

EconMatters

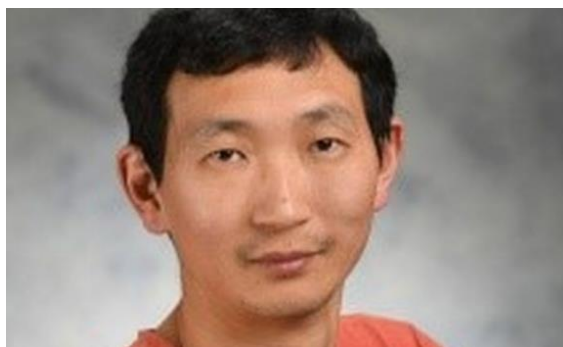
Introduction from Chair

This issue of EconMatters showcases the diverse backgrounds and careers of our former students by way of two of our accomplished alumni, Margaret Enniss-Trotman and Lisa Roberts. Prof. Norovsambuu (Norov) Tumennasan is the faculty member profiled in this issue. Norov joined Dalhousie in 2015, filling important gaps in our microeconomic theory stream, and his research deals with highly topical real-world resource allocation problems.

Faculty Profile

Norovsambuu Tumennasan

I am Norov Tumennasan, Associate Professor of Economics at Dalhousie. Prior to coming to Dalhousie in 2015, I worked as an assistant/associate professor of Economics at Aarhus University, Denmark. I truly enjoy my job: I interact with very smart colleagues and students on a daily basis. In addition, I have complete freedom over my research topics as well as my schedule.



My journey to becoming an academic economist was unplanned — a series of events that were not under my control led me to this path. Born and bred in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, I witnessed the transitioning period of my country from Communism to Capitalism during my childhood: the Mongolian economy collapsed, and the country experienced rampant inflation, unemployment and scarcity of consumption goods, which resulted in the rationing of essential products for a year or two. For the most part, I was able to avoid the hardships of that era, thanks to my parents and older siblings.

Surprisingly, the economic crisis did not affect the quality of education I received, mainly because the older generation of teachers did not want to, or were unable to, find better employment opportunities outside of public schools. Unsurprisingly, the educational system in Mongolia mirrored the Russian one and heavily emphasized quantitative subjects such as mathematics and physics. I thrived in that system and suspect that I would have become an engineer in any other time. But business studies were trendy at that time, perhaps due to the system transitioning, and my family wished for me to study management, which I did.

With management's heavy reliance on case studies and lacking quantitative analysis, however, I always felt out of place in that program. So, upon graduating, I wanted to pursue a Master's degree in the U.S. — this time in economics. I recalled how much I liked the few economics courses I took in college. I ended up at the University of Colorado, Denver, where I found out that pursuing a Ph.D. was a possibility for me. I was admitted to the Ph.D. program in Economics at Brown University. I enjoyed my time at Brown greatly and was drawn to microeconomic theory because of its technical elegance. Professor Serrano, who eventually supervised my thesis, introduced me to mechanism design, which examines whether one can design rules or institutions or systems that would achieve societal goals. A key assumption in this literature is that the designer knows how agents make decisions. In my first research paper I incorporated into the mechanism design literature the possibility that agents make mistakes.

Eventually I started working on more practical problems such as the allocation of daycare spots among children in Denmark. The goal was to design a system that satisfies two properties: (i) no parent should be able to game the system under all circumstances and (ii) there should be no complaint in the sense that no daycare assigns a spot to a child over someone who has higher priority and wants that spot. It turns out that such a system does not always exist, but it does if there are a large number of participants. My coauthors and I are now advising the Copenhagen municipality on improving their current system. Even though I started working in the field of mechanism design because of its elegance, my work turns out to have some practical implications. This was not planned, but...

Alumni Profiles

Margarett Enniss-Trotman (MDE 1996)

Margarett Enniss-Trotman (MDE 1996) is the Corporate Planner at the Workers' Compensation Board of Nova Scotia, a role that sees her leading its strategic planning and budgeting processes to support the attainment of numerous company goals and outcomes.

Her specialties include strategic planning, economic and environmental monitoring and analysis, corporate performance reporting and evaluation using a balanced scorecard. To that list she adds reporting on progress with strategic initiatives, assisting with institutional research and supporting the development of creative solutions to organizational challenges.

Margarett credits the development of most of these skills to the MDE program, which provided her with a theoretical foundation in economics as well as practical exposure as a development and policy analyst with strong research, analytical, reporting and statistical skills.



A Guyanese native, Margarett holds a Bachelor of Arts in Geography with a specialization in urban and regional planning from the University of Guyana (1987). Upon the completion of her graduate degree, she served as a lecturer and Head of the Department of Economics at the University of Guyana, and as a sessional instructor in the Department of Economics at Dal.

