

SPENCER COOPER

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Placement Director: Professor Price Fishback, pfishback@eller.arizona.edu, (520) 621-4421

EMPLOYMENT

The University of Arizona

Graduate Research Assistant

June 2021 – December 2021

Instructor and Teaching Assistant

August 2018 - Present

Center for Growth and Opportunity

Undergraduate Research Fellow

September 2017 – May 2018

Utah State University

Teaching Assistant

January 2017 – May 2018

EDUCATION

University of Arizona

PhD in Economics (in progress)

May 2023 (expected)

M.A. in Economics

December 2019

Utah State University

B.S. in Economics, minor in Music

May 2018

RESEARCH

Working Papers:

“Systemic Disparities in Sentencing: Prosecutors, Race, and Mandatory Minimums” – *Job Market Paper*

I consider how legal institutions may contribute to racial disparities in sentencing outcomes in the US criminal justice system. Specifically, I investigate whether prosecutors bring stronger charges against minorities compared to Whites in federal drug trafficking cases and whether prosecutor choice is driven by the legal framework they operate under. Using a unique data set of US Attorneys and exploiting the bunching point at mandatory minimum drug weights, I show that racial minorities face harsher charges for committing the same crimes as White counterparts and that harsher charges lead to longer sentence lengths. To show that prosecutor charging decisions vary based on legal institutions, I exploit a circuit split in charging law. These laws affect the ability for a prosecutor to bunch defendants. I then use the 2018 First Step Act (FSA) as an exogenous shock to prosecutor

incentives and compare effects across circuit law and race. I find that the FSA only reduced racial disparities in circuits where bunching is more costly to prosecutors. This implies racial disparities in charging and sentencing of drug crimes is at least in part driven by systemic factors.

“Prosecutorial Incentives and Outcome Disparities” –with Andy Yuan, submitted for publication

We examine the causal effects of prosecutors' incentive on racial and gender disparities. *Blakely v. Washington* 542 U.S. 296 (2004) significantly disincentivized state prosecutors from pursuing sentence enhancements by raising their burdens of proof from “preponderance of evidence” to “beyond a reasonable doubt.” Through a regression discontinuity design, we find striking evidence that a higher burden of proof eliminated the entire preexisting gender gap of men being 24% more likely to receive sentence enhancements than women. However, we find no evidence suggesting a racial gap of sentence enhancements both pre and post *Blakely*.

“Physical Environment and Crime: Evidence from Streetlight Modernization”

This paper examines how crime responds to widespread changes in physical environments. Specifically, I utilize the City of Chicago's conversion to LED streetlights as an exogenous shock to the environmental conditions for outdoor crime. The rollout of LED fixtures occurred over a five-year period and occurred slowly across the city. Using detailed light installation and crime report data, I estimate the effects of streetlight improvement using a difference-in-difference framework with staggered timing. Over the 113 treatment periods, I find that LED installation leads to large decreases in crime in the immediate area. My main contribution comes in estimating the effects of LED installation on surrounding areas. I find significant crime increases in untreated surrounding areas and significant crime decreases in treated surrounding areas. These findings suggest physical environment improvement policy is most likely to deter crime if it is widespread rather than localized.

Works in Progress:

“The Right Way to Rehabilitate: Comparing Effects of Heterogeneous Rehabilitation Treatments on Recidivism”

“Skin Tone and Sentencing”

Research Assistant

Dr. Katherine Barnes, The University of Arizona
Law & Legal Education

June 2021 – December 2021

Dr. Briggs Depew, Utah State University
Labor & Health Economics

January 2017 – May 2018

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Course Building

Econ 200: Basic Economic Issues (with Dr. Charity-Joy Acchiardo)

Fall 2019 - Spring 2020

Sole Instructor of Record

Labor Economics (in-person)

Summer 2021

Labor Economics (in-person)

Summer 2022

Basic Economic Issues (online)

Summer 2020

Teaching Assistant

University of Arizona:

Econometrics (Master's Level, in-person)

Fall 2022

Microeconomic Analysis for Business Decisions (in-person)

Fall 2022

Applied Econometrics (online)

Spring 2022

Microeconomic Analysis for Business Decision (in-person)

Spring 2022

Econometrics (Master's Level, in-person)

Fall 2021

Microeconomic Analysis for Business Decisions (online)

Fall 2021

Economic Models of Discrimination (online)

Spring 2021

Law and Economics (online)

Spring 2021

Econometrics (Master's Level, online)

Fall 2020

Microeconomic Analysis for Business Decisions (online)

Fall 2020

Basic Economic Issues (in-person/online)

Spring 2020

Energy and Environmental Challenges (in-person)

Fall 2019

Labor Economics (in-person)

Spring 2019

Law and Economics (in-person)

Spring 2019

Basic Economic Issues (in-person)

Fall 2018

Global and Financial Economics and Strategies (in-person)

Fall 2018

Utah State University:

Applied Econometrics (in-person)

Spring 2018

Intermediate Microeconomics (in-person)

Fall 2017

AWARDS AND HONORS

Summa Cum Laude, *Utah State University*

2018

Koch Scholar

2017

"A-Pin" Recipient, *Utah State University*

2017

Dean's List, *Utah State University*

2015–2016