Assistant Professor of Economics Yunmi Kong is the 2022 recipient of a Korea-America Economic Association (KAEA) Young Scholar Award. The award is given annually to one or two members of the KAEA who are within seven years of receiving their Ph.D. and have demonstrated both outstanding scholarly performance and great potential for future innovative research through their publications in leading journals in Economics and related fields. The award will be presented at the virtual annual meeting of the KAEA in January.

Yunmi joined the Rice faculty in 2016 after receiving her Ph.D. from New York University. Her research interests include empirical industrial organization and applied microeconometrics. Her latest work focuses on the empirical analysis of auctions including applications to the leasing of oil and gas tracts. For example, in an article that appeared in the January 2021 issue of the Journal of Political Economy (one of the top three journals in Economics), entitled “Sequential Auctions with Synergy and Affiliation across Auctions,” Yunmi examined the choice between (1) bundling multiple items in a government auction program to realize synergies between them, and (2) selling them sequentially so that the items can potentially be allocated to different bidders. She developed a method to extract from bidding behavior in sequential auctions the extent of synergy between auction items, and applied this method to analyze state auctions of oil leases in New Mexico. Yunmi found that while bundled auctions would increase revenue for the government, the synergy between leases is not sufficiently high for bundled auctions to improve allocative efficiency; that is, bundled auctions would make it less likely that each lease is allocated to the firm that values it the most. Another paper, published in August 2020 in the Rand Journal of Economics, examined the implications of low competition for auction design. In that analysis, Yunmi found that using first-price sealed-bid auctions rather than open ascending auctions can substantially mitigate the revenue reductions to the government attributable to low competition among bidders.

The KAEA Young Scholar Award complements nicely another award Yunmi received several years ago – the 2018 Malcolm Gillis Award for Distinction in Undergraduate Teaching in Economics, which recognized her outstanding performance in teaching our course in Applied Econometrics (ECON 209).
Our new Director of Undergraduate Studies, Professor Mallesh Pai, was the chair of the committee that designed the new interdisciplinary Managerial Economics and Organizational Sciences (MEOS) major, a stand-alone major housed in the Economics Department that replaces the previous Managerial Studies (MANA) second major. He spoke with RICE ECON about the new program.

What is the purpose of the new MEOS program?

The MEOS major provides students with a major focused on how the social sciences (especially Economics, Psychology and Political Science) inform the science and practice of management. It aims to provide students who are interested in careers in management/business the skills they need (statistical/econometric methods, communication, practical experience, etc.), while also exposing them to the underlying basic (social) science.

How is it structured?

MEOS is a 15-course major. The course structure involves: 3 basic Math/Stat foundation courses; 5 core courses (2 basic ECON classes, 2 PSYC classes and a Practicum); 6 elective classes from across the School of Social Sciences, and a Capstone class (“Management Communications in a Consulting Simulation”).

You can find more details on our website.

Where can students get advice about the MEOS program?

The MEOS program is housed in the economics department, so it is advised by the same team that advises ECON/MTEC majors. You can get more information about the advising team and office hours/contact details on our website.

How does it differ from MANA?

The MEOS program shares many of the underlying goals of MANA, but it is a more rigorous major (MEOS is a 15-course major whereas MANA was 10 courses). Unlike MEOS, MANA was a “second major,” i.e., you could not graduate from Rice with just the MANA major. Also, MEOS is a STEM-designated major.

Note that MEOS is an economics major – a student can declare at most one major out of ECON/MTEC/MEOS.

How should I choose between ECON/MTEC/MEOS?

That really depends on your interests. The ECON major is the traditional/classic economics major, exposing students to a wide variety of upper-level economics electives. The MTEC major is designed for students interested in gaining more quantitative/statistical/econometric skills, e.g. students considering graduate school or more quantitative jobs (for example, in finance). The MEOS major is designed for students interested in getting a wider exposure to the social sciences as it relates to management. Importantly, however, note that there is no need to figure this out immediately – all 3 majors share the same basic core courses (ECON 100, 200, MATH 101, 102 and STAT 310). You can take these while you try to learn more about what is best for you!

