

RICE ECON

News and Views from the Economics Department at Rice

Our heartiest congratulations to the Director of our Principles of Economics program, Senior Lecturer James (Jimmy) DeNicco, who is a 2022 recipient of a George R. Brown Award for Superior Teaching (story below). We would also like to congratulate the roughly eighty students who will be graduating in May with ECON and MTEC degrees – and to all of our departmental award winners who will be honored at our annual RISE (Rice Initiative for the Study of Economics) Day celebration, which will be held in the Kraft Hall Multi-purpose Room (KRF 130) from 4:00-6:00 pm on Saturday, April 23. Award

winners will be named soon!

I hope you attended our RISE “Conversations with Our Faculty” webinar on March 23. This event featured two of our outstanding junior faculty members, Yunmi Kong and YingHua He, who discussed their latest research projects. Details are provided in the story below.

We have also started a new speaker series, organized by our Director of Undergraduate Studies, Malleesh Pai, that is targeted at undergraduates interested in joining the workforce after graduation. We’re calling this series “RISE:

Conversations with Our Alumni,” and this event will feature a discussion with a Rice alum who has gone on to a successful career in an Economics/Finance related field. The first in this series was held on March 30. More details are provided in the story below.

Finally, if you are interested in what your instructors have been doing lately, our department website highlights recent [faculty achievements](#). Hope that the rest of your spring semester goes well.

George Zodrow
Chair, Department of Economics

Jimmy DeNicco Wins a Brown Teaching Award (AGAIN!)

We are delighted to report that our Director of the Principles of Economics program, Senior Lecturer James (Jimmy) DeNicco, is a 2022 recipient of a George R. Brown Award for Superior Teaching. This is of course not Jimmy’s first university-level teaching award. Indeed, just last year he was awarded the George R. Brown Prize for Excellence in Teaching, the most prestigious teaching award given by the university. Following Rice tradition, Jimmy will deliver the 2022 Brown Lecture on Teaching Excellence at this year’s University Awards ceremony on April 26.

Jimmy has received many other teaching accolades at Rice. In his first year here (2015-16), he was awarded the first Malcolm Gillis Award for Distinction in Undergraduate Teaching in Economics. In 2018 he won both the Sarah A. Burnett Teaching Prize in the Social Sciences and the Nicholas Salgo Distinguished Teaching Award, Rice’s oldest teaching award, which is based on the votes of current juniors and seniors. He has been named a “Favorite Professor” by Rice’s scholar-athletes on several occasions. Jimmy is also involved in numerous other Rice activities. He is the Faculty Liaison for the Rice Honor Council and has been a Faculty Associate at Baker College for seven years, where he was named the 2016 “Outstanding Faculty Associate” and received the 2017 “Garside Award for Service.”

Jimmy attributes his success as a teacher to his ability to engage with his students on many levels. He emphasizes that, “I really strive to make my classroom an energetic, friendly and fun place where students feel comfortable enough to sit back, relax and enjoy engaging in the material.”

In his upcoming Brown Lecture, Jimmy plans to talk about, “Finding Your Fun in the Classroom,” where he will discuss his approach to teaching, from organization to assignments to employing different presentation styles to reach more of his students.

Jimmy is currently involved in a new textbook project for his classes in an effort to make learning more affordable. The book will be titled *A Story of Economics: A Principles Tale*. He notes that, “I am trying to bring the story of introductory economics I tell in my classroom to the written page for my students. Along with the textbook, I am building up my Canvas page with complimentary videos, assignments and discussions to get away from my students having to pay for course materials.”

Economics Department Chair George Zodrow, who will introduce Jimmy at this year’s University Awards ceremony, said, “We are delighted but not surprised that Jimmy has won another prestigious teaching award at Rice. His passion for teaching economics and his commitment to our students are legendary, and in just a few short years he has become one of the most popular instructors on campus. We are indeed fortunate to have him leading our Principles of Economics program.”



