Personal Statement

As a housing and social policy researcher, I am interested in how the urban environment shapes household housing decisions, how those housing decisions affect well-being outcomes for households, and the role of government programs in improving those outcomes for the most vulnerable populations. Increasingly, I am focused on questions related to housing choices and the public sector in this era of climate change. While I am primarily a quantitative researcher, I have experience with, and value, mixed methods approaches. To identify causal effects of interest, I use a broad set of empirical tools that rely on quasi experimental variation induced by policy changes or other events. I am adept at collecting and linking large, and spatial datasets. In my work, my main goal is to conduct high quality research on housing decisions and important public finance questions and produce insights that inform public policy. I believe my research interests, teaching experience and expertise in quantitative data and analysis make me an excellent candidate for this position.

Research

My dissertation examines different ways in which the rental landscape is evolving: through the increasing frequency of natural disasters, the institutionalization of landlords, and the increasing tightness of housing markets. Embedded in all three papers are questions surrounding the government's role in mitigating any negative impacts of these changes, particularly for low-income households.

In my job market paper, I combine spatial data on surge heights with high frequency rent data and use a difference in differences methodology to compare New York City blocks that experienced high levels of storm surge during Hurricane Sandy, to those blocks that experienced no surge within the same zip code. I find that quality-adjusted rents were negatively impacted immediately after the storm but rebounded fairly quickly, in contrast to the hurricane literature on house prices. The estimation for the full sample masks evidence of heterogeneous impacts by neighborhood income: rents increased for higher-income neighborhoods and decreased for lower-income neighborhoods. In contrast to the broader findings for units in lower income neighborhoods, the voucher program appears to have protected both landlords and tenants. Voucher rents were "sticky" downward, and instead significantly increased, driven by households whose landlords renovated their units. The program appears to have subsidized the renovations rather than increasing the rent burden of the tenants. These results have important implications for how neighborhoods affected by hurricanes may evolve, and for the implicit incentives that rental subsidies may create to house vulnerable populations in these areas.

The "Rise of Corporate Landlords: Behaviors and Sub-market Strategies" focuses on the implications of the growing institutionalization of landlords in the multi-family rental market in New York City. We create landlord portfolios with New York City landlord registration records using algorithmic linking across business names and addresses and network analysis methods in Python and categorize landlords by both their size and their corporate self-designation in the registry. Using a quasi-experimental research design exploiting the change in ownership of a property, we identify the impact of corporate ownership by comparing outcomes including tenant selection, eviction, maintenance and rent setting before and after the sale. We also exploit the diversity of neighborhoods in New York City to study heterogeneity in landlord behavior across different submarkets. We discuss potential political strategies for local governments to promote transparency in property ownership, with the hope that accountability will encourage responsible practices.

The third paper examines whether Source of Income Protection (SOI) Laws, designed to prohibit landlord discrimination based on the source of rent, are an effective policy tool to better enable households that receive a Housing Choice Voucher to lease up with their voucher. This work builds on an earlier paper in Housing Policy Debate, “Advancing Choice in the Housing Choice Voucher Program: Source of Income Protections and Locational Outcomes,” with Ingrid Ellen and Katherine O’Regan, where we found that voucher households in jurisdictions that enacted SOI laws were more likely to move to low poverty neighborhoods post-enactment than households in jurisdictions that did not enact SOI laws. In increasingly tight housing markets, understanding how effective policies are at enabling households to find affordable and stable housing is critical.

My research agenda over the next three to five years will continue to focus on studying the intersection of climate change and housing, the impacts on vulnerable households and the government’s role in these settings. Part of my commitment to diversity and inclusivity involves ensuring that my research keenly investigates outcomes for marginalized groups. The following three projects in progress will use spatial and climate data, combined with complex quantitative data sets to answer questions across these topics.

One working paper builds on the results from my job market paper and asks, how has the population of households in these areas changed over time? Have higher income households moved into the newer buildings, demanding new amenities that over time drive up neighborhood rents and push out incumbent residents? Have displaced homeowners joined the rental market, changing or increasing the population of households that rent in these areas? I plan to explore these questions using a combination of census and Infutor data, to track neighborhood changes and households’ movement over time.

Second, I plan to expand to a body of work on how climate change is shaping rental markets beyond New York City and hurricanes to other geographies and other types of disasters. This is possible through publicly available data on damage and flooding through FEMA and wildfire destruction trajectories through Monitoring Trends in Burn Severity (MTBS). The rental data can be purchased through a company called Altos, which collects weekly listings data from a variety of sources nationwide. In addition, through the Housing Choice Voucher program data, I have information about subsidized rents and the incidence of those rents nationwide. I will explore how the impacts across different settings compare, to create a more comprehensive answer to these questions on the impact of climate change on rental markets.

The impact of natural disasters on rental markets may well extend beyond the local markets damaged by the disaster. In a third paper, I examine the migration patterns of Housing Choice Voucher holders that were displaced by Hurricane Katrina. I follow a panel of voucher holders to understand how the neighborhoods they were displaced to differ from those they came from and how their arrival affected local rental markets in the neighborhoods they moved to. Using an even study design, I compare rents in neighborhoods that experienced larger in-migration of voucher holders to those that received many fewer voucher holders.

