



Department of Economics

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October 16, 2023

University of Virginia
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To Whom it May Concern:

I am applying to the position of Assistant Professor in the Department of Economics of University of Virginia.

Areas of Research Interest

My research agenda, including my job market paper, published work, and work in progress, is comprised of work in applied microeconomics. My specific fields of interest are public economics, labor economics, applied econometrics, and urban economics. I am equipped to teach classes in these fields or others to respond to the instructional needs of the department.

My job market paper, *Beyond the Local Impacts of Place-Based Policies: Spillovers through Latent Housing Markets*, proposes an approach to study spillover effects of local policies that propagate non-spatially through latent markets. While the approach is particularly relevant for place-based economic development, it can be adapted to other contexts. I exemplify the approach with a place-based policy and estimate spillover effects within latent housing markets. The empirical findings inform conclusions on overall effectiveness and redistribution that differ from analysis using only direct treatment effects.

Aims for Future Research

The Economics and Econometrics of Place-Based Policies

My research agenda builds on the work in my job market paper. Two related projects that are works-in-progress study methodological of using panel data methods to study place-based policies. The first (co-authored) project unifies approaches to account for time-varying, unit-level unobserved heterogeneity in panel settings, including grouped fixed effects and interactive fixed effects. We use a bilinear programming approach to unify these models for the purpose of specifying alternative parallel trends assumptions.

The second methodological project considers measurement error of property values. While sale prices reflect the true market price, they are only observed for properties that sell, introducing transaction bias. On the other hand, assessed values are observed for all properties, but they may contain non-classical prediction error. In my job market paper, I rely on assessed values for the primary analysis with some supplementary work discussing the possible pitfalls using a measurement model. I plan to expand on this model using nation-wide data to study the tradeoff between prediction error and transaction bias, and relate it to household-level outcomes and equity concerns.

In addition to the methodological work, I will consider complementary modeling avenues to the work of my job market paper. I find evidence of a place-based economic development policy redistributing resources from relatively advantaged areas to relatively disadvantaged areas. A sorting model can reveal if the intervention indeed results in a flattening of the distribution of neighborhood income and amenities. With this additional structure, I can speak to welfare considerations. Additional assumptions will allow me to speak to optimal policy provision and under what conditions it is efficient to target a policy to a particular area.

Another (co-authored) topic in my research agenda relates to place-based interventions in the context of flood prevention. We study how the take-up of flood insurance changes after the construction and accreditation of a levee, which changes the flood risk and insurance prices of an area. It is of interest how two publicly funded interventions detract from or reinforce each other, given households' behavioral responses. We incorporate novel data on accreditation dates, after which properties protected by accredited levees experience a reduction in the price of flood insurance.

We plan to pursue two projects within the context of levees and flood insurance. The first project relates to measuring and experimentally altering household information on flood risk and levees. Our empirical results highlight the counter-intuitive finding that households reduce flood insurance take-up after a levee's accreditation lowers the cost of flood insurance. It is possible that households underestimate the risk of flooding, which the levee does not completely eradicate. We plan to pursue funding and partnership with government agencies to implement an experiment. We hope to randomly disseminate information about local levee infrastructure and local insurance requirements. Treatment effects on changes in the uptake of flood insurance would reveal to what degree incorrect information determines households' risky flood insurance choices.

The second project relates to measuring and studying the effect of enforcement of flood insurance mandates. Federal law requires that households in flood-prone areas purchase flood insurance. However, the take-up of flood insurance varies widely across the U.S. One challenge in studying this uneven take-up is measuring the enforcement of the mandate, which generally falls on mortgage lenders and the Federal Reserve. We plan to explore different variation

determining flood insurance take-up including lender heterogeneity and variation in mandate regulation policies.

The Importance of Place for Household Outcomes

There are two in-progress projects that study how place affects household outcomes. The first (co-authored) project studies rental choice sets in low- and high-opportunity neighborhoods for Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP) participants. HCVP participants face constraints in location choice both due to constrained resources and additional policy requirements of the program. A challenge to understand these constraints is the measurement of the choice sets. We combine restricted-access data from HUD with a novel data source on advertised rental prices to observe the weekly choice sets of HCVP participants, and describe them by geographic location and household demographics. Observing the choice sets expands modeling possibilities in a structural framework of residential sorting.