Advising Corner: ECON Undergraduate Committee



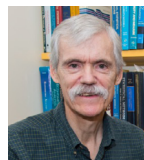
Mallesh Pai, Director
of Undergrad Studies



Maria Bejan
Major Adviser



Nina Bokova
Major Adviser



James Brown
Major Adviser



James DeNitto
Major Adviser



Mahmoud El-Gamal
Major Adviser

Menu

Main Course: ECON 465,
Markets, Governments and
Resource Allocation

Appetizers: ECON 200, MATH
212

Master Chef: Dr. John W.
Diamond, Kelly Fellow at the
Baker Institute

Dinner is Served: Spring 2023,
Mondays and Wednesdays, 4:00-
5:15 pm

*Come enjoy a
gastroeconomical delight!*

New Course on the Menu

ECON 465 lays the foundation for the theory of policy analysis, including an introduction to economic modeling. The course begins by introducing the basic model of the competitive economy, and then investigating the efficiency of the competitive equilibrium under a host of assumptions needed to derive a tractable model. The leads to the development of the two fundamental theorems of welfare economics. The course then discusses an analysis of government and lays out an overview of the public sector. The public sector accounts for about a third of all economic activity in the United States, which is relatively small compared to some other industrialized countries. The decisions of various governments affect us daily in many ways, and the course will analyze the activities of government with a particular focus on the theory and evidence on government expenditure policy. It then examines the existence and importance of various market failures and potential government solutions, followed by an analysis of the public sector and its decision-making process.

Frontiers in Economics 4 Ukraine

In solidarity with the people of Ukraine, and in particular with the Kyiv School of Economics (to which several members of our department share a personal connection), Mallesh Pai, in collaboration with faculty at the University of Birmingham, the Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, the University of Mannheim, and the Toulouse School of Economics, is organizing a virtual seminar series, the "KSE Frontiers in Economics 4 Ukraine." The first of these was held on March 30, with Jean Tirole, winner of the 2014 Nobel Prize in Economics, talking about "Privacy and the Control of Citizens." Subsequent speakers will include Daron Acemoglu of MIT, Steven Durlauf of the University of Chicago, and Stefanie Stantcheva of Harvard University. Currently, the seminars are scheduled for every Wednesday at 11:00 am CST. Details about future seminars and sign-up procedures are available at <https://sites.google.com/view/fie4ukr>. The speakers have been encouraged to present "frontier" work, as a play on the etymology of the word Ukraine.



KSE | Kyiv
School of
Economics

RISE Event: Conversations with Our Faculty

On Wednesday, March 23 at 4:00 p.m., we held another installment of our RISE webinars entitled “Conversations with Our Faculty.” The event featured two of our outstanding junior faculty members, Professors Yunmi Kong and YingHua He, who discussed their ongoing research projects.

Yunmi’s talk was entitled “Auctions and Arbitration in the Public Sector.” It examined public sector economic activity that is mediated by what economists view as strategic “games,” such as auctions in procurement and arbitration in labor disputes. The designs of these games can profoundly impact government revenue and resource allocation. Yunmi discussed various design choices that have been made in applications ranging from mineral leasing in New Mexico to wage arbitration for police in New Jersey, and explained what the data can tell us about the merits of different designs.

YingHua’s talk examined “Optimal Allocation without Money: School Seats, Donor Kidneys, and Beyond.” Traditional economics studies resource allocations where monetary prices adjust so that supply equals demand. However, in some cases, monetary prices cannot be used: Tuition and fees that can be charged at public schools and even public colleges and universities are highly regulated, and monetary payments for human organs are illegal. How can resources be allocated efficiently in such cases? YingHua discussed ways to address this question, with applications from Houston, New York City, and Paris, as well as country-wide applications in France and Germany.



Yunmi Kong is an assistant professor who joined the economics department in 2016 after receiving her doctorate from New York University. Her research combines data analysis with economic theory to analyze auctions and other institutions through which buyers and sellers interact. She is the 2022 recipient of the Korea-America Economic Association Young Scholar Award and the 2018 recipient of Rice’s Malcolm Gillis Award for Distinction in Undergraduate Teaching in Economics.

