

# ROBERT FRENCH

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# HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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## Education

### Harvard University

Ph.D. Public Policy (Economics Track), 2017 to 2024 (expected)

### University of Toronto

M.A. Economics, 2016

B.A. Economics, 2014

## Fields

*Primary:* Urban, Public

*Secondary:* Industrial Organization, Labor

## References

Professor Edward Glaeser  
eglaeser@harvard.edu

Professor Gordon Hanson  
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Associate Professor Mark Shepard  
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Professor Stefanie Stantcheva  
sstantcheva@fas.harvard.edu

Professor Matthew Weinzierl  
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## Fellowships, Awards & Grants

Horowitz Foundation for Social Policy Research Grant, 2023

Malcolm Wiener Center Research Grant (x2), 2022-23

Derek Bok Certificate of Distinction in Teaching (x3), 2020-22

University of Toronto Graduate Admission Scholarship, 2015-16

## Teaching

HKS PhD Micro Theory II, Pino Lopomo and Chris Avery, Head Teaching Fellow, 2020-22

HKS PhD Micro Theory I, Arda Gitmez, Head Teaching Fellow, 2021

Intermediate Micro Theory: Advanced, Ed Glaeser, Head Teaching Fellow, 2019-20

HKS Math Camp, Instructor, 2019-21

## Experience

Charles River Associates, Associate, 2016-17

University of Toronto, Research Assistant to Philip Oreopoulos, 2016-17

University of Toronto, Research Assistant to Kory Kroft, 2014-15

## Job Market Paper

“Quantifying the Welfare Effects of Neighborhood Change on Incumbent Low-Income Renters”  
(with Ashvin Gandhi and Valentine Gilbert)

How does gentrification affect the welfare of incumbent residents of low-income neighborhoods? This paper investigates how low-income renters of gentrifying neighborhoods fare relative to renters of neighborhoods in the same metro that stay poor. We link person-level administrative US Census data to construct an annual panel that tracks the earnings, workplaces, and residential addresses of over 1 million low-income urban renter households through 2000-2019. We use this data to estimate a dynamic structural model of residential and workplace choice. We identify our model with skill-specific labor demand shocks to potential commuting destinations, constructed using geocoded establishment-level business data. We find that – because low-income renters are highly mobile – gentrification affected incumbent renters primarily by changing the characteristics

of other neighborhoods in their choice sets. These results imply that where low-income renters lived within US metros mattered less than which US metro they lived in.

## Working Papers

“Schools or Suitcases? Optimal Urban Policy and Economic Opportunity in Greater Boston”

This paper considers when policy makers should prioritize providing opportunities for families to leave disadvantaged neighborhoods in Greater Boston and when they should prioritize investing resources in these disadvantaged neighborhoods and their schools. To do so, the paper develops a quantitative spatial general equilibrium model that is amenable to optimal policy analysis for a broad class of spillover functions and agents with heterogeneous preferences. Upon quantifying the model using administrative US Census data on the residential histories of most ACS respondents in Greater Boston, I argue that as the social planner prioritizes the upward mobility of children vis-à-vis parents’ utility, optimal policy integrates low-income families into Greater Boston's suburbs. However, given calibrations implying substantial complementarity between school spending and peer composition, school spending in the inner city remains ineffective. Children of parents with strong attachments to the inner city thus stay economically immobile under the optimal welfarist policy. Alternative policies concentrating spending in initially disadvantaged neighborhoods ensure a minimum level of economic mobility for all children, including those of parents with strong attachments to the inner city.

“Suburban Housing and Urban Affordability: Evidence from Residential Vacancy Chains” (with Valentine Gilbert) – *Valentine’s Job Market Paper*

This paper investigates the role that residential vacancy chains – the sequence of moves across housing units initiated by the construction of a new housing unit – play in linking different housing submarkets. We focus in particular on how the market for suburban single-family homes affects the market for dense urban housing in multifamily buildings. Using administrative data on the residential histories of the U.S. population, we describe the distribution of vacancies created by different kinds of new housing. A key finding is that vacancy chains end quickly, with 90% ending within three rounds of moves. We then conduct a simulation exercise to understand what the observed patterns of vacancy chains imply about the welfare and price effects of new housing supply. We show that the geographic distribution of moves created by vacancy chains is correlated with the geographic distribution of welfare and price effects, and that the number of vacancies created in a neighborhood is as strong a predictor of price effects as are model-derived cross-neighborhood substitution effects. These results, along with our descriptive results, imply that the incidence of the benefits of new housing depend strongly on what kind of housing is built and where.

## Publications

“Behavioral barriers transitioning to college” 2017. (with Philip Oreopoulos). *Labour Economics* 47, 48-63.

“Applying behavioral economics to public policy in Canada” 2017 (with Philip Oreopoulos). *Canadian Journal of Economics* 50(3), 599-635

## Seminars & Conferences

Urban Economics Association Summer School (Invited participant), 2023  
New York University, Furman Center, 2022

## Academic Service

Referee for *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *Journal of Urban Economics*, *Journal of Behavioral Public Administration*

## Personal Information

Citizenship: UK & Canada  
US Census Bureau Special Sworn Status