

EconMatters

Message from the Chair

This issue of EconMatters is published while we continue to grapple with a pandemic. We often forget how much we depend on each other on this planet and that not only our economies but also our health and well-being are interconnected. The pandemic and the ensuing global economic crisis affected everyone, but the health and economic ramifications of the pandemic have no doubt been more harshly felt by the poor and economically and socially marginalized communities. Hopefully, we will agree to mobilize our resources to create a more just, equitable, and sustainable world. This requires vision, leadership, and collective capacity to respond to a crisis. Our two alumni profiled in this issue, Naa Ode Lansana and Ryan Compton, are testament to vision and leadership capacities we have been nurturing in our MDE program and beyond. Our faculty member profiled, Mevlude Akbulut-Yuksel, gives us a glimpse of how a nurturing environment depends on dedication and perseverance by academics.

In this issue, we have two additional contributions, one by Birute Grikinyte, a participant in the Baltic Economic Management Training Program (BEMTP) that Dal Economics ran more than two decades ago, and one by Barry Lesser, the former director of BEMTP. These entries not only highlight the value of international collaborations, but they also demonstrate how critical state and collective capacity are in responding to a deep economic crisis as the Baltic countries did several decades ago, to the current pandemic, or to the ongoing climate crisis.

Over the spring and summer, we also celebrated, although virtually, the accomplishments of Monique Comeau and Lars Osberg, whose outstanding services to graduate students (Monique) and to economics profession in Canada (Lars) have been recognized by prestigious awards.

My term has been renewed, and it is my honour to continue to serve our students and members of the department in my role as the Chair.

Unfortunately, Christian Marfels, a long-time member of the department, and a valued teacher, died on May 11, 2020. Family, colleagues, and students of Christian have set up a Christian Marfels Memorial Graduate Bursary in Economics. You can make donations to this bursary by using the link: giving.dal.ca/marfels or send your donation by regular mail

Attn: Hilary Harron, Development Officer
Office of Advancement Dalhousie University
6389 Coburg Rd, PO BOX 15000
Halifax NS B3H 2A5

By any metric, we are living through challenging times. But, giving up hope is not an option.

Yours,
Talan İşcan
Professor and Chair



Faculty Profile

How do I become an Economist? - Prof. Akbulut-Yuksel

Thank you for this opportunity to share my story in this edition of the newsletter. It is such a pleasure. I am Mevlude Akbulut-Yuksel. I am currently a Full Professor of Economics. I joined Dalhousie University in 2009 after completing my PhD in Economics in University of Houston in Texas. My path to Economics profession was full of twists, corners and errors and at times a bit of luck. I have always wanted to continue learning and touch people's life either directly or indirectly, and our profession was generous in delivering this on both fronts. Since I was asked to write this piece I have been thinking about the pillars that shape me, my life and my decisions collectively both personally and professionally. I came up with these: persistence, curiosity, hard work and belief in goodness and friendship of fellow citizens. You would find each of these pillars intertwined in the story below.



Let me begin with my background and how I came to be an economist, and eventually an academic. I was born in the communist Bulgaria as a Turkish minority at the peak of the Iron Curtain and still vividly remember both the perks and the challenges of this system while growing up, especially as a minority. When I was eight, the Iron Curtain and USSR collapsed for good and the ethnic Turks in Bulgaria were given permission to leave if they were to leave immediately. This was the lifetime opportunity my family, especially my Grandma, was waiting for. With the collapse, we found ourselves in Turkey within a week with rudimentary Turkish knowledge and no transferable skills for my parents. We also had to leave all of our belongings and wealth in Bulgaria to be able to migrate. Both of my parents and almost all of our extended family were blue-collar workers; thus, we settled down in one of the industrial towns in Turkey neighboring Istanbul. My parents had to start over in their mid-thirties in an environment and a new world system totally foreign to them and their upbringing. During the early 90s, Turkey was also undergoing a major transformation through a massive migration from rural to more industrial areas. I grew up at the midst of all this change for better or worse.

