problem. University of Washington’s Economic Department, for example, has an entire web page dedicated to diversity, and even lists their five resources students can look into (University of Washington). This research will expand this search

Task 2: Assess more precisely the actual disparity between male and female enrollment in economics at A&M

* If you sit down in any given upper level economics class at Texas A&M University, it will be apparent that there are many more men than women. This task will do research to obtain more quantifiable numbers and figures, to demonstrate objectively the disparity between men and woman’s enrolment in economics.

Task 3: Identify potential roadblocks to females applying to the economics program

* This task will focus more on actually engaging female economics students about their experience with discovering economics and surveying them about the roadblocks they faced as a young woman trying to figure out a career path. This could include adverse social stigmas, inability to find out what economics entails, or any other roadblock they are able to identify.

Task 4: Examine the ways that the Texas A&M Department of Economics encourages female students to stay engaged with econ department

* This task is slightly less quantifiable than the other tasks, but, none the less, very important. This task examines the ways, or lack of ways, that female students feel encouraged and empowered by the leadership in the economics department to stay with the program. For example, this could include emails from advisors to female students distributing resources.

**Schedule**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Date of Tasks (week)** | | | | |
| **Task 1** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Task 2** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Task 3\*** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Task 4\*** |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | 10/11 | 10/18 | 10/25 | 11/1 | 11/8 |

\*Tasks include gathering information from peers, and therefore need a longer window of time

**Qualifications/Experience**

I believe I am uniquely qualified to speak on this subject. In spring of 2020, I was the Women’s Rights Intern in the White House in Washington DC. During my time there, I helped host events where we had hundreds of women leaders from throughout the country come and engage with senior administration officials on matters that they cared about. I was not infrequently the only single man in a room of ~150 woman speaking on empowerment and equality. Additionally, in 2019, the Texas A&M Economics Department sent me to a diversity conference at the Federal Reserve Bank in Richmond, Virginia, where I engaged with people from all walks of life on the subject of equality in the field of economics. There, as well, I was the only single white male at the entire conference, and it was an eye-opening experience, and I believe I have continued to carry much of what I learned with me to this day. Finally, there are two economics organizations on campus- the Texas A&M Economic Society, and Women in Economics. The president and vice president of the Texas A&M Economic Society are both females, and two of my closest friends, and I believe that my friendship with them has given me a glimpse into what the everyday challenges of a woman in this field look like. I am, of course, a man, but I hope this disposition does not disqualify me from caring deeply about diversity in economics.

**References**

Texas A&M University. “DIVERSITY & INCLUSION.” Division of Student Affairs, studentaffairs.tamu.edu/diversity. Accessed 11 Oct. 2020.

“Diversity.” University of Washington Department of Economics, econ.washington.edu/diversity. Accessed 11 Oct. 2020.