

Union College Economics Department

# NEWSLETTER

Fall 2020

## Quantitative Easing

*The latest news and updates in Union College Economics*

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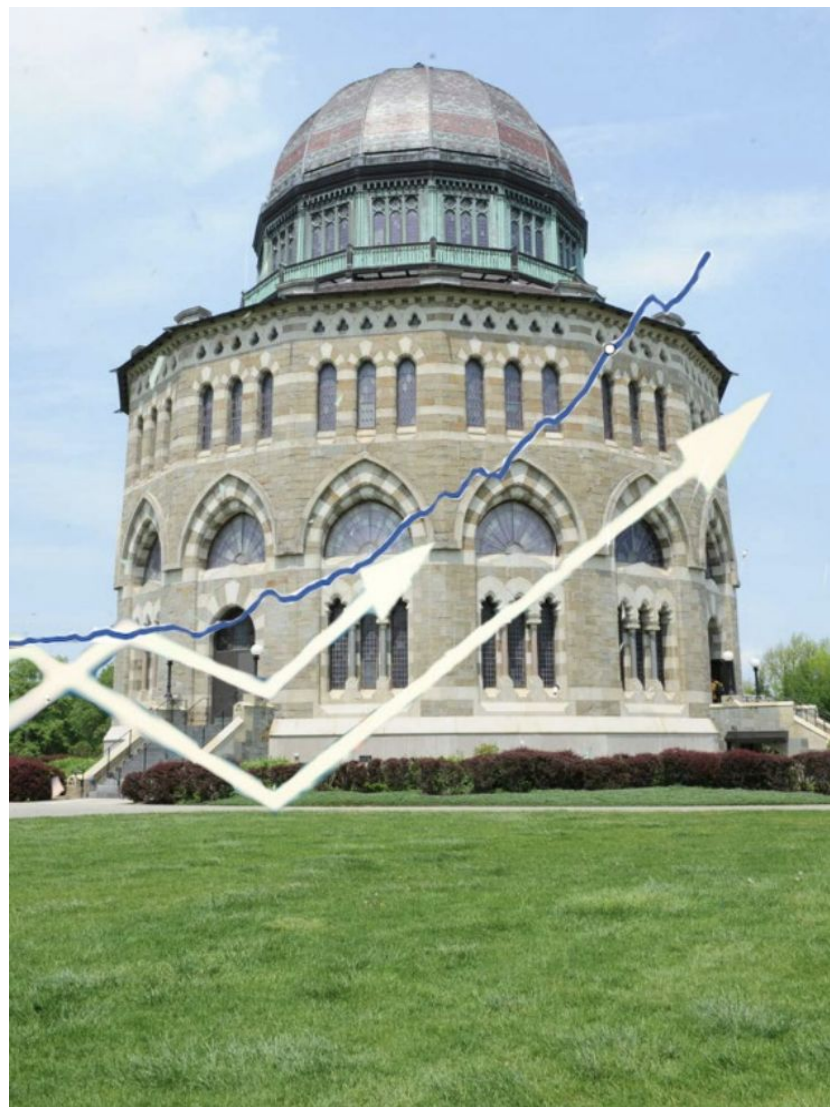
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Lewis Davis, Economics Department Chair



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## Chair's Corner

By Lewis Davis, Department Chair

Dear Economics Students, Colleagues and Alumni,

It's a great pleasure to greet you in my first Chair's Corner!

Below, I briefly catch up on the news of the Department, as well as some of the initiatives and challenges I hope to make progress on during my time as Chair.



### **New Faculty and New Courses**

Without a doubt our happiest news is that **three new faculty members** joined the Department this fall! Dolores Garrido and Caroline Abraham are serving as Visiting Assistant Professors, and Huong “Alicia” Dang is serving as a (tenure-track) Assistant Professor. All three are doing extremely well during their first term at Union, in spite of the notably challenging times, and we look forward to properly celebrating their arrival when the environment permits!

Together, these faculty members contribute significantly to the **depth and breadth of the department**, adding strength in microeconomics, industrial organization, information economics, environmental economics, political economy and economic development.

Partly as a result of these new hires, the Department has been able to **increase the total number of courses** offered this year by 20% over the past two years. This increase includes an additional section of each required course, bringing much needed relief to enrollment

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pressure in this part of our curriculum, and a significant expansion in the **diversity of our elective offerings**, with the addition of 3 lower level and 4 upper level electives.