In addition to her strategic planning and teaching experience, Margarett is a newly published author and blogger. Her memoir, "I Remember That: A Collection of Cherished, Unforgettable, and Lasting Memories," charts the life of a little girl—and a young woman—growing up in a large nuclear family in post-colonial Guyana. It is available on her website (www.ladyguianasmusings.com) and amazon.com. Margarett serves as vice president of the Board of Directors of the Parker Street Food and Furniture Bank, a charity dedicated to feeding the hungry in Metro Halifax. She lives in Lower Sackville with her husband and daughter who is also a Dal alumni.

Lisa Roberts (MDE 2002)

Enrolling in the MDE program in 2001 was my way to come back to my chosen home - Halifax - after six years post-undergrad working and sometimes drifting between Newfoundland, Guatemala and Toronto. I bought a house before finishing my thesis to make sure I wouldn't leave, and now I represent that same neighbourhood as a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA). I was elected in a by-election in 2016 and re-elected eight months later in the general election with the New Democratic Party.



Being a politician is truly a great job for a generalist, and I have a good amount of general experience. After I graduated in 2003, I left my fleeting understanding of regression analysis behind, but held gratefully onto my ability to read balance sheets, differentiate between capital and operating expenses, and use Excel. I worked primarily as a journalist until, after a second maternity leave, I began doing non-profit and community work. Now, as an MLA, I juggle constituency work, seven critic portfolios, and membership in legislative committees.

In the legislature, when we are debating the path forward for our sometimes struggling province, I find myself reaching for concepts that I learned during the MDE program. For example, I recently dived into CANSIM tables from Statistics Canada for the first time in more than a decade - to find that, measured by the Gini coefficient, Nova Scotia has a more unequal income distribution than Canada. In the Public Accounts committee, I question the opportunity cost of investing in more highway interchanges when we do not keep up with the maintenance of the rural roads and bridges that actually connect communities. I wonder at the current government's single-minded pursuit of export-led development - in the form of lobsters flown to China and tourists flown from Europe - and the unexplored potential of import substitution. I mourn the reduction, due to policy decisions, of film industry jobs with their sizable economic multiplier and moderate carbon footprint.

I hope to one day be part of an NDP government and put my economics background to work in a new way. Nova Scotia's biggest challenge is demographic - with an aging population and inadequate immigration - but its potential and beauty are tremendous. I feel lucky to raise my family here.

Of course, we will be affected by the biggest challenge facing us all: climate change. I follow and appreciate the arguments for doughnut economics (by Kate Raworth) and circular economics and wonder when, at a provincial level, we will get serious about making the huge transition required.

If I hadn't studied economics at Dalhousie, I would have studied it somewhere at some point, as I grew frustrated seeing how economic arguments were used to thwart calls for positive political change. I'm glad and grateful that when I entered the political arena, I had an economics toolkit at my disposal.

Upcoming Events

Edward Wolff, New York University, will be the speaker for the John F. Graham Memorial Lecture 2018. The annual public event will be held November 29, 2018 at 3:30 pm in the Great Hall, University Club. Reception to follow. All are welcome. Economics seminars are generally held in McCain 2198 from 2:30 pm - 4:00 pm on Friday afternoons.

Research

Our research continues to reach far and wide: Dr. Chidozie Okoye has received a grant from SSHRC to investigate the impact of climate change on conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa. This past summer Dr. Lars Osberg published his book *The Age of Increasing Inequality: The Astonishing Rise of Canada's 1%*. And Dr. Andrea Giusto gave a lecture at the Bank of Canada on methodological advances in

History of the Economics Department

Professor Ian McAllister (retired) completed a delightful intellectual history of the Economics Department. *Dalhousie Economics in Retrospect: A Synopsis of Selected Writings from Past to Present* is available online at dalspace.library.dal.ca/handle/10222/73796

Or in print form by contacting the Department. The coverage, says Prof. McAllister, only scratches the surface of the socially relevant writings that have emerged from the department over the years

Canada 2050: The Economy We Want

The Department hosted two events on September 29 organized by our own alumni: a participatory conference and a panel discussion on the theme *Canada 2050: The Economy We Want*. Both events were skillfully organized under the leadership of Jamie Charlebois (MDE 2012), who deserves recognition for his tremendous energy and dedication to inclusive debate. The conference inspired wide-ranging debate and a robust exchange of ideas about areas that need urgent attention in order to create a more prosperous Canada. The panel discussion drew attention to the needs and aspirations of diverse members of our society. It was rewarding to see our alumni engage in economic and social issues, and to watch new connections emerge and grow within our community. I walked away from these events thinking of ways to improve my own teaching and research so that my students consider the economy as something they can shape rather than a monster that shapes them. We will share more about these events in the winter edition of *EconMatters*.

Talan Iscan
Professor and Chair
Department of Economics

FACULTY OF SCIENCE | Department of Economics

6214 University Avenue | PO Box 15000 | Halifax NS B3H 4R2 Canada
902.494.2026 | FAX: 902.494.6917 | economics@dal.ca | dal.ca/economics
DAL.CA