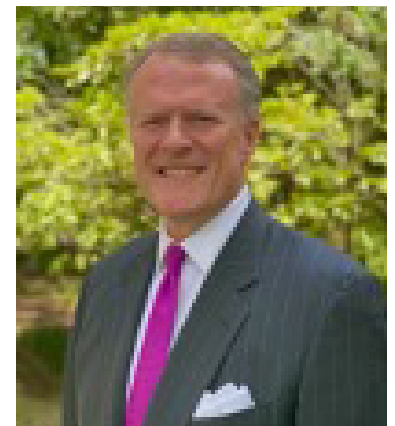
YingHua He has been an assistant professor at Rice since 2016. He uses a variety of analytical tools to study the allocation of resources when monetary prices are precluded. He has developed new scientific methods that facilitate the use of data in improving resource allocation policies. He has also developed novel algorithms for school choice and kidney exchange. Many of his results can be readily be applied in practice.



RISE Event: Conversations with Our Alumni

We have created a new speaker series targeted at undergraduates interested in joining the workforce after graduation. We’re calling this seminar series “RISE: Conversations with Our Alumni” (to complement our popular RISE: Conversations with Our Faculty series that highlights Economics Department faculty research). Every semester, we will have a fireside chat with a Rice alum who has gone on to a successful career in an Economics/Finance related field.

The first in the “RISE: Conversations with Our Alumni” series was held on a lovely spring afternoon on March 30. A dozen or so ECON, MTEC and MEOS majors stopped by for a freewheeling conversation with Sten Gustafson (’89), who is a member of our RISE Council and the CEO of Pyrophyte Acquisition Corp. The event was chaired by RISE Council chairman Nick Zdeblick, who titled this edition of the event “Charting a Career Path Without a Map.” Sten talked in response to questions asked by Nick and the audience about various choices he made in his career, his observations about hiring Rice and non-Rice undergrads (he favored the former!), and his experience advising his own children. We’re looking forward to hosting the second in this series next fall!



About Sten: Mr. Sten Gustafson is a highly experienced energy service industry executive, investment banker, and corporate securities attorney, and is currently CEO of Pyrophyte Acquisition Corp. (NYSE: PHYT). With over 25 years of experience in the global energy sector, he has advised on over 100 corporate transactions around the world for over \$100 billion of transaction value. He earned a B.A. from Rice in 1989 and a J.D. from the University of Houston in 1992. Mr. Gustafson and his wife, alumna Sofia Adrogué (’88), have three children including their daughter, Schuyler (’22), who currently attends Rice, and Stefan (’26), who will attend and play football for Rice.

And about Nick: Mr. Nicholas (Nick) Zdeblick has been the Chair of the RISE Council since 2020 when he took over from the founding Chair, Mr. Rob Ladd, who is currently the Chair of the Rice Board of Trustees. Nick is a Principal at Fayez Sarofim & Co. and a member of the Rice Investment Committee. He has been a community associate at Jones College since 2007, is an Owls season ticket holder, and now lives with his wife Beth and their two young children just across the street from Rice.

Spotlight on Our Faculty: Ted Loch-Temzelides



Ted Loch-Temzelides, George and Cynthia Mitchell Professor in Sustainable Development

Research Interests: Climate and Energy Economics and Policy; Sustainability and Conservation; Global Health and the Environment

Ted Loch-Temzelides holds the George and Cynthia Mitchell Professor in Sustainable Development in the Department of Economics and is also a James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy Center for Energy Studies Scholar. His research interests include the energy transition towards a sustainable economy, conservation agreements, global health, and non-standard models of individual decision-making. His current research focus is in quantifying the economic and health consequences resulting from climate change, pollution, deforestation, and zoonotic pathogen transmission. He serves on the editorial board of the journal *Economic Theory*, and is a fellow in the CESifo Research Network.

How did you first become interested in economics?

I have always been interested in solving problems subject to constraints. This is what defines economics for me.

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

I currently mostly work on the energy transition toward a sustainable economy. Climate change is one of the biggest challenges faced by humanity and we need to do a lot more in order to address it. I am also interested in the many connections between ecology and economics, especially the economic consequences of deforestation.