How does MEOS compare to the new BUSI major?

The two majors are focused on similar areas and are thus complementary, but they feature different approaches. The MEOS major is a social science major – the coursework focuses on how the social sciences inform management (e.g., via Economics, IO Psychology, etc.), while the BUSI major focuses more on applications. The MEOS major also has some unique elements (e.g., the practicum and the capstone).

What options are available for current MANA majors?

Current MANA majors (i.e., students who matriculated 2020 and earlier) can, if they desire, continue to major in MANA. They are also, of course, welcome to switch to MEOS – feel free to reach out to an ECON advisor if you need help with the requirements and/or with rearranging your course schedule.
Hülya Eraslan Appointed Fellow of the Game Theory Society and Research Associate at NBER

We would like to congratulate Hülya Eraslan, Ralph O’Connor Professor of Economics at Rice and our Director of Graduate Studies, who has received two prestigious appointments. Most recently, Hülya was appointed a Fellow of the Game Theory Society, an organization created in 1999 to promote research, teaching and application of game theory, which studies strategic interactions in competitive and cooperative environments and is an essential tool in economics and other social sciences. Fellows of the Society are scholars who are honored for their contributions to game theory as well as their service to the Society. And this past summer, Hülya was appointed a Research Associate at the prestigious National Bureau of Economic Research in Cambridge, MA. The NBER is a private, nonpartisan organization that facilitates cutting-edge investigation and analysis of major economic issues. It disseminates research findings to academics, public and private-sector decision-makers, and the public through its working paper series and some 120 conferences each year. Research fellows are appointed based on their research records and their capacity to contribute to NBER activities.

Hülya’s research program focuses on both theoretical and empirical analyses of bargaining and voting with applications to political economy and corporate finance. For example, she recently published (with Renee Bowen and Ying Chen) the lead article in the American Economic Review, the top journal in the profession, a paper entitled “Mandatory vs. Discretionary Spending: The Status Quo Effect.” This paper studies budget negotiations over public and private spending that take place between two parties every year, and compares mandatory and discretionary spending rules. Mandatory spending is governed by criteria set forth in enacted law; prominent examples are Social Security and Medicare. By comparison, discretionary spending, such as military spending, is decided through periodic appropriations. Hülya and her co-authors show that mandatory programs result in higher public goods spending and find conditions under which mandatory spending is preferable to discretionary spending.

Hülya is currently engaged in a large number of research projects with colleagues and graduate students at Rice. These collaborations include Professors Xun Tang, Jeremy Fox, YingHua He, Nina Bobkova, and Rossella Calvi, and students Yakym Pirozhenko, Kirill Evdokimov, Mingzi Niu, Dibya Mishra, and Ritika Sethi and examine a broad range of issues in political economy. She is also working on three projects comparing unanimity rule and majority rule, both theoretically and experimentally, in different multilateral bargaining environments.

Nobel Laureate James Heckman to Deliver RISE Lecture November 4

The tenth lecture in the RISE (Rice Initiative for the Study of Economics) Nobel Laureate Lecture Series will feature James J. Heckman, who is the Henry Schultz Distinguished Service Professor of Economics at the University of Chicago. He is also director of the university’s Center for the Economics of Human Development, where he has conducted groundbreaking work with a consortium of economists, developmental psychologists, sociologists, statisticians and neuroscientists showing that quality early childhood development heavily influences health, economic and social outcomes for individuals and society at large. Heckman has shown that there are great economic gains to be had by investing in early childhood development. Some of this research is with Flávio Cunha of the Rice Economics Department, including a paper on “Estimating the Technology of Cognitive and Noncognitive Skill Formation (also with Susanne Schennach of Brown University) which won the 2014 Frisch Medal for the best paper published over a two-year interval in the journal Econometrica. Along with Daniel McFadden of the University of California at Berkeley, Heckman was awarded the 2000 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences for their development of theory and methods in the field of microeconometrics that are widely used in the statistical analysis of individual and household behavior within economics as well as other social sciences. He was especially recognized for the Heckman Selection Model, which is a method for estimating regression models which suffer from sample selection bias, a bias that arises when a non-random sample of a population is analyzed. Heckman is the recipient of many other awards, including the John Bates Clark Medal awarded by the American Economic Association for significant contributions to economic thought and knowledge by an economist under the age of forty, and the Jacob Mincer Award for lifetime contributions in the field of labor economics presented by the Society of Labour Economics. According to rankings compiled by Research Papers in Economics (RePEc), Heckman is the second most influential economist in the world.