Growing up, our family discussions and gatherings were a natural laboratory in labor relations and rights. In those meetings, us as kids were always active listeners of the lively discussions on unfair work environments and employers, small vs. large scale workplaces, strike preparations, unions (mostly a failure of the union initiations), wage and benefit negotiations, a fair share of overwork and more. I now appreciate how much growing up in this vibrant environment does prepare you for life and paves the way for the perseverance, hard work, empathy and strength. Inspired by our parents and some would say our ethnic enclave, both my young brother and I started working in factories in our hometown over summers at the junior high school age and I also find this exposure and experience invaluable in shaping up my future decisions, research choices and a way of going through life.

As it was customary with being an immigrant at the time, my parents were able to afford an apartment at the periphery of the city, thus, the primary school I attended had 70 students per class at times. I was the first student from this primary school who performed well enough in the junior high school entrance exam to get to attend the most competitive junior high school in our town. After an incredible four years in the junior high school and learning a very sound English, I finished it as a Valedictorian. In Turkey, we used to have entrance exams for each level of schooling. For high school, I scored high enough to be admitted to the boarding Science High School in our city, which was the most competitive high school in the region. There, I started to realize the origins of the gender divide in STEM. Our curriculum was designed for the future STEM graduates, preparing them for this future to be doctors, engineers and scientists. However, there were three boys for each girl in our school, even though girls performed a lot better in classes, a smaller number of them ended up in STEM fields in the university. I thus feel extremely lucky to get to teach and do research about gender issues today and hopefully encourage young female economists that there is a bright light at the end of the tunnel.

Once again, I entered another entrance exam at the end of the high school, this time for university. I was working at the Colgate factory as a packaging worker over summers during high school, where again, I was experiencing firsthand the gender divide in the workplace and dual labor market with us women doing the low paying and

unstable jobs and men working in the good production jobs with double the salary. I was at work when my boss went to check my university exam results and we found out together that I was among the first 1000 students in the exam out of a million allowing me to choose any field I like. I still remember to day the excitement in my female coworkers and the surprise of the engineers and management in the factory, who came down to our work unit to meet with me for weeks.

I knew deep down that I would be happier in a field which would allow me to closely connect with people and which will academically challenge me at the same time. Thus, somewhat with intuition, somewhat with luck, I decided to pursue Economics as a major in Middle East Technical University, which is one of the top universities in Turkey. As a first generation in university and having moved away from my hometown to the capital city, the first year of the university was somewhat a struggle also because the web of coincidences made me pass the English prep year and I had to start the first-year without much preparation. After the first semester, I learned how to study for university courses, got hold of the courses and things significantly improved from there. In addition to my major, I also did a minor in Mathematics starting my third year, which proved to be instrumental in my acceptance to PhD in economics.

There was quite bit of talk of the graduate school among friends, and I decided to give it a try. I met with someone on a bus ride from my hometown to university town, who graciously hired me as a tutor for their children, which allowed me to save enough money to pay application fees for the graduate school in the U.S. During the application process, I bumped into one of my friends in the city centre, who mentioned to me some graduate schools and we decided to apply together. As I only had a budget to apply to very few universities, the guidance of my friend turned out to be essential. I got accepted from both of these schools and decided to pursue a PhD in Economics in University of Houston. I moved to Houston by myself and with almost no money at the age of 23. I cannot express enough to the enormity of the shock with this move and a significant change in my life. Bestowed with my upbringing and countless conversations and discussions growing up, I decided to focus on labor economics in the PhD as my main field and the University of Houston offered excellent education. I am still grateful to this day to the professors and my advisors.

The academic job market in Economics is quite challenging and random at best. While I was sitting in an airport waiting to fly to Europe for series of day-long interviews and presentations, I got a call from Dalhousie, asking me to fly Halifax for a campus visit. I had no idea how this phone call would have changed my life, and I would be joining this department in a couple of months. I moved to Halifax in August 2009 and have been here since then. These past eleven years were the most rewarding and most challenging years of my life. One the one hand, I have two wonderful kids, a supportive husband and many wonderful students; on the other hand I went through a major health challenge in my personal life. Last year, at age 37, I got promoted to the full professorship and was elected to serve as one of the twelve Board of Directors of the Canadian Economic Association.