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

On the last topic of deforestation, I am working with an interdisciplinary team that includes physicians and infectious disease biologists, in addition to economists, in order to compute the social cost of deforestation in a way that

accounts for the effects of deforestation on human health. Rainforests are hotbeds of virus evolution, and there is evidence that these viruses can reach humans with a higher frequency as the interface between forests and human activity increases. In addition, climate change results in vector borne diseases, like malaria, reaching wider human populations than before. We hope this research will inform conservation efforts around the world.

You and your wife Beata, who is Rice's Study Abroad Director, were Magisters at Martel College – what are your most memorable and forgettable experiences?

We were fortunate enough to be Magisters of the best college ever for six years and we enjoyed every minute of it! The colleges represent the best of Rice. We have great facilities, faculty, and staff, but our best asset, by far, is our students. The dedicated student governance structure that effectively runs the colleges is the best example of that. We made lifelong friendships that we cherish. One of the greatest things we witnessed was the students in the college coming together and supporting each other during challenging times.

What do you enjoy most about being at Rice?

My family includes Rice faculty, staff, a current Rice student, and a Rice alum. We consider Rice University to be an extended family. It is a diverse, friendly, open and accepting place. The world would be a better place if it were a bit more like Rice.

What are your favorite hobbies?

Beata and I enjoy traveling and cheering for the Owls tennis teams at every opportunity.

For more information on Professor Loch-Temzelides's research projects, including current working papers and a C.V., see the [Faculty Page](#) on the Economics Department website.



Grad Student Highlights from Our Ph.D. and MEECON Programs

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

The first cohort of students who went through our restructured PhD curriculum were on the job market this year and met with excellent results. Most of them received multiple attractive offers, which is especially impressive given that we are in one of the toughest markets in recent memory. Some have finalized their decisions and are ready for the next exciting stage in their careers, while others are still deciding. A few of them decided to go on the non-academic market and are still in the process of applying for positions.

Among those who have been placed, Rajarshi Bhowal will be joining Nazarbayev University in Astana, Kazakhstan as an assistant professor. He said, "I truly appreciate the help and support we received from the faculty members and special thanks to Marcie for the effort she has put in during our application process." Kirill Evdokimov is planning to accept a postdoctoral fellowship at Princeton University. Igor Hernandez will join the Brattle Group, a Boston-based consulting firm that has hired several of our graduates. Ajinkya Keskar accepted a one-year postdoctoral fellowship at J-PAL South Asia (the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab at the Institute for Financial Management and Research in New Delhi, India), after which he will be starting as an assistant professor at SUNY, Binghamton in 2023. Kelly Neil will be joining the University of Sydney as a lecturer, a position that is equivalent to assistant professor in the United States. She said, "I have learned such a lot at Rice – in class, from my advisors, from the other students. It has been a lot of hard work, and I've had a bit of luck, but I am SO happy to have the job that I wanted all along! Shout out to Peter, Isabelle, Ken, the Economics Department and the Center for Energy Studies." Andrea Salvati will be joining University College London as a postdoctoral fellow, a top department worldwide in Andrea's research area of labor economics. He is also on the waiting list for an assistant professor position at NYU. Xunjie Zheng accepted an offer from Bates White, an economics consulting firm in Washington DC.

Commenting on the success of our students, placement director Ted Loch-Temzelides, who worked diligently in leading the placement effort, said, "All of the credit should go to our students' dissertation advisers and committee members, and of course to our creative and hard-working students themselves." Congratulations to them all!

I am also delighted to report that sixth-year Ph.D. student Hira Farooqi has recently been awarded a research grant from the Center for Financial Security (CFS) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, which is part of the Social Security Administration Retirement and Disability Research Consortium. In this project, she and her co-author Dr. Brielle Bryan, Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at Rice, will explore the implications of juvenile justice involvement of children on maternal labor market outcomes and financial well-being. Their research aims to shed light on the extent to which child incarceration imposes restrictions on women's economic participation, eventually contributing to gender inequality in access to Social Security benefits, private savings, and the need for SSI in old age. More broadly, Hira's research focuses on the economics of gender and family. She is particularly interested in studying how social norms and institutions shape women's decisions regarding human capital investment, fertility, and family formation.