The second (co-authored) project studies the relationship between household income volatility and life expectancy using a household-level consumer dataset. We find that income is an important mediator of the correlation, with the bottom half of the income distribution experiencing negative correlation between income volatility and life expectancy, including if the income volatility is positive. The role of place is notable both in the geographic distribution of households in the bottom half of the income distribution and the possibility that place-specific factors, such as factory closings, contribute to this correlation. This paper is Revise and Resubmit at the *Journal of Labor Economics*.

Potential Collaborations at UVA

My current and future research touches several fields in applied microeconomics, allowing me to collaborate with and contribute to the larger applied microeconomics group at UVA. I am interested in expanding my research agenda to include analysis of inequality and environmental justice in collaboration with faculty members such as Leora Freidberg, Jonathan Colmer, Shan Aman-Rana, and Amalia Rebecca Miller.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Universities are special institutions in which pluralism can thrive amidst intellectual pursuit and the expansion of opportunity. I aim to contribute to efforts to expand diversity and real inclusion with dedication, humility, and information on institution-specific resources. Once I join a new institution, I will familiarize myself with the policies and services of the international and disability offices, as well as other affinity organizations that provide support to those from different backgrounds.

As an undergraduate student in Chicago, I took coursework and sought out volunteer and work experience to expand my worldview on the realities of race, class, and other sources of social inequality, as well as to positively contribute to my new home. Through Women and

Youth Supporting Each Other (WYSE), I volunteered for four years by mentoring middle school girls in a predominantly Chicano and low-income neighborhood. In addition, I interned at two homeless shelters in predominantly Black and low-income neighborhoods. As part of my internship, I traveled throughout the city to learn from politicians, social service providers, academics, and advocates on issues such as affordable housing or access to healthcare. Learning about the historical and political context of these issues and witnessing the widespread disregard (both unintentional and nefarious) for low-income, non-white neighborhoods and their residents underscored to me the necessity for effective policy to produce societal progress and justice. These experiences inform my research agenda of studying the economics of place and place-based policies. I aim to approach this research with maximal seriousness and integrity out of respect for the people potentially affected by the conclusions of the work.

These experiences, as well as experiences in my family, underscore to me the potential for interpersonal connection in increasing inclusion and opportunity, dictating how I approach mentorship in a university setting. First, my experiences as a Latina Jewish woman (both my parents are Jewish and my mother is from Argentina), although not representative, provide some insight into problems that minorities can face in academia. During my time as a graduate student, I mentored at least one first-year Ph.D. student per year and two undergraduate students, all from different backgrounds than my own. Given the lower number of women present in economics, it was usually other women who were interested in being my mentee. I find this type of mentor-mentee connection valuable for myself as well to feel connected to other female economists who may face challenges within the profession.

Second, growing up with my autistic brother exposed to me the extra barriers to education for those with disabilities. In addition to the ableism my brother confronts, I witnessed how my parents had to advocate for his inclusion in every educational opportunity. During high school, I volunteered with my brother's disabled community and encouraged my peers to do so as well to positively contribute to that inclusion. These experiences equip me to assist students and colleagues with disabilities, including mental health challenges. As a T.A. during the height of COVID, I met with several undergraduate students who were facing such issues. After speaking with them one-on-one, I shared resources to ensure they were connected to the proper professionals. I am prepared to lend an empathetic ear, seek out the proper resources, and follow up with any assistance that is appropriate and possible.

Finally, my mother's experiences as an immigrant taught me the real challenges that immigrants can face, especially if English is not their first language. During my teaching and mentoring experiences, I take care to include international students. For example, I allowed students in my classes and T.A. sections to type their answers over Zoom rather than speak them aloud. I was surprised to see many American students participating through the chat feature. This accommodation is an example of what Haben Girma highlights in her memoir, in which solutions that benefit one group, such as disabled people or immigrants, can extend benefits

more broadly. In my next role, I look forward to contributing to the expansion of solutions that contribute to a diverse and inclusive community.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Anna Ziff". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Anna" and last name "Ziff" clearly legible.

Anna Ziff