Palaash Bhargava

PhD Candidate | Department of Economics, Columbia University

420 West 118th Street, New York NY 10027, USA

palaash.bhargava@columbia.edu | +1 332 600 3253

https://sites.google.com/view/palaashbhargava

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Research Interests

Primary Fields: Development and Labour Economics, Economics of Education, Social Networks

Secondary Fields: Economic History, Behavioral and Experimental Economics, Climate and Household Finance

References

Sandra Black
Professor
Department of Economics and
School of International and Public Affairs
Columbia University
sblack@columbia.edu

Cristian Pop-Eleches
Professor
School of International and Public Affairs
Columbia University
cp2124@columbia.edu

Miguel Urquiola
Dean of Social Sciences and
Professor
Department of Economics,
Columbia University
msu2101@columbia.edu

Alex Eble
Associate Professor
Teachers College
Columbia University
eble@tc.columbia.edu

Education

Ph.D in Economics, Columbia University	2019 – 2025 *(expected)*
M.A in Economics, Delhi School of Economics	2014 – 2016
B.A. (Honors) in Economics, Kirori Mal College, University of Delhi	2011 – 2014

Research

Job Market Paper

Popularity and Student Networks: Trade-offs in Resolving Social Isolation through Deskmate Assignments

Short Summary: Social connections matter for educational, non-cognitive and long run labour market outcomes. Using a sample of 12,842 students from India, I first show that relatively isolated students face a host of

socio-emotional and academic disadvantages. I then implement a two-tier randomized deskmate matching intervention, aimed at improving the outcomes of these isolated students. The results reveal a notable trade-off. Within the classroom, matching isolated students with each other improves their social connections with peers, interactions with teachers and social / non-cognitive skills. However, across classrooms, creating more isolated-poppular deskmate pairs improves social integration for isolated students with no change in social and non-cognitive skills. These findings suggest that optimal matching plans need to account for both direct and group-level effects, which may operate in opposing directions, leading to equity-efficiency trade-offs.

Publications

A Cross-verified Database of Notable People (3500 BC - 2018 AD), Nature Sci Data, June 9; 9(1):290 *(with Morgane Laouenan, Olivier Gergaud, Jean-Benoît Eyméoud, Guillaume Plique and Etienne Wasmer)*

> *Coverage: DailyMail UK, NY Post, Metro UK, +135 others*

> *Short Summary:* A new strand of literature aims at building the most comprehensive and accurate database of notable individuals. We collect a massive amount of data from various editions of Wikipedia and Wikidata. Using deduplication techniques over these partially overlapping sources, we cross-verify each retrieved information. Our strategy results in a cross-verified database of 2.29 million individuals (an elite of 1/43,000 of human beings having ever lived), including a third who are not present in the English edition of Wikipedia. Building on seminal works based on Freebase and Wikipedia by Schich et. al 2014 and Yu et. al 2016, we use six additional language editions of Wikipedia as well as Wikidata as complementary sources of information about notable individuals to reduce the Anglo-Saxon bias present in current works. We obtain information about their demographic characteristics, place and death of birth / death, citizenship, and occupation. This is an attempt to create the most comprehensive database employable for understanding the role of culture, gender and creative classes in fields of economic growth, urban economics, cultural development and network analysis.

Working Papers

Family Ties: The Effects of the Price of College on Parent and Student Finances *(with Sandra Black, Jeff Denning, Robert Fairlie and Oded Gurantz)*

> *Short Summary:* Paying for college is often a family affair, with both parents and students contributing. The rising cost of college has led families to increasingly rely on debt to finance education. We study the effects of college on family finances using administrative data on all FAFSA applicants in California linked to credit records. We perform two complementary analyses. First, we use an event-study framework to describe how students and parents' use of debt changes in response to a child's college attendance. We show that parents increase the use of educational loans when their child attends college. Parents also shift borrowing from credit cards and auto loans. Further, we find that parents are less likely to declare bankruptcy. These patterns suggest that educational loans provide a useful mechanism for financing household spending. Second, we use discontinuities in eligibility for generous financial aid to test how an exogenous change in the price of college affects parents and students. We find that parents finance increases in the price of college through educational loans as well as home equity loans. We find that financial aid for children decreases parental delinquency on debt. These findings document a new and important channel in which the college and its rising cost may spill over into the broader financial health of families and economy.