All my life experiences and childhood of living in two different world systems significantly influenced and continues to shape my research interest. The main theme of my research is the long-term effects of childhood environment and how shocks during childhood such as wars, persecutions, migration, disease environment, and economic crisis affect the children's socioeconomic outcomes in the long-run. Another research theme that I have been working on over the years is the women at the times of the war, their labor market outcomes in conjunction with childcare and parental leave. I am also quite passionate about understanding the functioning of the standard economic theories in the underdeveloped parts of the world and in emerging economies. I have always been a curious soul and these research topics have always fascinated me since childhood. Still, I cannot wait to wake up every day and continue learning and practically doing my passion for living. To sum up, as my story clearly exemplifies, life and choices are indeed never linear, in fact far from it and life is full of good and not so good surprises, which kind of makes it all interesting. Being hopeful, not giving up at the times of adversity and hard work is the key. Your best bet is to do your best to get ready, and jump in when the opportunity arises, and enjoy the ride. And it goes without saying, make sure to surround yourself with people who would make this ride fun.

Alumni Profiles

Ryan Compton (MDE 1997)

I graduated from Dalhousie with a Master of Development Economics (MDE) in 1997. During my degree I met my wife Janice Yates (MA Economics) and together we headed to Ottawa following our graduation. In Ottawa I worked as an economist in the Federal Government's Accelerated Economist Training Program (AETP). The AETP gave me the opportunity to work at Finance Canada, the Treasury Board, Privy Council, and importantly the Canadian International Development Agency which allowed me to put my development economics training to good use as well as work alongside Dalhousie economics alums John Kozij and Bill Gunn. Following the AETP, I settled into the financial markets division of Finance Canada where I enjoyed reporting on Canadian and international financial market developments.



After 3 years of working in Ottawa, I decided to go back to school for a PhD in economics (well really Janice decided to pursue a PhD in economics so that she could become a professor and so I figured I may as well too). I spent 5 years from 2000 to 2005 at Washington University earning a PhD in Economics. Janice and I had our first child while completing our PhDs. Following our studies we moved to Winnipeg to be closer to my family (which has been very useful now that we have 3 kids). Janice and I are both currently professors in the economics department at the University of Manitoba where I research and teach in the areas of macroeconomics, development, defence economics, and sports economics.

Moving to Halifax to study at Dalhousie was a big leap for me at the time, but I couldn't be happier with my decision. The unique nature of the MDE program exposed me to the application of economic tools in studying broad topics. I've carried this training, and this mindset, throughout my time in government as well as academia. Further, the education I received at Dalhousie prepared me well to succeed later in my doctoral studies at Washington University.

I remember the economics department as a lively place, where faculty members worked closely with graduate students and encouraged them to attend the Friday Seminar and Economizer Social where we could learn from visiting speakers and interact socially with the members of the department. The environment among graduate students was one of studying hard and partying hard, which made for a fantastic student experience! I made great friends during my time there, especially Glenn Purves and Darren Byers, and have always appreciated the influence professors Talan Iscan, Kuan Xu, Barry Lesser, and Ian McAllister had on me during my time at Dalhousie, and importantly their support in the years that have followed. I am also grateful for the experience the department gave me working with the Baltic Economic Management Training Program, which gave me my first experience overseas in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, and allowed me to see economic transition first hand.

I'm a proud Dalhousie alum and forever thankful for my time at Dalhousie!

Naa Ode Lansana (MED 2007)

I arrived in Canada from Ghana in 1999, on the cusp of the new millennium. I had been accepted into Dalhousie University's Economics program and I was excited for what the future had in store. At Dalhousie, I complemented my Economics courses with classes in Development Studies. This culminated in my graduating with an Advanced Double Major degree in Economics and International Development Studies. I next pursued the Master of Development Economics (MDE) degree at Dalhousie; with my burgeoning interests, the program appeared tailor-made for me. Many of my courses were taught by professors with extensive practical experience, and the lessons I learned informed my work as I ventured into the world of Development.