Teaching

I believe I would be well suited to teach students across the Department's programs at the undergraduate, masters and Ph.D. levels. Throughout my graduate studies I have taught recitations for core courses in microeconomics, which generally draw a diverse student body and I pride myself on being able to connect with students from varied personal and professional backgrounds. I also have extensive experience using complex data and econometric/statistical methods to conduct policy analysis, from my training in my Master's in Economics at Tufts, through my position at Abt Associates prior to pursuing my PhD, and the PhD itself. With my expertise, I am confident I could teach core methods courses in policy analysis and economics for public policy as well as electives across the urban and social policy, community and economic development and environmental policy specializations.

As a teacher, I truly enjoy connecting with students and helping to excite them about material that may initially appear daunting or challenging. I try to emulate the teachers and professors in whose classes I was most effectively able to learn by identifying a few principles that made their classes so conducive to learning: making the material relatable, encouraging engagement, and returning to intuition. My personal experience as a woman in economic and policy research, and as an ex-pat, has greatly informed my approach to teaching in these fields, and I try to foster inclusive learning and belonging across all approaches I take.

As a student, I was inspired to pursue graduate work in economic and policy research through research papers I was introduced to. I realized that I wanted to learn the same tools to answer interesting questions about the world. As a teacher, I try to make the material relatable in the same way by using real world examples, and by referencing interesting and relevant research papers. I also try to highlight papers by female scholars. Women continue to be underrepresented in academia, and it is not uncommon for me to be one of few women in the economic research settings I have been a part of. I have intentionally sought out the women that do work in these spaces, and several of them have become the greatest mentors in my career thus far. As an Assistant Professor, I hope to have the opportunity to fill this role for other women through my own research and by introducing them to the work of other women in the field.

I encourage and truly listen to questions. In my experience, both in classes and seminars, too many professors are quick to answer questions whose meaning they have not fully understood. For students to engage with a class, it is important that they not only feel comfortable asking any question but also that they feel that their question was understood by the professor and answered adequately. Growing up, my family moved several times, including to Brussels, Belgium, where I attended an international school. My peers comprised students from all over the world, and I was uniquely exposed to some of the challenges students can face entering a learning environment when English isn't their first language, or the cultural norms differ from their own. As a teacher, I try to be aware and sensitive to this possibility. Students that do not feel confident in their English can often remain silent in class and refrain from asking questions. Students from historically marginalized populations may have faced many barriers to education that have made them less comfortable in school settings. I try to make the classroom a comfortable space for all students to participate and engage with the material by allowing space for these differences and using many types of examples that students from varied backgrounds can relate to.

Introductory economics classes draw a wide swath of students, many of whom do not have strong math backgrounds. For these students, equations can appear daunting and discouraging. When teaching quantitative classes, it is important to reach those students for whom math does not come as naturally. For this reason, I always make a point to spend time explaining the intuition behind the concepts and equations. I offer alternative ways to solve problems, when possible, that focus on the intuition as a way to understand the math.

Below I elaborate on my teaching experience at Tufts University and NYU.

Teaching Experience

- Principles of Economics (Tufts, 2014-2016). This course is the main introduction to economics for undergraduate students and serves around 200 students. As a TA, I conducted weekly recitations, as well as office hours, graded problem sets and exams. The course focused on both micro and macroeconomic concepts. With such a large class, many students found it hard to engage with the professor, and in my role as TA I acted as an important and approachable resource for asking questions and reviewing concepts.
- Microeconomics (NYU, 2020-2023). This course is a required course for the Master in Public Policy (MPP) degree offered at NYU Wagner's Graduate School of Public Service. As a TA, I conducted weekly recitations, as well as office hours, and graded exams. I used my recitations to provide a review of the concepts introduced in that week's class, fielded questions on the homework, and worked through practice problems on that week's material. I was careful to structure my reviews logically so that the concepts felt sequential and naturally fed into the practice problems.

As an Assistant Professor, I am excited to have the opportunity to develop my own courses based on my expertise and interests. In addition to microeconomics courses similar to those I have taught before, below is a non-exhaustive list of courses I believe, as an Assistant Professor, I would be particularly well suited to teach.

Example Future Courses

- Policy Analysis and Program Evaluation. This course would cover the main statistical and econometric tools used to evaluate social policies. Through my experience as a researcher both in the workforce and in graduate school, I have extensive experience in both experimental and quasi-experimental evaluation and would design a course that details the empirical strategy and assumptions behind evaluation using randomized controlled trials, instrumental variables, difference in differences, regression discontinuity and other commonly used methods.
- Public Economics. This course would cover topics such as externalities, public goods, social insurance (health and unemployment insurance, social security), redistribution (in-kind vs cash transfers, take-up and targeting of social programs), cost-benefit analysis, tax incidence and optimal taxation. I would review concepts such as adverse selection and moral hazard.

- Urban Economics. This course would cover agglomeration externalities, location theory, urban and regional labor markets, land and housing markets (household sorting, housing policies), local provision of public goods, and urban challenges (poverty, segregation, crime, climate change).

- Housing Policy and Community Development. This course would provide an overview of housing and community development policy in the U.S. over time. It would explore key developments chronologically, while providing necessary economic and social context for the policies. Emphasis will be put on understanding not only the intention of policies, but the reality of their implementation as well.

Across my research interests and teaching capabilities, I believe I would thrive as an Assistant Professor of Public Policy at USC. I am most comfortable at places of intersection in research, so I believe a policy school is an ideal fit for me. I would be truly excited about the opportunities for collaboration with diverse colleagues that this position in the Price School would offer. In addition, I acknowledge that in this position I will have increased authority and responsibility to improve diversity and inclusion and would like to play an active role in making academia a more inclusive community through research, teaching, and mentorship.