Cultural transmission and historical origins of attention to environmental issues *(with César Barilla)*

> *Short Summary:* How does the climatic experience of previous generations affect today's attention to environmental questions? Using self-reported beliefs from over 130,000 individuals in World Value Surveys and environmental themes in ethnic folklore, we show empirically that the realized intensity of deviations from typical climatic conditions in ancestral generations influences how much descendants care about the environment. The effect exhibits a U-shape where more stable and more unstable climates lead to higher attention, with a dip for intermediate realizations. We propose a theoretical framework where the value of costly attention to environmental conditions depends on the perceived stability of the environment; prior beliefs about which are shaped through cultural transmission by the experience of ethnic ancestors. The U-shape results from a dual purpose of learning about the environment: optimal utilization of typical conditions and protection against extreme events.

Homophily and Transmission of Behavioral Traits in Social Networks, Submitted *(with Daniel Chen, Matthias Sutter and Camille Terrier)*

Short Summary: Social networks are a key factor of success in life, but they are also strongly segmented on gender, ethnicity, and other demographic characteristics (Jackson 2010). We present novel evidence on an understudied source of homophily: behavioral traits. Based on unique data collected using incentivized experiments with more than 2,500 French high-school students, we find high levels of homophily across all behavioral traits that we study. Notably, the extent of homophily depends on similarities in demographics, particularly gender. Using network econometrics, we show that the observed homophily is not only an outcome of endogenous network formation, but is also a result of friends influencing each others' behavioral traits. Importantly, the transmission of traits is larger when students share demographic characteristics such as gender.

Selected Works in Progress

Let the students teach: Effects of peer tutoring pedagogy on academic and socio-emotional outcomes
(with Dashleen Kaur, Nikhil Kumar, Madhavi Jha and Tarang Tripathi)

(On Field)

Short Summary: Majority of students in rural India still lack foundational literacy and numeracy skills. Large class sizes, overworked teachers and a heavy reliance on traditional instruction starves students of individual attention necessary for academic growth. In a resource constrained environment, can high ability students improve the outcomes of their peers? We evaluate the effect of a peer tutoring intervention in rural Bihar on students' academic outcomes and non-cognitive skills. We work with a sample of 25,000 students from grade 3 to 5 across 350 schools in the district of Bhagalpur. High academic ability individuals in treated schools are assigned leadership roles where they spearhead everyday remedial classes for mathematics in small groups with a fixed set of learners. The study evaluates how personal attention (for learners) and positions of responsibility (for leaders) affect students' proficiency and interest in math, develop relevant social and non-cognitive skills and reduces math anxiety rampant under traditional instruction. It also evaluates whether peer tutoring programs alter classroom social networks and make the classroom environment more conducive. By analyzing impacts on both academic and social growth, the study presents scalable and cost-effective solutions for generating improvement in academic outcomes that persist over time.

Trajectories of notable individuals: A cross verified database of locations *(with Minda Belete, Morgane Laouenan, Olivier Gergaud and Etienne Wasmer)*

(Final Data Verification in Process)

Short Summary: Famous individuals contribute to the visibility of cities, and vice-versa. The production of historical data on notable individuals has expanded in recent years but information on their association to locations remains scarce. We extend our older work from the Brief History of Human Time project and improve information on geographical locations beyond birth and death place of 2.29 million notable individuals spread over 3500 years of human history. We compile a consolidated database of places visited by these individuals in their lifetime. Using information from the text in Wikipedia in a structured way, we assign a reasonable range of years for each location associated with an individual to identify their locations of residence and work over their lifetime. We cross verify this information against information contained in Wikidata. We use multiple Wikipedia editions simultaneously to further assign a confidence and intensity measure of association for each location to an individual. We create metrics useful for measuring the impact of the presence of notable individuals on city growth from a historical perspective (with various focuses such as the development of global cities – e.g. 20th century in Americas, 21st century in the Global South, or the Middle-Age and Industrial Revolution in Europe).