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



Forbes recently profiled MEECON (Master in Energy Economics) alumnus Sid Battacharya as one of the "Top 30 under 30 in Energy." Sid performed extremely well in his MEECON courses and was a gregarious student, always full of humor and good spirits. He completed his undergraduate degree at the University of Adelaide in South Australia. He chose to come to Rice after I met with him and described the program on a visit to Perth in Western Australia. It was clear from that first meeting that Sid was an exceptional person.

After graduating from Rice, Sid cofounded the Data Science and Analytics business in Accenture's energy sector. He later founded and leads the products and services business of the Amazon Web Services division that caters to the energy industry – helping the operators of oil and gas operations, chemical plants, renewable energy projects and even nuclear plant operators.

Meet Tangie Robertson, New Coordinator of our MEECON Program

We are pleased to welcome Tangie Robertson as the new program coordinator for our MEECON program; she is also the coordinator for all of our RISE (Rice Initiative for the Study of Economics) activities, including the annual Nobel Laureate Lecture. Tangie comes to us from the Jones Graduate School of Business where she has been a faculty program coordinator since 2017 and was the recipient of a Rice Mile award, which recognizes excellent performance by university staff. Prior to coming to Rice, she worked in Continuing and Professional Studies at the University of Houston. Tangie has been working in the department since February 1, and said, "I am happy to be a part of the Economics Department team and would like to say thanks for the warm welcome." Director of the MEECON program Peter Hartley told RICE ECON, "We are delighted that Tangie 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 MEECON students."

Tangie is the mother of two, Trevor (30) and Makayla (23), and the grandma of a three-year-old puppy named Gizmo. She added, "I enjoy creating custom design T-shirts in my free time. I also enjoy walks in the park and taking spontaneous road trips with my sister, Barbara."

If you haven't met Tangie yet, stop by her office (KRF 406) and say hello!



More About the MEECON Program



Peter Hartley
Co-Director, MEECON Program

The Master of Energy Economics is a full-time, 12-month professional master's degree. The curriculum is offered in four terms, normally with the final term devoted to an internship or practicum. Students are required to complete 40 credit hours within the 12 months, which are separated into four sessions. Sessions I and II correspond to the fall and spring semesters, respectively, and follow the standard Rice academic calendar. Sessions III and IV are consecutive 7-week-long sessions that take place during the summer. All courses in Session I, and two in Session II, are mandatory. Sessions II and III provide a variety of specialized elective courses of particular interest to a subset of students. Students have the option to accelerate their program of study by taking additional elective courses in the spring semester.

All students are also required to complete an internship or practicum to provide them with practical experience relevant to the degree. The practicum is a research project similar to what students will encounter in industry. It is developed by a group of participating industry advisors to whom the student will also present their analyses at the end of the degree program. Internships provide prospective employers with an opportunity to effectively evaluate new talent. Students complete the required

internship in Sessions II, III, or IV. However, the practicum is only available in Session IV. The internship should be directly related to the MEECON degree program. It is recognized that some students may be employed in an industry that provides a suitable internship opportunity. These students may be able to fulfill the internship requirement by working on a special project with their current employer.

The MEECON Program develops and educates future leaders and strategic thinkers in the energy sector. The program trains participants to provide insightful analysis and to inform such things as capital asset decisions, firm strategic direction and future market orientation by combining the disciplined study of market and economic principles with a deep understanding of the functioning and inter-connections of the energy industry. At the core of any discussion of these matters is the manner in which energy markets function. The inexorable link between economic activity and energy demand implies that understanding the sources of growth is critical to determining the market pull for energy resources. The economic factors that determine supply and deliverability then determine how the demand for energy services will be met. More specifically, the economics of energy supply and deliverability affect how energy resources are allocated through both space and time.

We are particularly proud to offer the program here in Houston, the widely recognized energy capital of the world, and at Rice which already has an existing reputation in energy studies built upon the programs in the Economics Department and the Baker Institute's Center for Energy Studies (CES). The commitment of Rice to training future leaders in academia, business, and government and the proven excellence of the Center for Energy Studies in creating cutting edge analysis of the energy industry provides a solid foundation for the program. We also bring in reputable scholars from around the country to teach program electives and impart a deeper understanding of specialized fields as well as give participants an opportunity to network and field questions directly to the experts.