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Melissa R. Wilson
University of Oregon

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EDUCATION

Ph.D., Economics, University of Oregon (expected 2021)

- Dissertation: "Essays on Racial Disparities in Law Enforcement"
- Dissertation Advisor: Dr. Benjamin Hansen

M.S., Economics, University of Oregon (2018)

B.A., Economics, University of South Florida (2016)

FIELDS

Applied Microeconomics, Labor Economics, Applied Econometrics, Public Policy, Economics of Crime

ACADEMIC POSITIONS

2016-present: Graduate Employee, Department of Economics, University of Oregon

WORKING PAPERS

"Racial Disparities in Police Stops: A Regression Discontinuity Approach"

It is evident based on recent news articles and social media discussions that racial bias in police action is currently at the forefront of public interest in the U.S. Whether police operate outside of what is considered fair under our justice system can be challenging to estimate. This paper analyzes the incidence of racial bias in traffic stops by city police departments in 9 cities across the country. Under the "veil of darkness," police cannot determine the race of a driver prior to pulling them over, based on the hypothesis of Grogger and Ridgeway (2012). I take their method a step further in order to address an issue that may cause a bias in their results. Utilizing the Stanford Open Policing data, I employ a regression discontinuity design around the start of daylight savings time in order to make an accurate comparison between daylight and nighttime stops drawn from the same distribution of drivers. I find little evidence of racial disparities in police stops with no significance for black drivers and significance for Hispanic drivers that is not fully robust to functional forms. This indicates that daylight times do not affect proportion of stops of minority drivers and racial disparities are not affected by visible lighting. I posit that this might be due to a flaw in the "veil of darkness" hypothesis, rather than a lack of racial discrimination.

WORKS IN PROGRESS

"Drug Laws, Police Leniency, and Racial Disparities in Arrest Rates" (*Job Market Paper*)

Abstract: This paper tests if racial disparities in arrests are driven by police bias. I use Chicago police arrest data with the quantity of contraband reported to determine if racial discrimination affects police decision-making at lower and higher contraband severity differentially. By showing there is a larger racial disparity in arrest rates at lower contraband levels than at higher levels, I provide evidence as to whether the disparity is driven by officer taste-based discrimination. I then run an interrupted time series in order to estimate the effect on the arrest rate disparity of decriminalization of marijuana in Illinois at different severities. My results motivate policy decisions to decriminalize marijuana and, subsequently, other minor crimes that disproportionately harm minority groups.

FELLOWSHIPS, HONORS, AND GRANTS

Kleinsorge Research Fellowship Award 2020

Graduate Teaching Fellowship 2016-2021

University of South Florida Directors Award 2012-2016

University of South Florida Honors College Award 2012-2016

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Introduction to Microeconomics

Instructor of Record

Spring 2021, Fall 2019, Summer 2019

Introduction to Macroeconomics

Instructor of Record

Spring 2020, Spring 2019, Summer 2018

Introduction to Econometrics I

Discussion Instructor

Fall 2021, Winter 2019

Introduction to Econometrics II

Discussion Instructor

Fall 2018

Introduction to Microeconomics

Discussion Instructor

Spring 2018, Spring 2017

Introduction to Macroeconomics

Discussion Instructor

Winter 2018

Econometrics (Master's Series)

Discussion Instructor

Fall 2021

PRESENTATIONS

Kleinsorge Fellowship Proposal at University of Oregon 2020
How to Use Wikipediatrend in R at Grant McDermott's Seminar UO 2018
Applied Microeconomics Group Winter 2020 (online)
Practice Job Talk at University of Oregon 2021

COMPUTER SKILLS

Google Earth Seminar at Oregon State University Spring 2018
Stata, R/RMarkdown, Julia, MATLAB, Latex
Git/Gitbash
Microsoft Office Suite

DATABASES

Stanford Open Policing Project Database
Chicago ISR Police Data
Administrative Chicago Police Department Data (FOIA)

REFERENCES

Professor Benjamin Hansen
University of Oregon
Department of Economics
bchansen@uoregon.edu

Professor Jonathan Davis
University of Oregon
Department of Economics
jdavis5@uoregon.edu

Professor Eric Zhou
University of Oregon
Department of Economics
ericzhou@uoregon.edu