Work in Early Stages (Details available on personal website)

Historical elite social networks and the escape from the Malthusian trap

(Data Construction in Process)

Percolation of Wildfire related Credit Shocks through Family Networks *(with Shreya Chandra)*

(Data Construction in Process)

Omniscient Teachers: Revealing Classroom social networks for better student outcomes *(with Tarang Tripathi)*

(Pilot and Scoping Completed)

Empowering Youth with Digital Skills: A Large-Scale Clustered Randomized Intervention in Kenya
(with Tommaso Batistoni, Daniel Chen, Tushar Kundu and Ken Maina)

    (Pilot and Scoping Ongoing)

Awards and Honors

Dissertation Fellowship, Columbia University	2024 – 2025
Dean's Fellowship, Columbia University	2019 – 2024
PER Economics Department Fellowship, Columbia University	2019 – 2024
PER Summer Research Fellowship, Columbia University	2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024
California Policy Lab, Graduate Fellowship *(with Shreya Chandra)*	2023
Winner, Vickrey Award for the best 3rd year paper, Columbia University	2022
Runners up, Wueller Teaching Award for PhD courses, Columbia University	2021
Runners up, Harriss Award for the best 2nd year paper, Columbia University	2021
EXIM Bank Scholarship, Delhi School of Economics	2015 – 2016
Sri Bodhiswar Rai Scholarship, Delhi School of Economics	2014 – 2015
Runners up, Budding Economist, South Asian Economics' Students' Meet	2013

Research Grants

The Agency Fund ($270,000 *in conjunction with InvolveEDU*)	2024-2026
The Weiss Fund at University of Chicago ($25,325)	2023-2026
Center for Effective Global Action - PEP Initiative ($9,200 *in conjunction with InvolveEDU*)	2024
Center for Development and Economic Policy, Columbia University ($5,000)	2023-2024
Department of Economics, Columbia University ($15,000)	2023-2024
Program for Economic Research at Columbia University Experimental Grant ($20,700)	2022-2024

Professional Experience

Assistant Instructor of Economics, New York University Abu Dhabi	2017 – 2019
Assistant Instructor of Mathematics, New York University Shanghai	2018
Analyst, Investment Banking Division, Nomura Services Pvt. Ltd.	2016 – 2017
Research Assistant *for Professor Sandra Black, Columbia University*	2022 – 2024
Research Assistant *for Professor Evan Sadler, Columbia University*	2020 – 2022
Research Assistant *for Professor Etienne Wasmer, NYU Abu Dhabi*	2018

Teaching Experience

Economic Growth and Development, Instructor (Undergraduate level), Columbia University   2022, 2023

PhD Math Camp Primary Instructor, Department of Economics, Columbia University   2020, 2021

Teaching Assistant (Undergraduate level), Department of Economics, Columbia University   2022 – 2023
    Intermediate Microeconomics, Spring 2023   *(for Professor Caterina Musatti)*

Teaching Assistant (Graduate level), Department of Economics, Columbia University   2020 – 2021
    Math Methods, Fall 2020   *(for Professor Jushan Bai)*

Recitation and Lab Instructor (Undergraduate level), NYU Abu Dhabi   2017 – 2019
    Markets, Spring 2019   *(for Professor Andrzej Baranski)*
    5000 Years of Notable lives (Data and Discovery), Fall 2018   *(for Professor Etienne Wasmer)*
    Economic Dynamics, Fall 2018   *(for Professor Thomas Sargent)*
    Intermediate Micro-Economics, Fall 2017, Spring 2018   *(for Professors Hervé Crès & Maximilian Mihm)*
    Calculus with Applications in Economics, Fall 2017, Spring 2018, Summer 2018, Fall 2018, Spring 2019, Summer 2019

Recitation Instructor (Undergraduate level), NYU Shanghai   2018
    Integral Calculus, January 2018   *(for Professor Hisham Sati)*

Selected Conferences and Seminars   (*) Scheduled

Southern Economic Association, Annual Meeting*	2024
Office of the Chief Economist Inaugural Conference, US Department of Education*	2024
North East Universities Development Consortium (NEUDC)	2024
Interdisciplinary PhD Workshop in Sustainable Development, Columbia University	2024
NBER Innovation Research Bootcamp	2023
Network Science in Management, IIM Ahmedabad	2022
Young Scholars Matchmaking Workshop, CEPR - PEDL and NYU Abu Dhabi	2022
Regional and Urban Economics Workshop - "Urban Economics and History", Paris School of Economics	2020
Development Graduate Summer School, Paris School of Economics	2018
The Frontiers of Network Science, NYU Abu Dhabi	2018
10th South Asian Economics' Students' Meet, Lahore University of Management Sciences	2013

Referee

Economics of Education Review

Other

Software: Python, STATA, R, MATLAB, Mathematica, LaTeX, SQL

Languages known: English (Fluent), Hindi (Native), Oriya (Intermediate), French (Beginner)

Nationality: Indian