Heckman will present his lecture, entitled “Interactions as Investments” on Thursday, November 4, 2021 at 5:00 p.m. in the BRC (BioScience Research Collaborative) Auditorium. All Rice COVID protocols, including the wearing of masks indoors, will of course be followed. Please REGISTER if you wish to attend. We hope to see you there!

The RISE Nobel Laureate Lecture Series is made possible by a gift from Doyle Arnold ’70, who is profiled below.
What prompted you to endow the RISE Nobel Laureate Lecture Series?

When former Economics Department Chair, Antonio Merlo, came to Rice and, with Rob Ladd, was forming the RISE Council, he asked about my undergraduate experience at Rice and what could have made it better. I told him how impressed I was that the elite schools in the Northeast, and Stanford, where I got my MBA, always seemed to be on the distinguished lecture circuit. In addition to great academics, which Rice also had, those schools had a constant stream of practitioner/academics—former members of the Federal Reserve Board, Cabinet secretaries, etc.—giving guest lectures, joining an institute for a time, and so forth. Rice, being on the “third coast” didn’t seem to be in that flow, and students did not get as much of that exposure. I also told Antonio that my only personal “claim to fame” in economics was to have had the pleasure and privilege of studying at the graduate level under two future Nobel Prize winners in Economics—and to have gotten “A’s” from both!

Out of those two observations came our joint idea of developing this lecture series. We decided to make the series a combination of (1) a public lecture on a topic of the speaker’s choice, but one that should be of interest to and understandable by a well-educated lay audience, and (2) time spent discussing current economic topics and research with faculty and students—particularly graduate students. It has been a personal pleasure to have had both of my former teachers deliver these lectures at Rice.

How does such a lecture series fit in with your hopes for the future of Rice?

We had several objectives in starting the series: (1) to increase Rice’s visibility in the Houston and donor communities, as a place grappling with some of the major economic policy issues of our day; (2) to give Rice students and faculty a chance to interact with and learn from these path-breaking economists; and finally (3) to thereby expose these economists to the extremely high quality of Rice students and faculty, which they might then talk about and increase Rice’s visibility back at their university homes. I think we’ve partially achieved all of these objectives, but we still have room to improve, particularly in using these lectures to increase Rice’s public visibility and stature.

You have been associated with Rice for many years. In what ways has the university changed and in what ways has it remained the same?

What has stayed the same is what I hope never changes: (1) the great faculty devoted not just to research, but to outstanding teaching; (2) the talented, interesting students; and (3) the residential college system, which breaks down an already modest-sized undergraduate student body into even smaller social groups that are non-competitive to join and give everyone—from the most introverted to the most extroverted—a way to find a place and a role. What has changed for the better is greatly increased diversity, on multiple dimensions—race and ethnicity, and international.

What I’m concerned about is the elimination of a required classical liberal education, which the undergraduate “distribution requirements” approach does not really foster. I know it has fallen out of favor to require any grounding in history, Western Civilization, or English literature. Nor are students required to get much if any exposure to the incredible breadth of Eastern histories, political systems and cultures. However, I fear that this is resulting in graduates who lack a degree of historical perspective and have moral certainty about their own positions that is not warranted. If I could make one change at Rice, it would be to institute a two-year, required undergraduate course sequence—one year in Western history/civilization and one year in Eastern history/civilization. This would give all our graduates—both U. S. and international—a much better foundational basis to understand and deal with, but also respectfully disagree with, those from other cultural backgrounds. Unfortunately, I don’t hold out much hope of seeing this change soon!