Some of this increased diversity will be on display this coming term, with new courses on the ***Economics of Information*** and the ***Economics of Race in the US***, and an upper-level ***Seminar in Environmental Economics***. These courses will provide students with a solid foundation to address important ongoing economic and policy challenges in our society.

The addition of these faculty members is the fruit of **Fuat Sener's tireless efforts** on behalf of the Department over his three-year term as Department Chair, to whom we owe an immense debt of gratitude!

### **Coping with Covid**

The Department has gone to extraordinary lengths to continue providing **high quality economics education** in the midst of a pandemic. Our faculty have redesigned courses, learned new pedagogies, and mastered the technologies of distance learning. I wish to express my **deepest gratitude to our students** as well, who have exhibited exceptional maturity, flexibility, and resilience in dealing with a crisis that has upended their lives. This time of distance learning has reminded us of what makes the Union experience, with our small classes and tight-knit community, so valuable.

Overall, things this term have **gone better than many expected** or feared they might. For the most part, the combination of regular testing and social distancing appears to be working. The total number of positive cases on campus is still very low, and in-person classes continue to meet in person.

In light of this, the Department is expecting to increase our in-person offerings winter term. At this point, we expect **half of our winter term courses to be offered in person** or as a hybrid

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course, up from just over a third this term. In addition, we will continue to offer at least one section of each required course online to serve our remote students.

### **Initiatives and Challenges**

When not answering emails, or putting out departmental fires, it's been my pleasure as Chair to devote time to doing some new and different things around the Department.

One of these projects is to revamp the **Department webpage**. Given my limited knowledge of all things computing, I am working closely with **Benita Lopez**, a Senior Economic-Computer Science Interdepartmental major and consummate professional. To date, we have updated the department home page and added pages dedicated to each of the different **student economics clubs**. Coming soon, we hope to add a page highlighting the rich and productive body of **faculty research**, and another for **student research**, including award-winning thesis projects, student publications in undergraduate and professional journals, participation in conferences, and the like. I also hope to begin developing spaces devoted to **maintaining relationships with the Department's alumni**.

I am also excited to be working with Editor-in-Chief **Cozette Blumenfeld** and a talented group of young writers and editors, to **revitalize the *Economics Department Newsletter***. Under Cozette's leadership, the Newsletter has dramatically expanded its coverage of Department sponsored and student-organized events, and she is planning to new and innovative sections, including the **Economics Student Op-Eds**, in which current students comment on a current economic issue, and a series we are calling **Putting Your Thesis to Work** series, highlighting the experience of recent alumni combing their research experience and their careers. In addition to the traditional once-a-term Newsletter, Cozette has also been experimenting with different formats, including more bite-sized and timely **News Flashes** and entries in **social media accounts**.

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In closing, I should note that perhaps my **greatest challenge** as Chair is addressing the Department's **persistent staffing shortage**. As one expression of this shortage, the Economics Department constitutes less than **less than 8% of the college's faculty** (17 of 220), but our majors constitute roughly **one-fifth of all Union graduates** (102 out of 481 this past July). As a result of this **mismatch between supply and demand**, average class size in Economics is **20% higher** than the next highest department and nearly **60% higher** than the average class size across departments. Under-staffing also impacts the experience of our students in less perceptible ways, affecting the availability of courses and electives, the flexibility of academic scheduling, and facetime with academic advisors. The College's administration is aware of our

staffing shortage and its impact on our Department, and I look forward to working closely with them to address this issue going forward.

Wishing you all a safe, healthy, and productive fall,

Lewis Davis

Thomas Armstrong Professor of Economics and Economics Department Chair

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## Catch Up with Professors Dang and McCarty

By Abira Naheem and Thomas Bonaccio



### **Professor Dang:**

Professor Dang is a new faculty member to the Union community, and we warmly welcome her to campus! Some of her research and work so far has involved the use of data from Vietnam and the United States, with extensive literature reviews on related studies on East Asia. She also has experience conducting field work in Vietnam and South Korea, and is particularly interested in topics of economic development and political economy in Asia. Professor Dang

shared with us, regarding the details of her most recent work; *“Beyond traditional econometrics techniques, I have been employing machine learning methods in another project to further explore the nature of firms' political connectedness through supervised learning algorithms. My other ongoing research project focuses on the US-China trade war's diversion effects on Vietnamese firms. In addition, I am exploring the potentially new applications of the firm-level data sets that I have in a number of other research projects. As political elements interfere with various aspects of an economy especially in transition and emerging markets, I plan to extend my research into diverse directions stemming from the insights of my current research e.g. the institutional determinants, including the rule of law, of firm performance.”*



