

Georgia State University Department of Economics AEA Award for Outstanding Achievement in Diversity and Inclusion

The economics department at Georgia State University (GSU) is committed to practices that encourage diversity and inclusion within our department and within the economics profession. Our focus on diversity, equity, and inclusivity (DEI) ranges from our undergraduate and graduate teaching to our research. We incorporate many of the [Best Practices for Economists](#) recommended by the AEA.

Our department is housed in the [Andrew Young School of Policy Studies](#), a unit named after the civil rights icon and former mayor, Congressman, and ambassador. Georgia State University itself is renowned around the nation for [its pioneering work in closing racial and economic achievement gaps](#).

Within our department, our focus on DEI has spurred great success in providing outreach and expanding the reach of the economics profession. According to the [interactive scorecard](#) of the race, gender, and ethnicity of undergraduate economics majors at universities provided by the New York Fed, our department's Economic Education Inclusion Index is 76.8, placing us in the 85th percentile among all U.S. universities. At the graduate level, our PhD graduates have achieved enormous success by being placed at many outstanding academic and government positions where their impact on DEI-related policy can be large. This includes students placed in the last few years at the CBO, working on the models of the distributional impacts of climate policy, and at UT-Dallas researching academic outcomes of economically-disadvantaged students.

Our commitment to DEI is best exemplified by describing the following initiatives that have been undertaken, their impact, and how they promote the AEA's best practices.

1. PhD Student DEI Fellowship

Our department was one of the two initial winners in 2020 of the AEA's Departmental Seed Grants for Innovation in Diversity and Inclusion. We used that \$5,000 seed grant to develop and promote a fellowship for an incoming PhD student, who works to increase diversity and inclusion among the department and the profession. The seed grant funding was matched with \$20,000 in funding from the Andrew Young School, and we have funded a student who has begun studying here in the fall semester 2022. The funding was used to top off the standard stipend offered to all incoming PhD students in order to attract excellent applicants. We had several students apply for the fellowship, and we identified several others among those who applied to our PhD program overall. We anticipate that the current fellow will use their education at GSU to promote DEI throughout the profession.

Best Practices: Implement an inclusive process for admitting and developing graduate students; Build a sense of belonging for all students

2. Principles Curriculum Realignment

Starting in the spring semester of 2020, our department began an initiative to redesign the curriculum for our introductory principles of microeconomics course. A primary goal was to move away from a mandatory textbook to a no-cost format, in line with the Andrew Young School's [Digital Landscape Initiative](#). Faculty members, staff, and graduate students working with the department's [Experimental Economics Center](#) developed a curriculum based on free online resources. We also developed a set of online interactive tools for student practice and assessment, which can be incorporated into a learning management system. We have a website (<http://econreimagined.gsu.edu/>) to disseminate this broadly so others can learn from our work. These courses were piloted in 16 online sections starting in fall 2021, with a planned rollout to more sections in the future. We have saved over 1,300 students approximately \$75 each in course materials.

The course incorporates many of the inclusive classroom techniques recommended in the best practices, including active learning and engagement with their peers. We also include elements that explicitly address DEI in economics. For example, students are encouraged to explore links such as the podcast [100 Years Since Sadie Alexander](#) (featuring a GSU PhD student alumna). After watching videos including [What is a common myth about economics?](#) (also featuring a recent GSU PhD student alumna) and [A career in Economics...it's much more than you think](#), from the AEA, students are asked to describe what surprised them most about economics.

Best Practices: Offer course content that is relevant for diverse students; Use effective and inclusive classroom techniques

3. Committee for Mentoring Women and Non-Binary Graduate Students

Since 2021, our department has instituted a program aimed at supporting women and non-binary MA and PhD students. The program includes a one-on-one mentoring network along with networking and research events. The mentoring network's purpose is to promote the professional development of graduate students by facilitating the matching of mentors and mentees. The Committee solicits mentors from GSU economics MA and PhD alumni and faculty. Matching is based upon similarity in interests and preferences for timing and intensity of interactions. The first round of matching resulted in fourteen mentor-mentee pairs that have been interacting since June 2022. The Committee will begin the second round of matching in Spring 2023.

Networking and research events are open to all graduate students in economics. For example, the Committee partnered with GSU Career Services to host an open Career Networking Roundtable featuring PhD and MA female economists working in academics and industry. After offering brief perspectives to the group, panelists met in small groups to answer student questions and network.

Best Practices: Build a sense of belonging for all students; Implement an inclusive process for admitting and developing graduate students

4. Andrew Young School Faculty Mentorship Program

The Andrew Young School has instituted an interdisciplinary faculty mentorship program, in which senior faculty in the School are assigned junior faculty to mentor. This program includes not just the economics department but all of the units within the School. It includes mentorship training for the mentors, including a focus on goal-setting, network-building, and support for women and faculty from traditionally underrepresented minority groups. Several of the senior faculty in our department are participating as mentors, as well as several junior faculty who are mentees.

