

Service Narrative

I have an extensive record of engaging in service not just to the Department of Applied Economics, but also to the broader University, my profession, and society as a whole.

Service to the department

One of the primary ways I have served my department is **as an active, engaged member of departmental committees**. I have served on three committees since I was hired. First, I was on the undergraduate committee for my first six years as a faculty member (2015-21). In that position, I reviewed and voted on proposals for new courses. I also helped lead a discussion of whether to rename one of our undergraduate majors. Second, I was on the awards committee from 2017-18; during that year I coordinated our successful nomination of one of my colleagues for the CFANS Graduate Teaching Award. Finally, as a member of the communication committee (2015-17, 2021-present), I have helped to review and update the department's website and our strategy for communication more generally.

I have also been the **departmental representative for the University Honors Program (UHP)** since 2018. In this role I have been the approver for honors theses and been UHP's point of contact for communicating new policies and scheduling meetings. Until the COVID-19 pandemic began, I also regularly attended UHP events to get to know honors students and to enhance their experience at the University. I also helped bring about two changes in how the honors program works in our department, which dovetailed with my work as a member of the undergraduate committee. First, I led the overhaul of our rules for honors theses to bring them in line with UHP's goals. Second, I have helped to promote additional ways for students to get honors course credits within APEC. In particular, I developed an honors contract for my undergraduate course (APEC 3001), which successfully led to a student getting honors credit for the course; in the future, this contract could be the basis for a permanent honors option. I have also promoted the use of these honors contracts in other courses in our department, exploring whether professors are willing to try them and connecting them with honors students in their classes.

I have **co-organized our Trade & Development Seminar series** since 2015, finding speakers to invite and setting up the schedule of talks. As part of this, I actively encourage students to meet with the outside faculty who visit our department. This has paid dividends: in the past, very prominent academics ended up with mostly empty schedules. Now the meeting schedules are much fuller, and my students are heavily represented.

I have taken advantage of my role in organizing the seminar series to **promote diversity in the economics profession**, by inviting women, people of color, and junior scholars to give talks. I made a particular effort on this front for the Spring 2020 seminar series, when I was tasked with organizing the seminar series on my own because my senior colleague, Professor Paul Glewwe, was on sabbatical. The talks were all canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but my speaker invitations were rolled over into the fall term. I was thus successful in organizing a slate of speakers for that term that was entirely made up of people who are female, from developing countries, or both. This was an explicit goal of mine because of the problems with representation in

economics—and because of the large numbers of people from both groups who work in international development.

I also sit on the steering committee for the Center for International Food and Agricultural Policy (CIFAP). In this role I help make decisions, and vote on, our funding priorities; I also review grant applications for CIFAP’s calls for proposals.

Since 2020, I have served as the placement co-director for our PhD students. In this role, I guide them through the job market process, helping explain how the job market works for PhD economists and running practice interviews to help them prepare. I also provide guidance to candidates who have interviews or job offers and need advice on what to do or how to make decisions.

Another aspect of my department service is providing peer reviews of my colleagues’ teaching. I have done this twice: for Joe Ritter’s APEC 8211 and 8212 courses (each of which is half a semester) and for Marc Bellemare’s APEC 8703 course. When I conduct a peer review, I provide feedback on the syllabus and the overall course goals, and the assigned readings for the course. I also observe a lecture and give the instructor detailed feedback on their slides, oral presentation, interactions with students, and other aspects of their teaching.

One more general way that I serve the department is by being a very active participant in department events. The APEC department holds a number of regular social events for faculty, staff, and both undergraduate and graduate students. I make a point of attending as many of these as I can, from welcome BBQs for the graduate students to commencement receptions for the undergraduates to award ceremonies for my colleagues. By doing so I help make our department a more vibrant place for everyone to work, study, and learn. These events were hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic, but I found ways to create and participate in substitutes, such as recording welcome videos for new students and hosting virtual “receptions” for my graduating seniors. In the spring of 2022, I returned to attending in-person events, including both the undergraduate and graduate commencements for CFANS.

Service to the University

Outside of my own department, I am also actively engaged in service to the University as a whole. I am a member of the graduate faculty at the Minnesota Population Center (MPC); in that role I review and vote on proposed courses and changes to the curriculum. I am an active and engaged member of MPC, attending most of their academic and social events. Since 2015, I have also been a member of the Graduate Faculty of the UMN Humphrey School of Public Affairs.

In 2020, I ran for and was elected to the position of **Faculty Senator for CFANS in the University Senate**. I sought out this position in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, because I believe that my background and research focus are uniquely well-suited to understanding and addressing this crisis. In terms of my research background, I have been studying behavioral responses to pandemic diseases for over a decade. Moreover, because I run studies in the typically uncertain environments that characterize developing countries, I have extensive experience in managing budgets in

response to shocks. In my capacity as a Faculty Senator, I have been heavily involved in the University's decisions about COVID-19 mitigation strategies.