What about the Economics Department?

Like the university, it seems to me that Economics at Rice has grown, both in substance and in stature. I hope and trust that will continue—and certainly support the ongoing effort to strengthen macroeconomics, for example. And, I am extremely pleased that the introductory survey course in economics is the most popular undergraduate course by far. Economics gives one a practical grounding in thinking rigorously, rather than just emotionally, about societal problems and how to address them.

What are your favorite memories of your time at Rice?

That’s an easy question: the professors who changed my understanding of and ways of thinking about the world around me!

Many Thanks to Doyle Arnold ’70!

We would like to offer our sincere thanks to Mr. Doyle Arnold, a 1970 Rice Economics (and Mathematics) alum, who recently established an endowment to finance in perpetuity our RISE Nobel Laureate Lecture Series, a departmental highlight that he has been supporting since 2015. Mr. Arnold currently serves on the RISE Council, is the Chair of the Dean’s Advisory Board for Rice’s School of Social Sciences, and is a Trustee Emeritus on the Rice University Board of Trustees. He served in several executive positions at Zions Bancorporation from 2001 until retiring in 2015 as vice chairman and chief financial officer. RICE ECON recently had a chance to visit with Mr. Arnold.

Many Thanks to Doyle Arnold ’70!
ECON 280, Transportation, Infrastructure and Logistics, is a course that will be taught in the Spring 2022 semester by Ed Emmett (’71), who is a Fellow in Energy and Transportation Policy at the Baker Institute Center for Energy Studies and a Rice Professor in the Practice; he is also a Distinguished Senior Fellow at Northeastern University’s Global Resilience Institute. Ed was Harris County Judge from 2007-2019, and served as a Texas state representative from 1979 to 1987 where he chaired the Committee on Energy and was a member of the Transportation Committee. He was appointed in 1989 by President George H.W. Bush to the Interstate Commerce Commission where he served for three years. Ed has been recognized internationally for his work in transportation and logistics and was named Transportation Person of the Year by Transportation Clubs International. He currently chairs the Texas Freight Advisory Committee. Ed earned his B.A. in Economics from Rice and was a president of Lovett College – not to mention that he was a walk-on member of the tennis team, and he and George Zodrow, current ECON department chair, were the left and right ends on a Lovett football team that won the intramural championship.

ECON 280 focuses on the fact that the health of an economy depends critically on the efficient flow of goods and products — a point clearly illustrated by the supply chain problems that are currently plaguing the US and world economies. The course will analyze the economic impacts of transportation, infrastructure and logistics from a policy perspective. Topics covered will include technological change, regulation versus deregulation, the impact of globalization, and the roles of government and agencies at various levels. Readings will include specific case studies as well as three books that provide a broad overview of the importance of transportation policy.

The class will meet in the spring on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2:30-3:15 pm. It is open to majors and non-majors, has a pre-requisite of ECON 100 or ECON 200, and provides three hours of university credit but does not count toward the ECON or MTEC majors.

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**Former County Judge Ed Emmett to Teach ECON 280**

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**A Blast from the Past: The Economics Department, 2006**
Mahmoud El-Gamal, Professor of Economics and Statistics, Chair in Islamic Economics, Finance, and Management

Research Interests: International Economics and Finance, Econometrics, Behavioral Economics, and Islamic Law and Finance

Mahmoud El-Gamal is a Professor of Economics and Statistics, a Baker Institute Rice Faculty Scholar, and holds the Chair in Islamic Economics, Finance, and Management at Rice. He served as chair of the economics department from 2008-11 and on Rice’s Faculty Senate from 2012-13 and 2018-21. He served previously as associate editor for the Journal of Economic Dynamics and Control and for Macroeconomic Dynamics, and on the Middle East Advisory Group at the International Monetary Fund. Professor El-Gamal received his Ph.D. from Northwestern and has previously held posts at the U.S. Department of the Treasury, the University of Wisconsin at Madison, the International Monetary Fund, and California Institute of Technology.

