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## UCR Global Issues Forum hosts panel discussing free and international trade

By **Adrian Tran** - November 22, 2016



On Wednesday, Nov. 16, the UCR community was invited to participate in a discussion organized by the Global Issues Forum entitled "Global Free Trade Agreements."

Consisting of two economics experts and a mediator, the panel included Noel Johnston, UCR assistant professor of political science, Sheheryar Kaoosji, director of the [LA Alliance for a New Economy](#) (LAANE) and Matthew Mahutga, an assistant professor of sociology at UCR specializing in the economic aspects of the field.

The forum opened with Johnston describing the modern origins of international trade, beginning by introducing the Law of Comparative Advantage. [Comparative advantage](#) occurs when a person "can produce (something) at a lower cost than anyone else," per the Library of Economics and Liberty. However, free trade, which is trade based solely on this law occurring in the absence of government intervention, may be harmful to a nation's native producers. On the other hand, fair trade, which involves tariffs and the taxation of goods to protect those native producers, may sometimes see the same effect, Johnston said. Therefore, to bridge the balance, the World Trade Organization was formed.

Johnston said that the purpose of discussing the history of international trade was to understand "the big picture (of trade) and how we got to where we are today." He concluded by speaking on Regional Trade Agreements and automation, the latter of which he elucidated on, saying, "A recent study showed that 65 percent of people believed that in 50 years, their job would be replaced by robots. 80 percent said 'not mine.'"

After Johnston, Kaoosji continued by focusing on present issues caused by international trade in the Inland Empire, which he labeled "the land of west coast trade" by virtue of the hundreds of billions of dollars worth of goods that move through California's ports annually.

He spoke of the small benefits that communities impacted by large corporate trade receive relative to the capital moved through those communities, as although "more than \$500 billion comes through California's ports per year ... warehouse workers (who move those goods) get minimum wage, have dangerous jobs and generally face job insecurity, because most of them find work through staffing agencies." Kaoosji attributed this to the undocumented worker population involved in warehousing, which he says naturally avoid unionizing for fear of deportation.

Kaoosji then introduced the Warehouse Worker Resource Center (WWRC), a nonprofit organization founded in 2011 that, according to their [mission statement](#), is "dedicated to improving working conditions in the warehouse industry in Southern California ... by (focusing) on education, advocacy, and action to change poor working conditions in the largest hub of warehousing in the country." Kaoosji believes that by working with the WWRC, he can target all Inland Empire warehouse workers to make every job a good job by holding those at the top accountable for the sake of social and economic justice and social peace.

Following Kaoosji, Mahutga spoke briefly on trade's influence on the recent presidential election by discussing president-elect Donald Trump's ability to flip the historically democratic northeastern "rustbelt states" of Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Michigan by capitalizing on the economic unrest of the state's inhabitants. Then, Mahutga allowed the forum to end with a Q-and-A session with the audience, which touched on subjects including minimum wage, the value of warehouse workers, the efficiency vs. equality as it relates to trade, redistribution of wages and capital and offshoring.

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