Alison X. Pei

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EDUCATION

Ph.D. in Economics & Public Policy, Duke University	Expected 2024
M.S. in Applied Economics and Management, Cornell University	2019
B.A. in Economics, Nankai University	2017

RESEARCH AND TEACHING INTERESTS

Primary Fields: Labor Economics, Industrial Organization
Secondary Field: Entrepreneurship

REFERENCES

Matthew S. Johnson (co-chair)	Daniel Yi Xu (co-chair)
Sanford School of Public Policy	Department of Economics
Duke University	Duke University
matthew.johnson@duke.edu ✉	yi.xu@duke.edu ✉

WORKING PAPERS

"Monopsony in the High-Skilled Migrant Labor Market: Evidence from the H–1B Petition Data" with Seohee Kim.

Abstract: This paper assesses the extent of monopsony in the H–1B labor market through the lens of employment concentration and its effect on H–1B workers' wages. Using FOIA-requested micro-level H–1B petition data, we calculate the H–1B employment concentration using Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI) from 2010 to 2021. We first discover that the H–1B labor market is nearly twice as concentrated as the broader U.S. labor market, with a steady increasing trend over the last two decades. We then examine the impact of high employment concentration on H–1B workers' wages. The causal link is established by exploiting a lottery system implemented for over-the-cap H–1B applications that generate random labor supplies for each labor market. We find that larger firms disproportionately get more new workers from the exogenous increase in the market-level lottery win rate. These unbalanced distributions of new H–1B workers increase HHI, which in turn, reduces the H–1B workers' wages in the corresponding labor market. A shift from the 25th to the 75th percentile of the employment concentration distribution decreases the workers' wage by 7.1 percent. These local average treatment effects are the largest for first-time Chinese applicants in scientific and technical services.

[“Innovation and the Enforceability of Noncompete Agreements”](#) with Matthew Johnson and Michael Lipsitz.

Abstract: Worker mobility across firms can enhance innovation by spreading knowledge, but such mobility may also hinder innovation by making firms reluctant to invest in R&D. A common way that firms limit workers' mobility is with noncompete agreements (NCAs). We examine how the legal enforceability of NCAs affects innovation, as measured by patenting, using data on every state-level NCA enforceability change between 1991−2014. We find that making NCAs easier to enforce ("stricter" enforceability) substantially reduces the rate of patenting: an average-sized increase in NCA enforceability leads a state to have 16-19% fewer citation-weighted patents over the following 10 years. This effect reflects a true loss in innovation rather than a reduction in useless or strategic patents. We then reconcile these findings with contrasting theoretical predictions. Stricter NCA enforceability reduces job mobility and new business formation in innovative industries, suggesting slower knowledge spread. Within publicly-traded firms, stricter NCA enforceability increases investment, but still leads to less innovation, suggesting that any gains from enhanced incentives to invest are more than offset by other ways that NCAs slow down innovation. Finally, using variation in technology classes' exposure to NCA enforceability changes, we show that the economy-wide losses to innovation from strict enforceability are even larger than what our state-level estimates imply.

Work in Progress

"'Missing' Talents at Startups: Immigrant Inventor Mobility and Misallocation"

"OSHA Inspections, Productivity, and Management,"With Nicholas Bloom, David Levine and Matthew Johnson.

"Immigrant Labor Constraints as Barriers to Entrepreneurship," With Nicholas Morales.

Research Experience

Research Assistant to Matthew S. Johnson	2021 − Present
Special Sworn Status, U.S. Census Bureau.	
Research Assistant to Kaushik Basu	2018 − 2019
Research Assistant to Nancy Chau	2017 − 2018

Teaching Experience

Duke University

PUBPOL 801: Microeconomics in Public Policy (MPP)	Fall 2020
Teaching Assistant	

Cornell University

AEM 1200 Introduction to Business Management (UG)	Summer 2019
Section Instructor & Teaching Assistant	

ECON 1110 Introductory Microeconomics (UG) Section Instructor & Teaching Assistant	Spring 2019

Awards, Fellowships and Grants

APPAM Entrepreneurship Policy Fellowship for PhD Students	2022
Competitive Summer Research Fellowship for Students in Third Year and Beyond	2022
Sanford School of Public Policy Graduate Student Travel Grant Award	2021
Duke University Graduate Fellowship	2019–Present
Cornell University Teaching Assistant Fellowship	2019
Erasmus Exchange Program Fellowship, China Scholarship Council	2017
First Prize, Comprehensive Scholarship of Nankai University	2016 − 2017

Presentations

Imperfect Competition in the Labor Market Workshop, IAB Nuremberg	2023
SOLE 2023 Conference	2023
Wharton Migration and Organizations Conference	2022
APPAM Fall Research Conference	2022
NBER Summer Institute Entrepreneurship Research Bootcamp	2022
Western Economics Association Annual Conference	2022
Midwestern Economics Association Annual Conference	2022
Graduate Student Seminar – Department of Economics, Duke University	2020–2022
Graduate Research Workshop – Sanford School of Public Policy, Duke University	2020 – 2022
Development Policy Research Unit (DPRU) Workshop – University of Cape Town	2019

Professional Service

Referee
    American Economic Journal: Economic Policy
School and Departmental Service

Graduate and Professional Student Government Representatives	2022
Diversity and Inclusion Committee, Duke University	2020 − 2021
Women in Economics, Duke University	2020 − Present

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