How did you first become interested in economics?

I had followed my brothers into engineering, but reading about problems of poverty and famine, even as edible grains were intentionally destroyed and farmers were paid to produce fewer crops, convinced me that the most pressing problems were ones of distribution rather than production. I thought that economics would provide the tools for finding solutions to these problems that were simultaneously humane and incentive compatible – so that richer nations and individuals would willingly provide sufficient help to the poor, and the poor would not disrupt the efficient production processes that enriched the wealthy. Although there have been some bright spots, I am sad to report that working genuinely to solve such problems has not been incentive compatible for most economists, myself included.

Can you give us a brief summary of your fields of research?

I wrote my dissertation on chaotic dynamical systems, hoping to break from economists’ obsession with the circular reasoning of equilibrium analysis. That led me to study how such dynamics can emerge in economies populated by agents who learn using optimal (Bayesian) or other methods. This, in turn, led me to study experimentally how humans update their beliefs in individual decision problems as well as strategic game interactions. After coming to Rice, I sought to apply my craft and insights to understanding the legal and economic evolution of my native Middle East, which has been shaped during my lifetime by Islam and petrodollars. I continue to study the complex dynamics of religion, ethics and economics, on the one hand, and their interactions with dynamics of geopolitics, energy and financial markets, on the other.

What are some of your favorite current research projects and what impact do you hope your research achieves?

I admire colleagues who pursue impactful research, but I no longer belong to that branch of academia. I subscribe now to the ancient tradition of pursuing knowledge as its own reward. The two strands of my ongoing research are very critical of contemporary Muslim thought on law and economics, on the one hand, and the economic policies pursued by hydrocarbon-rich Arab countries and their labor-exporting neighbors, on the other. I am perfectly satisfied if this research has no immediate impact and will be happy but seek no acknowledgement if it helps future generations to avoid some tragic mistakes.

You served for a year as Provost at the American University in Cairo – what are your most memorable experiences?

As John Waterbury, the former President of American University of Beirut, had said to encourage me to take the job at AUC, which is my alma mater, the two commencements were my most memorable experiences. They were the culminations of service to my colleagues and successive cohorts of students. I like to think in terms of flipping the traditional org-charts of universities and viewing them as trees: The shining fruits, flowers and leaves at the top are students and scholars; chairs sit at the branches trying to tend to them; deans sit at the roots trying to siphon nutrients from the soil to feed their departments; and I as the provost was responsible for tilling the soil to direct resources to the roots of different trees. On commencement days, I could briefly revel in seeing the fruits of our labors.

What do you enjoy most about teaching at Rice?

I was a very argumentative student, and I enjoy interacting with argumentative students who challenge me. There seem to be fewer students now who do this, but I am grateful for those who engage an argument for the sake of argument, which is the only path to illumination for student and teacher alike.

What are your favorite hobbies?

Reading, reading and reading.

For more information on Professor El-Gamal’s research projects, including current working papers and a CV, see the Faculty Page on the Economics Department website.
We strongly encourage our students to present their research at conferences and other forums and are delighted to report that there has been a flurry of activity over recent months. Recent student presentations include:

**Kirill Evdokimov**: Society for the Advancement of Economic Theory (June 15).

**Qinyou Hu**: Population Association of America Annual Meeting (May 5); Society of Labor Economics Annual Meeting (May 14); Young Economist Symposium (August 17).

**Kelly Neill**: Australian Conference of Economists (July 12).

**Andrea Salvati**: Swiss Society of Economics and Statistics (June 11); European Society of Population Economics (June 18); European Economic Association and Econometric Society European Meeting (August 23); Labor Econometrics Workshop at Monash University (August 26); European Association of Labor Economists (September 16).

**Fisher Yu**: 7th International Young Finance Scholars’ Conference (July 13); International Finance and Banking Society Oxford Conference (September 15).

