

Research Statement

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My research focuses on how labor market outcomes differ regionally in the United States as a result of characteristics unique to those specific labor markets. In particular, I have researched location-specific policy, income distribution, and the relationship between compensation and productivity as measures of these regional outcomes. The results of these projects have yielded several tractable policy prescriptions--a unifying thread that binds my work together. The ability for economic research to meaningfully improve and alter economic outcomes is critically important to me and, as a result, policy implications are a common feature to both my current and future work plans.

Current Research

My current projects therefore reflect an intersection of labor and regional economic analysis. Most recently, my paper “Are We Underpaid? Estimating Average Compensation Relative to Productivity in the United States” develops a new measure that can be used to evaluate outcomes for the average worker of a given labor market. The impetus behind developing the measure is to unify the colloquial and academic discussions of compensation rates in the United States. Many news sources and government agencies describe stagnating wages, underpaid workers, and worsening labor market outcomes as commonplace for the U.S. worker. On the other hand, academic discussions have strayed away from such topics due to difficulties estimating productivity for many industries. Despite the potential confounding factors, this paper argues that it is important to elucidate the relationship between compensation and productivity rates to better understand how labor market outcomes affect workers in different sectors and regions. Ultimately, the results show that workers tend to be underpaid in coastal states and overpaid in the rest of the country, even accounting for regional price differences. Robustness checks indicate the measure has merit and can yield important information regarding the state of labor markets in the United States.

The second paper of my current work represents an interdisciplinary piece with one of my linguist colleagues at Oxford College. In the paper, “Heritage Language Labor Market Returns: The Importance of Speaker Density at the State-Level,” Dr. Walter and I hypothesize and test for a concave labor market return function for non-English workers in the United States.¹ This paper, which has been accepted pending revisions to the *Journal of Economics, Race, and Policy*, argues that wages and employment status for these heritage language workers are a function of the number of people in their area who also speak that particular language. Concerning employment status, the theoretical model argues that non-native English speakers are partially insulated from negative employment shocks in a way that native English speakers are not. Following the human capital literature, the paper also argues that compensation should be higher for these workers as their skills are valued for their productive utility, which is itself a function of the size of the network. The results

¹Taking the shape of an “inverted-U.”

support our hypothesis of this “inverted-U” shape between labor market returns and proportion of speakers in a state that speak the same non-English language. Of notable interest with respect to policy, the shape of the curve and data employed implies that most heritage language speakers would benefit from increases in the size of their state-level network. This counters the arguments of so-called English-First movements that foster and advocate for English as the dominant language in the United States.

Future Research

These combined works, in tandem with ongoing projects, provide a clear avenue for future research. Because my paper on the relationship between compensation and productivity represents an advanced version of one of my dissertation papers, some of my ongoing work seeks to expand and clarify my dissertation’s remaining chapters. One of these works will focus on regional labor shares as a measure of income inequality at the state and county-level.² A significant body of work focuses on labor shares at the international- and national-level, which leaves a clear research opportunity to investigate labor share differences at the state- and county-level. Another work will clarify precisely why we see the relationship between average compensation and productivity rates differ regionally in the United States.³ This particular paper relies on describing labor market tightness, policy, and human capital differences at the regional level in order to understand what most determines compensation rates relative to productivity. As I have continued to work on and improve these papers, the updates have led to new questions that I hope to address in the future.

Separate works will use different tools to analyze regional outcomes in the United States. I was initially trained as a Computable General Equilibrium (CGE) modeler and have started to put together the basis for a flexible, multi-sector CGE model that could be informative for policy analysis in any region. My desire to incorporate this form of modeling as well as the econometric approaches of my current work stems from my hope to supply the information local policymakers need to make optimal decisions. Whether a policy comes in the form of tax changes, programs to attract entrepreneurs, or job training programs, I want to investigate the impacts each policy’s implementation will have on a region and its surrounding areas. It is this unintentional spillover effect of policy that attracted me most to regional analyses early in my graduate career. Long term, my hope is that the development of a localized CGE model will provide ample opportunities for impact studies—a form of research that will necessitate the aid of students. In my current role at Oxford College, I have worked with students on several research projects and see the mutual benefit that such work provides.

Finally, it has become increasingly evident that answering my research questions will necessitate the inclusion of multiple disciplines. The union of demography, spatial analysis, economic theory, and other fields inform my research methodologies and improve the applicability of my results. I enjoy working with others and finding common research goals that transcend individual fields of

²The focus of Chapter 1 of my dissertation.

³Akin to Chapter 3 of my dissertation.

study. My goal is to generate meaningful research that can improve people's lives and the efficacy of policy--to do so will require an interdisciplinary perspective.