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Research Statement

As a passionate economist, my research endeavors reside at the intersection of education, labor markets, inequality, and discrimination. Rooted in a profound commitment to understanding and addressing systemic educational challenges, my work seeks to illuminate the intricacies of both K-12 and higher education systems, especially in the context of under-served and marginalized communities. In addition, my adeptness at econometrics and my proficiency as a data analyst enables me to employ advanced statistical methods and techniques, ensuring that my research is both robust and relevant. By leveraging large data sets and analytical skills, I aim to uncover hidden patterns and insights that can inform policy decisions and drive systemic change.

Past Research

Central to my research portfolio are several extensive analyses of anti-discrimination policies and government-funded teacher staffing initiatives, especially in regions grappling with challenges tied to socio-economic disparities. One of my notable and published works is the evaluation of the Rural Recruitment Initiative (RRI) in South Carolina. This initiative provided additional funding to eligible districts without prescribing specific use. My collaborative study with Henry Tran and Douglas Smith (2022) unveiled the promises and pitfalls of such an open-ended policy approach, offering crucial insights for future policy design, highlighting the importance of district follow-up and increased financial support.

Moreover, my research also underscores the subtle yet pervasive forms of inequality that permeate the educational landscape. Through rigorous data analysis, I've illuminated how biases toward rural or urban areas, both overt and systemic, and under-investment can keep the rural teaching workforce at the margin and exacerbate existing inequalities. In another collaboration with an interdisciplinary team of Henry Tran and Douglas Smith on the "Abbeville vs. South Carolina" school funding lawsuit, I document how under-investing in rural schools perpetuated staffing challenges in plaintiff districts in the lawsuit. Furthermore, we explore variations in the salary structure of teachers across time and districts of South Carolina to examine if "front-loading" – experience-based pay raise in early years of experience – or "back-loading" – experience-based pay raise in later years of experience – teachers' salaries can encourage teacher retention.

Ongoing and Future Research

Building on my past work, I am channeling my efforts towards a comprehensive, national-level exploration of inequality in teacher staffing and mobility decisions. This includes understanding the role of socioeconomic factors, sexual orientation and gender biases, and institutional practices in perpetuating disparities. I am also collaborating with an interdisciplinary team to study the broader implications of LGBT employment anti-discrimination policies, especially in the realm of labor economics.

The challenges faced by K-12 and higher education institutions, while distinct, often intersect in complex ways. At the higher education level, I am keenly interested in topics like college affordabil-

ity, personal finance management, the evolving nature of tertiary education in our digital era, and the role of policies in promoting equal access to quality education. Notably, my emerging research initiatives in these sectors have been recognized and bolstered by grants, particularly the influential SPARC Graduate Research Grant by the office of Vice President for research at the University of South Carolina. This support has been instrumental in advancing my seminal contributions to education and economics.

As a labor economist, I am deeply interested in understanding how educational policies and practices influence labor market outcomes and expanding my research horizons to understand the broader implications of educational policies on student outcomes, particularly for marginalized groups. This includes studying the transition of students from education to the workforce and employment opportunities in the face of evolving economic landscapes. Beyond these areas, my research endeavors also delve into financial technologies and financial economics, providing a multidimensional perspective to my academic contributions. I particularly focus on the impact of marketplace lenders which provide access to new sources of individual loan. Based on industrial organization theories, I study how the introduction of these new firms change the lending industry and behavior of incumbent banks.

For the future, I plan to collaborate with interdisciplinary teams to explore the intersection of education with other critical domains such as technology, sociology, and public health. By bridging these disciplines, I aim to develop holistic solutions that not only address educational challenges but also foster inclusivity, equity, community growth and social progress. This involves harnessing the power of data analytics and maintaining a relentless focus on marginalized and underserved communities.

With a strong foundation in both theoretical and empirical research methodologies, I am poised to contribute significantly to the academic community and beyond. I am keen on collaborating with institutions that share my vision for a better educational equity landscape and am open to exploring innovative research avenues that align with this mission.