Service to the academy

I am an active and engaged member of the scholarly community in the field of economics. This is most clear from my work as a peer reviewer. Since starting at the University of Minnesota I have **refereed articles for 37 different academic journals**. These include all of the top five journals in economics overall (the *American Economic Review*, *Econometrica*, the *Journal of Political Economy*, the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, and the *Review of Economic Studies*), and the top journals in agricultural economics (the *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*) and development economics (the *Journal of Development Economics*). I also regularly review papers from journals that focus on public health and education, due to the overlap of those fields with my research interests. I have written a total of 80 referee reports since my hiring, or an average of more than 11 reviews per academic year. Despite my extensive workload of referee reports, I have maintained high standards for my reviews. One editor wrote to me to commend the review I wrote for her journal, saying "I simply want to thank you for a terrific review. While many reviewers are thoughtful, your review is exemplary."

Beyond these formal referee reports, journal editors sometimes consult me on an informal basis to give an additional opinion on papers they are handling. I also regularly review grant applications for research granting organizations such as the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) and the World Bank; I average around three such reviews per year. In addition to reviewing submitted papers and grants, I also regularly provide other economists with feedback on their research papers and grant applications. This is in addition to, and separate from, reading papers by students in our department.

Another way that I serve the profession is by **helping to organize academic conferences**. I review abstracts for the Midwest International Economic Development Conference each year, and about once in every three years I help to run the conference when it takes place on our campus. I also occasionally review abstracts for other conferences, such as the annual meetings of the Agricultural and Applied Economics Association. I regularly serve as a session chair and paper discussant at conferences; I would estimate that I do each roughly twice a year. Along with my colleague, Professor Marc Bellemare, and Professor Kim Dionne of Smith College, I organized the 2016 Midwest Group in African Political Economy (MGAPE) meeting here at UMN. MGAPE brought faculty from eight other institutions to campus to discuss their research, and also featured a public roundtable discussion of food security in Africa. I took the lead in securing funding for the workshop managing the logistics; I also read and provided detailed comments on all eight papers.

One of my abiding commitments as a development economist is to **help researchers from Africa enter and succeed in the field**. While a great deal of research is conducted in Africa, our profession has a stark shortfall in the number of economists who are from and live on the continent. I work toward addressing this in two key ways. First, I provide mentorship on an informal basis to

junior researchers in Africa, connecting with them at conferences or via social media and helping them navigate tricky aspects of the profession and learn the “hidden curriculum”. Second, I am now a formal mentor to two Ugandan researchers, through the J-PAL African Scholars Mentorship Program. As part of this program, I will help guide them through the process of designing, getting funding for, and carrying out a field experiment.

Service to society more broadly (Outreach)

While I do not hold a formal extension appointment, I believe it is my role as an academic at a public university to **help the public gain access to the frontier of scientific knowledge**. As such, I seek to make my work in particular, and research in international development more generally, as useful as possible to society as a whole. One way that I do this is via my blog, *Ceteris Non Paribus* (Latin for “all else is not equal,” a play on the famous “everything else equal” assumption so often made in economics), which I have been running since graduate school: <https://jasonkerwin.com/nonparibus/>. I use the blog to share my own research in a lay-accessible format, and also to explain and synthesize findings from the field more broadly. In 2021, the blog had 37,000 page views from 23,000 unique users. The most popular post, with 9,250 views, was “Nothing Scales”, a summary of the evidence that development interventions do not seem to work when they are scaled up, and my thoughts on why.

Another post that has gotten extensive traffic is an explanation of randomization inference (a statistical technique that is increasingly popular in economics). One person who reached out to me about the randomization inference post was eventual Nobel Prize winner Guido Imbens of Stanford University. Ezra Golberstein of UMN SPH put the blog post on the syllabus for his Advanced Quantitative Methods Course, PubH 8804, and Jeff Michler and Anna Josephson of the University of Arizona cited the post in their new handbook chapter on inference.

Another way that I serve society more broadly is by **providing advice to international development practitioners**. Sometimes this dovetails with my blog; for example, Innovations for Poverty Action had me give a talk to their staff about my “Nothing Scales” post. Other times, it is based on my research: I have been involved in discussions with GiveDirectly about implementing the approach from our “Pay Me Later” paper in their cash transfer programs, and as part of that I gave a presentation to their organization explaining that research. My education research has led to similar interactions: I have advised charities on the most cost-effective education programs to invest in, and on how to effectively improve the quality of literacy instruction in developing countries. I have also given other lectures and talks to provide advice on topics such as how to succeed in college. For example, in 2018 I gave a guest lecture at the Clarence T. Ching PUEO Program at Punahou School which is a program that aims to increase college attendance and completion among disadvantaged but academically promising students in public schools in my home state of Hawaii.