After graduating with my MDE, I undertook an internship with the United Nations in Vietnam tackling issues of aid effectiveness. At the United Nations Country Economist Unit, I assessed the development assistance framework of the Vietnamese government. I also had the opportunity to conduct a comparative study of the effectiveness of aid mechanisms around the globe. I worked closely with the Ministry of Planning and Investment, and together with a team, helped to author a key government report on aid flows to Vietnam. This report was widely distributed across government and among the donor community.

I then returned to Canada, where through the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre (later the Pearson Centre), I had the opportunity to work with the African Union, United Nations, numerous non-governmental organizations and training centres on issues of peace and security in Africa. The projects that I undertook often made apparent the interplay between economics and law. While working with the African Union to prepare police, civilian and military personnel to be deployed into peace support operations, I experienced first-hand the dynamics of resource allocation, human rights and international humanitarian law juxtaposed against political considerations. A highlight of mine was the opportunity to deliver a presentation to the African Union Peace and Security Council at its headquarters in Ethiopia as part of a program to train senior decision-makers. After my time at the Pearson Centre, I worked with the International Bureau for Children's Rights developing training curricula on children's rights for security forces in the Middle East and East Africa.

My work in development affirmed my commitment to justice issues and re-ignited a long-held dream to be of service through the law. As such, following a few years of work with the Government of Canada (Industry Canada and the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada), I decided to return to school to pursue a law degree. None of this would have been possible without the dedicated professors I encountered at Dalhousie. In particular, the continued mentorship and support of Professor Ian McAllister have been instrumental in helping to shape my career path.

Now, as I finish off my degree at Osgoode Hall Law School, I stand, as I did many years ago, filled with expectancy of what the future holds.

The Baltic Economic Management Training Program:

A 1990s venture of the Dalhousie Economics Department In the spring of 1992, Dalhousie was approached by a local Halifax member of the Latvian-Canadian community and asked if we would be interested in getting involved in helping the newly independent Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania transition from being part of the former Soviet Union to being independent, self-governing nations. With support from the Government of Canada, a delegation from Dalhousie visited the Baltic region in April 1992 and out of this came a proposal for a training program for public servants from the three countries to learn something about market economics. The logic of this proposal was that as the three countries transitioned from Soviet socialist economies to more market-oriented economies, public policy makers would need to understand what needed to change and what the implications of those changes would be. It was also agreed that a selected group of participants from all three countries should not only learn some formal economics in the classroom but should also have an opportunity to spend time in federal and provincial government offices in Canada to observe the Canadian policy-making process and its implementation in action. This proposal was accepted by the Government of Canada and funded initially as a one-time offering. Following a very successful operation of the program in August/September/October of 1992, and a follow-up evaluation of the program in 1993, a proposal for a multi-year offering of the Program was made to the Government of Canada and accepted; and in the summer of 1994, the Baltic Economic Management Training Program (BEMTP) was officially started. The Program ran until the spring of 2001. Including the first group of participants from 1992, over 150 senior public servants from the three countries were trained through the Department of Economics at Dalhousie and spent time in Canada. Many participants in the Program went on to very senior positions in their respective governments, including one becoming Minister of Finance of Lithuania, another Auditor-General of Latvia, and another Minister of Social Welfare of Estonia. Other alumni of the program became Head of the Lithuanian delegation to the WTO, Ambassador of Lithuania to China, Deputy Minister of Finance of Latvia, Deputy Minister of Agriculture of Estonia, Director of the Agency for Small Business Development in Lithuania, etc. Many other public servants in each country took courses offered by Dalhousie in each country. A partnership also was established with a university in each country and faculty from these partner universities were involved in the courses offered by the Program in their respective countries and had an opportunity to spend a study leave at Dalhousie to improve their own professional qualifications in Economics. The BEMTP Director was Barry Lesser, who was also Chair of the Economics Department through this period of time, and faculty from Economics who participated in some way included Talan Iscan, Jeff Dayton-Johnson, Mel Cross, Christian Marfels, Al Sinclair, and Ian McAllister, among others. The article which follows this has been contributed by Birute Grikinyte, who was a participant in the first round of the Program in 1992. Birute subsequently became a working member of the Board of Governors of the Bank of Lithuania, spent two years seconded to the IMF in Washington in the mid-1990's and then returned to the Bank in charge of one of the Bank's statistics departments. BEMTP was a successful program for the Department, for the countries it was designed to help and, as Birute's article demonstrates, and perhaps most importantly, for the public servants who participated in the Program. Barry Lesser Professor Emeritus Director, China Program, Economics and Science (former Director, Baltic Economic Management Training Program)