**Professor McCarty:**

This fall term, Professor McCarty has been hard at work, researching the “Learning Mindset.” Here’s how Professor McCarty describes her most recent research:

*“Along with co-author Professor George Bizer of the Psychology Department, I have been working on research related to "learning mindset" and academic achievement, with a particular focus on military-connected students (veterans and active members of the Armed Forces).*

*Learning mindset is a set of constructive attitudes about the potential to succeed in school. For example, the idea that intelligence is not a fixed attribute of a person, but rather that cognitive ability can increase with practice, is known as "growth mindset." Other facets of learning mindset involve one's sense of belonging in college and one's sense of the relevance of school work to future life. We have recently completed a paper that uses a large survey data set, the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), with a third co-author, Michael Bohlig from the University of Texas at Austin (the home of CCSSE). The paper uses approximately 130,000 student survey responses to examine patterns of relationship among GPA, academic mindset, and demographic characteristics, including military status. We find that military-connected students have somewhat higher GPA but somewhat lower learning mindset on average than other students, holding other demographic characteristics constant. Our next step in this project is to secure grant funding to develop and test an "intervention," in the form of writing exercise, to develop learning mindsets for veterans.” \**

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# Let's Talk Thesis

By William Martin



**Kevin Chaimowitz**

**Union College Senior**

**Major:** Managerial Economics with a Minor in Data Analytics

**Thesis Advisor:** Professor Dong Cheng

**What is your senior thesis?** *Synergies & Stocks: An Analysis of Mergers & Acquisitions on long-run stock performance.*

**Why did you choose this thesis?** While working at Royal Bank of Canada over the summer, I worked on a collection of bridge loans for acquisitions. I thought it was extremely interesting, so I wanted to combine my exposure to public equities offerings from my sophomore summer with my RBC internship. Also, looking at the current market, there is a lot of restructuring and M&A activity, so I am curious to see how this external impact (COVID-19) will sway my research.

**Describe your thesis:** I am essentially analyzing abnormal returns following the event of merger.

**Tell us about what you've found so far?**



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From my research thus far, I found that there is a negative abnormal return after the deal takes place three to five years later. Some authors have looked at the financing style, type of company being acquired (public vs. private) and the industries. I plan to build upon this work by combining these elements and using more recent data from the United States.

**What has been the most challenging aspect of your thesis?** So far the most challenging aspect in data gathering. For the most part, most of the information is privately held so it is hard to collect large sets of data for all the deals.

**What advice would you give to an economics student?** Economics at Union provides a strong fundamental foundation, but you should use your “in-class learning experience” and apply it to an independent study or external research.

**On the side, do you have any hidden talents or interests?** Baseball and cooking



**Justin Esposito**

**Union College Senior**

**Major:** Interdepartmental Major (ID): Economics & Anthropology

**Thesis Advisors:** Professors Lewis Davis and Arslan Khan

**What is your senior thesis?** How Does Social Capital Impact the COVID-19 Response in the US on a County-Level?

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**Why did you choose this thesis and describe your thesis?** Based on my internship experience and the current pandemic, I wanted to research why people react differently across the country. Moreover, there are many challenges that affect American individualism and see if social capital can foster trust to influence a change. I wanted to address a lack of COVID-19 response in the U.S., to find determinants and steps before that and how social capital impacts that.

**What has been the most challenging aspect of your thesis?** Coming up with a topic and balancing two subjects together as they are fundamentally different.

**What advice would you give to any economics student?** Don't be afraid to experiment with other subjects. You will be surprised how different classes can help you and lead you in the direction of a potential thesis.

**On the side, do you have any hidden talents or interests?** Working out, Baseball, and Sports Statistics

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## A Snapshot of Econ Club

By Aarya Rijal and Emersyn Alberici

Union College's Economics Club held an event for students looking to have a professional LinkedIn headshot. The Economics Club seeks to create a forum for the discussion of current economics events that helps members explore the numerous career options in the field through guest speakers, group discussions and field trips. Around 25 students, mostly Managerial Economics and Economics students attended the event. Following COVID-19 regulations, the event was conducted outdoors and was socially distanced. Everyone had their mask on during the event, except for the student whose photograph is being taken and the photographer at least 6 feet away. A sign up sheet was provided to allow for 5 students per 15 mins slot; anyone waiting to be photographed had a mask on. The Economics Club emphasized the importance of a professional photo in building networking profiles to establish incredibly important alumni connections. In the past, the Economics Club has sponsored other important events, including, How to Get an Internship, Excel Workshops, and Economics-related lunch discussions. \*