Best Practices: Be a good mentor; Meet your colleagues where they are

5. Undergraduate Pipeline Program

In partnership with the Dean's office, the department has had a program since 2018 that aims to target some of the most outstanding undergraduate economics majors and encourage them to apply for graduate school in economics. The program specifically aims to encourage underrepresented minorities to apply to receive direct, one-on-one mentorship from a current economics graduate student for at least one academic year. Many of our undergraduate econ majors are first-generation college students less familiar with nuances of graduate programs, application processes, and funding opportunities. Our undergraduate students have benefited greatly from connecting and learning from graduate students with recent experience applying and enrolling in our programs. Our graduate student mentors receive mentorship training through our school's career services office as well as a travel/data stipend for their efforts. The program has thus far created 15 mentor/mentee pairings. Several students from the earlier cohorts have successfully enrolled in MA and PhD programs both at GSU and other universities.

Best Practices: Implement an inclusive process for admitting and developing graduate students; Use outreach to counter stereotypes about economics and close other information gaps

6. Courses with DEI Component

Several of the courses offered at both the undergraduate and graduate levels have a significant component related to DEI issues, reflecting our department's focus and the interests of our students. One example is an undergraduate course, Econ 4350 - Economics of Poverty and Public Policy. This course's topics include poverty and inequality, economics of the family, racial/gender discrimination and segregation, neighborhood effects, history of welfare, the incentive structure of the current and proposed welfare plans, and welfare reform. Another example is a graduate course, joint between MA and PhD students, Econ 8310 - Economics of Educational Policy. This course provides an economic conceptual framework in which to evaluate education policy alternatives and then examines education reform proposals that have been advanced over the last two decades.

Best Practices: Read and cite diversely; think inclusively; Offer course content that is relevant for diverse students

7. Faculty Recruitment

In the past several years our department has made a concerted effort to hire new faculty in such a way that emphasizes our commitment to DEI within our university and the profession. Of the five new full-time faculty members hired within the last three years, three are women, and three are from underrepresented minority groups.

Best Practices: Implement a structured and fair recruiting process

8. Public Outreach

Consistent with the commitment of the Andrew Young School and the university, our department is engaged with the community and makes connections with important stakeholders. A prominent example of this is the creation of the [Georgia Policy Labs](#), a research center within the department created to foster research and teaching to address the needs of children and families. The Policy Labs have partnered with some of the largest school districts within Georgia and have access to rich data that are used to analyze education policy and student outcomes.

Best Practices: Share research opportunities broadly

9. Seminar Code of Conduct

Our department recently formally adopted a code of conduct for our research seminars, based on the code of conduct implemented by the MIT economics department. This includes a “10-minute rule,” where no questions are allowed of the speaker in the first ten minutes of the presentation, along with suggestions for ensuring fair and equal treatment of speakers

Best Practices: Ensure that the conferences and seminar discussions you host are constructive; Discuss and enforce a code of conduct

10. Partnership with Spelman College

Spelman College, also located in downtown Atlanta, is a historically Black college for women. Faculty members in our department are partnering with Spelman faculty members, prompted by the fact that one of our recent PhD alums is now on Spelman’s faculty. We are working to make this an informal pipeline into our Ph.D. program. Spelman faculty have received an NSF research grant, and GSU faculty are co-PIs on the grant, to conduct joint research and teaching between the two universities. One of our PhD students is working with a Spelman faculty member on a teaching assistantship and is mentoring Spelman research assistants in their virtual lab ([VLab](#)) program.

Best Practices: Use outreach to counter stereotypes about economics and close other information gaps

11. Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders

The [International Center for Public Policy](#) in our department sponsors this [Fellowship program](#), where business, civic, and public leaders from 49 countries across Sub-Saharan Africa visit several institutions around the United States. At GSU, 25 Fellows visit campus each year for five weeks, taking academic and leadership programming with faculty, staff, and local community leaders. Leaders participating in the program include our school’s namesake Ambassador Andrew Young, as well as a former mayor of Atlanta and governor of Georgia.

Best Practices: Use outreach to counter stereotypes about economics and close other information gaps; Build a sense of belonging for all students.

The efforts that the GSU economics department have undertaken have dramatically enhanced the diversity and inclusion within our department and, we hope, among the economics

profession overall. But there are still challenges to be overcome. We thus have a plan for further improvement and innovation.

While our undergraduate student representation is admirable relative to the national average, it is still below the level of proportionate representation. The fraction of students overall who major in economics is about a percentage point lower than the national average, according to the [New York Fed](#). To address this, our department is working on a plan to encourage undergraduates to take economics and become economics majors. While this plan does not target underrepresented groups, the increase in overall numbers will help to increase diversity within the profession given the diversity of the overall student body here at GSU. This multi-pronged approach is still in progress, and includes items like emailing individual students who do well in principles courses, meeting with the undergrad economics club and guidance counselors, redesigning the requirements for the major, and reaching out to high school teachers.