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**Note from Hülya Eraslan, Director of Graduate (PhD) Studies**

We are delighted to have our classes back in face-to-face format this year! In contrast to last year, we have a more normal-sized class and the students are all very enthusiastic, asking good questions and making good comments in lectures. Please keep up the good work.

We understand that you are all extremely busy with your coursework right now, but we also urge you to think about internships and jobs. The end of the academic year will arrive sooner than you appreciate. As part of getting ready to interview, please also take seriously the task of getting your portrait taken for our web site.

Speaking of internships and jobs, I also want to take this opportunity to thank Rivka Ettinger, who has done such a good job helping the MEECON students with resumes, interviews and finding employment. We are disappointed that she is leaving Rice, but are hopeful the Social Science Dean’s office will find a suitable replacement reasonably quickly.

Finally, I just wanted to confirm that the Baker Institute has graciously agreed to allow MEECON students to use the Barbara and Gerald Hines Research Lab (310 and 310A) as a study space.

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**Note from Peter Hartley, Co-Director of the MEECON Program**

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**Meet Marcie Carlson, New Coordinator of our PhD Program**

We are pleased to welcome Marcie Carlson as the new program coordinator for our PhD program. Marcie comes to us from the Jones Graduate School of Business where she had been a faculty coordinator since 2012 and was the recipient of a Rice Mile award, which recognizes excellent performance by university staff. Prior to coming to Rice, she worked in admissions at Texas Woman's University. Marcie has been working in the department since the beginning of the semester, and said, “I am enjoying my new adventure in the Economics Department, learning a lot and gradually settling in.” Director of Graduate Studies Hülya Eraslan told RICE ECON, “We are delighted that Marcie has joined our team and looking forward to her help as we continue to improve our program and provide an outstanding learning environment for our students.”

Marcie and her husband Curtis have been married for 21 years, and have two sons, Leif (28 years old) and Ethan (11 years old). She added, “We also have two puppies, a 4-month old blue heeler and a 6-month old red heeler. My son Ethan and I have both studied the violin, and I am really proud he is interested in the same instrument I love.”

If you haven’t met Marcie yet, stop by her office (KRF 406) and say hello!
Economics Faculty: Recent Achievements

Honors and Awards in 2020 and 2021

Hülya Eraslan was appointed a Fellow of the Game Theory Society, an organization created in 1999 to promote research, teaching and application of game theory. Fellows of the Society are scholars who are honored for their contributions to game theory as well as their service to the Society.

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Ken Wolpin received the Jacob Mincer Award, presented by the Society for Labour Economist for lifetime contributions to the field of labor economics. Wolpin is the retired former Lay Family Chair of Economics and Chair of the Rice Economics Department.

Isabelle Perrigne was awarded the Reginald Henry Hargrove Chair in Economics.

Mallesh Pai was awarded the Lay Family Chair in Economics.

James Brown won the 2021 Malcolm Gillis Award for Distinction in Undergraduate Teaching in Economics.

Richard Boylan won the 2021 Ralph O’Connor Award for Distinction in Teaching and Research in Economics.

Vivian Ho was elected to the National Academy of Medicine.

Jeremy Fox was awarded the Shatto Endowed Chair of Economics.


Michele Biavati won the 2020 Malcolm Gillis Award for Distinction in Undergraduate Teaching in Economics.

Rossella Calvi won the 2020 Ralph O’Connor Award for Distinction in Teaching and Research in Economics.

Articles Accepted or Published Since July 1, 2020


YingHua He, “Impact of Air Pollution on Human Activities: Evidence from Nine Million Mobile Phone Users,” *PLOS One*, 2021 (with Wei Chen and Shiyan Pan).


**Grants Awarded or Ongoing in 2020 and 2021**


Rossella Calvi and Hülya Eraslan, “Political Alignment and COVID-19 Response of Local Governments,” Rice University (with Dibya Mishra and Ritika Sethi).


Vivian Ho, “Does Physician-Hospital Integration Affect the Quality and Price of Hospital Care?,” Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.


**Books Published in 2020 and 2021**