My Experience in the Baltic Economic Management Training Program by Birute Grikinyte Bank of Lithuania Vilnius, Lithuania

In 1992, 21 young bureaucrats from three Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) had an extraordinary possibility to visit Canada and experience old democracy and how bureaucratic mechanisms smoothly worked at the various government institutions.

The Baltic countries then were only two years into living independently, after fifty years of Soviet occupation with its crazy planned economy and corruption, with double standards in values and a suspicious society accompanied by the KGB chasing those who questioned Soviet/communist ideology. The Baltics were countries that had spent decades experiencing a shortage of simple daily goods, combined with isolation from the rest of the world, especially "capitalist" countries. There was a need for them to learn how market economies work and how governments interact with the market in a mixed economy setting. This is what the Baltic Economic Management Training Program was intended to do. It was designed as a training program for selected public servants from each of the three countries to have an opportunity to learn both the theory and the practice of market economies and the role of government in a mixed economy, which each of the three countries was in the process of creating for itself. The programme was prepared by Dalhousie University and included classroom study of economics, including, for me, interesting lectures on macroeconomics and market economics, delivered by faculty from Dalhousie. University

education in the Soviet Union provided only criticism of capitalist economies. With the break-up of the Soviet Union and the gaining of independence by the three Baltic countries, there was a need to learn about the strengths and the weaknesses of a market system, in order to guide the transition from a wholly planned economy to a mixed economy and very importantly, to better understand the role of government in this new economy. The Programme also tried to teach us some psychology. I was asked, for example, to find five things that I liked in a person whom I hardly knew. This was very difficult for me to do but I could easily find five things that I did not like. This underlined the somewhat perverse nature of the mentality fostered by the Soviet system. We also learned some ecology. For example, we were shown a documentary on the huge amounts of waste that were dumped every day in New York City, and one of the suggestions in the documentary was to use plastic bags more than one time in order to reduce the amount of pollution that plastic bags create. For us it was a funny conclusion, as we used plastic bags as long as we could, until they were worn out, not because of economic or environmental considerations but because they were a scarce product. We spent a great deal of time in various government offices, ones specific to our individual jobs at home and in the process learned about democratic governance that we were in the process of implementing in our countries. We learned, very importantly, about the operation of a well-functioning bureaucracy. And last, but not least, we got to experience another culture, a warm welcome and to foster/build new human relationships.

What has stayed with me up till now is the impression of a pleasant society. A good example of this was our experience with drivers, in Halifax, in particular, but to some degree, anywhere we went in Canada. The drivers were considerate and polite to pedestrians, to the point where we thought they could "read our minds" and knew when we wanted to cross the street. And stopped so we could do so. In our own countries, up to the time of independence, very few people had cars, because they simply were not available for the average person to buy. After independence, this started to change but the aggression that was inherited in the society spilled over to the driving habits and pedestrians received no respect. So our Halifax experience was very much a surprise. We were also not used to easily establishing normal trusting relations with people but quickly found that this was a relatively common experience for our Canadian hosts and most of the Canadians we met. We met many good-hearted families who invited us for dinners, meetings, picnics, even the Lesser family cottage on the ocean shore. Every detail of the programme demonstrated friendly care and the desire to share the best that Canada had to offer. Even meetings with Canadian Lithuanians, Estonians and Latvians were arranged! We had access to a swimming pool! We saw wonderful tides! We were taught to play baseball! The wives of our professors, like Barry Lesser, Tony Tillett, and Alasdair Sinclair were engaged full time, as well, to make our experience as productive and enjoyable as possible.

An important part of our Programme was meetings that we had with relevant institutions according to our workplaces back home. I had a possibility to visit the central bank of Canada, and had discussions there with the HR staff, which was my primary focus at that time in the Bank of Lithuania.

My group was the first that came to Canada as part of BEMTP. The Programme went on for another eight years but because we were the first, and because it was still such a short time since independence and our opening up, a tremendous number of things were not only new and different but were everyday things we never imagined before this. To give just a few examples in terms of food,

- We got our first exposure to an avocado – we had heard of it but thought it was a sweet fruit. Imagine the shock when we tried it for the first time. And then consider that we later learned that the one we tried was not yet ripe.
- We were served a salad that had flowers as one of the vegetables. We had never considered eating nasturtium blossoms.
- We were served cauliflower that was not cooked.
- We were served celery sticks, also a new experience.

In total, we spent approximately a month in Canada and the BEMPT programme gave a different view to many things, not just food items. One of the important results of my participation, which was also true for most of the participants who took part with me, was the impact on my career. One year later, after my return from Canada, I was appointed to the Board of the Bank of Lithuania (central bank) as a working member of the Board and became responsible for HR and media relations at the Bank. After one more year, I was sent to work at the IMF for a two

year assignment as an assistant to the Executive Director of the Nordic-Baltic Office of the IMF. I later returned to the Bank and was in charge of one of the divisions of the Statistics Department of the Bank.

BEMTP was a positive influence on my career but more importantly, it was an experience that greatly influenced my development, not just professionally, but personally as well.

News

- New Sciographies Episode: Dr. Teresa Cyrus
- Our research featured by IZA: Economic crises have adverse long-term health effects.
- Joint research with faculty at SDUFE, our partner institution in China, produces novel insights on the impact of carbon pricing on employment.
- COVID-19's Economic Impact could be Stressing out our Kids.
- Machine Learning for Economists and Applied Social Scientists.

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR SPRING 2020 GRADUATES!!!

The Economics department wishes to our Spring 2020 graduates the best of luck in their post graduate endeavors. We are very proud of you for all your hard work over the years towards achieving this accomplishment.

In Memoriam: Dr. Christian Marfels

It is with deep sadness that the Department of Economics shares news of the passing of Dr. Christian Marfels on May 11, 2020.

After earning his doctorate in economics from Freie Universität in Berlin, Dr. Marfels joined Dalhousie in 1967 as a Killam Fellow, staying on to become a long-serving and valued member of the Economics Department. An internationally-respected scholar of industrial and antitrust economics, Dr. Marfels' early research focused on the design and analysis of innovative measures of market concentration. His later work explored a diverse range of issues including industrial analyses of the food and beverage industries, the economics of gaming, and international competition and merger policy. Most recently, he was a Research Associate with Dalhousie's European Union Centre of Excellence.

Dr. Marfels was a popular educator, teaching courses such as industrial organization, antitrust economics, and "Euros and Cents" on the economics of the European Union. His passion for his subject matter was always prominent in his lectures, which were filled with entertaining and informative stories that made even the most abstract concepts relatable. As a graduate supervisor, he provided meticulous guidance, leaving his students well-prepared for careers in industry and academia.

Dr. Marfels loved to travel and he saw parts of the world that were fascinating to him, everything from swimming in the Dead Sea (Sea of Salt), exploring Uluru (Ayers Rock), timing the geysers in Iceland and to visit the Moai on Rapa Nui (Easter Island). He also was an avid antique collector which included books, maps, stamps, coins, and toys.

Dr. Marfels could often be spotted on campus walking shoulder to shoulder with his friend and colleague, Dr. Gouranga Rao, between the Economics Department and Dalplex where the two enjoyed playing badminton.