

Aurelia (Aochun) Di

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Department of Economics

University of Washington

Savery 407

Seattle, WA 98195

EDUCATION	University of Washington	Seattle, WA
	Ph.D. candidate in Economics	expected 2025
	University of Science and Technology of China (USTC)	China
	Bachelor's of Science in Statistics (Math Track)	2014 – 2018
	Minor: Business Administration	2015 – 2018
	University of British Columbia	Vancouver, Canada
	Visiting Student	2016

RESEARCH **Interests:** Development Economics, Behavioral Economics, Education Economics, Labor.
Methodology: Field experimentation, Survey data collection, Causal machine learning.

REFERENCES	Professor Rachel Heath	Professor Emma Riley
	Department of Economics	Department of Economics
	University of Washington	University of Michigan
	rmheath@uw.edu	erileyg@umich.edu
	Professor Xu Tan	Professor Felix Zhiyu Feng (teaching)
	Department of Economics	Foster School of Business (Finance)
	University of Washington	University of Washington
	tanxu@uw.edu	ffeng@uw.edu

JOB MARKET PAPER **Inspirational or Demotivational: Experimental Evidence on the Impacts of Role Models**
***Abstract:** High-achieving role models can raise aspirations and improve performance, but may negatively affect individuals who fail to meet their goals. I study what role model characteristics influence their effectiveness in improving academic performance. Using a randomized controlled trial with students across five middle schools in China, I compare the impacts of role models with different success levels. Two months later, students exposed to higher-achieving role models improved test scores by 0.07-0.18 standard deviations, whereas those exposed to moderately achieving role models experienced an average 28.8% and 26.6% reduction in the likelihood of feeling depressed and stressed, respectively. Higher-achieving role models improve low-performing girls' academic outcomes but negatively affect their mental health, as these girls invested more effort but still found their improved performance falling short of their elevated aspirations. This paper highlights the negative impacts of role models on mental health as a trade-off for enhancing performance in underperforming subgroups, emphasizing the need to consider mental health when implementing role model interventions.*

WORKING PAPERS **1. The Power of Words: How Role Models Influence Attitudes and Behaviors**
***Abstract:** Previous studies show that role models shape behaviors and challenge stereotypes. I investigate whether these impacts arise specifically from role models discussing effective behavioral*

strategies or addressing gender. Using an RCT with 2720 middle school students, I find that learning strategies or attitudes toward gender and ability discussed by role models enhance academic outcomes through distinct mechanisms. Learning strategies influence student behaviors and show immediate marginal benefits in increasing test scores within one month after the intervention. Attitudes shift girls' beliefs about gender and math ability, though translating such changes into measurable improvements in test scores took a longer time. Additionally, my study also finds that role models who discuss both learning strategies and their attitudes lead to complementary impacts on girls and low-performing students, highlighting that these students need concrete study strategies to achieve their goals after overcoming stereotypes.

2. Second-Order Beliefs about Parents, Academic Performance, and Mental Health with Cheng Chen and Lucy Hong

Abstract: *Students' second-order beliefs matter for their health and development, even if these perceptions may not accurately reflect the true opinions of others. Using two rounds of the China Education Panel Survey, we examine the impacts of students' second-order beliefs regarding their parents' views on gender and mathematical ability. One year later, students who perceived their parents as believing that boys are better at math experienced a decrease in test scores across all subjects and also a significant increase in unhappiness. Our findings suggest that the impacts of students' second-order beliefs are not due to their accurate perceptions of their parents' actual beliefs. We do not find any heterogeneity in these negative impacts between girls and boys, challenging the common assumption that such stereotypes primarily hurt girls. Our study highlights that to reduce gender stereotyping in education effectively, future research should focus not only on reshaping students' beliefs but also on addressing their second-order beliefs by engaging their parents.*

SELECTED
WORK
IN PROGRESS

1. Post-Secondary Choice and Perceived Returns to Migration: Evidence from An Information Experiment

Registered at [AEARCTR-0014225](#); IRB approval number STUDY00021100.

2. Second-Order Beliefs and Choice of Science vs. Arts: An Experiment in a Chinese Senior High School with Zhe Liu

Registered at [AEARCTR-0014223](#); IRB approval number STUDY00021098.

TEACHING

Instructor, University of Washington

- Intermediate Macroeconomics (ECON301, Overall eval. score 4.9/5.0): Spring 2021 & Winter 2022.
- Introduction to Macroeconomics (ECON201, Overall evaluation score 4.6/5.0): Summer 2020, Autumn 2020, Winter 2021 & Summer 2021.

Graduate teaching associate, Foster Business School, University of Washington

- Corporate Finance (FIN 505, MBA course): Spring 2024
- Business Administration II (B A 501, MBA course): Winter 2024
- Introduction to Business Economics (BECON500, MBA course): Autumn 2023

Teaching assistant/associate, University of Washington

- Introduction to Statistical Methods (QMETH 201, Foster Business School, Eval. 4.5/5.0): Autumn 2021, Spring 2022, Autumn 2022 & Winter 2023.
- Introduction to Macroeconomics (ECON201, Eval. 4.7/5.0): Spring 2019, Autumn 2019, Spring 2020 & Winter 2020.
- Introduction to Microeconomics (ECON200): Winter 2019.

Teaching assistant, University of Science and Technology of China

- Mathematical Statistics, *a junior-year level class* 2017-2018 Fall semester

EXPERIENCES **Research Assistant**, *Paul G. Allen School of Computer Science & Engineering, U Washington* 2023
— *Survey design; Evaluation of the outcomes derived from multiple generative-AI products.*

Research Assistant, *Foster Business School, University of Washington, Seattle* 2017

FELLOWSHIPS, Annual Conference Graduate Student Award, *Southern Economic Association* 2024

HONORS, Graduate Student Conference Presentation Award, *University of Washington* 2024

AND AWARDS James O. York Fellowship, *University of Washington* 2018

Scholarship for Excellent Academic Performances, *USTC* 2016-2017

Wang-Guangtai Scholarship for Leadership, *USTC* 2015

Scholarship for Excellent Freshmen, *USTC* 2014

PRESENTATIONS **2025:**

(*: scheduled) 1. 2025 ASSA Annual Meeting*

2024:

7. 7th Annual Pacific Northwest Labor Day Workshop*

6. 2024 Southern Economic Association Annual Conference*

5. Western Economic Association International (WEAI) 99th Annual Conference

4. 2024 Northwest Development Workshop (NWDW)

3. 2024 CES North America Conference

2. Labour and Development Brownbag at the University of Washington (×2)

1. Political Economy forum at the University of Washington

2023 & before:

2. Labour and Development Brownbag at the University of Washington (×n)

1. USTC-Foster Business School Workshop on Fin-Tech and Management Innovation (invited speaker)

SKILLS

Software

Proficient in R, STATA, and \LaTeX ;

Experiences in GAUSS, SAS, Mathematica, Matlab, and C.

Languages

Native in Chinese, Fluent in English

Selective Advanced Econometrics/Statistics Courses

Econometrics I, II, III (ECON580/STAT509, ECON581, ECON582); Econometric Theory I, II, III (ECON583, ECON584, ECON585); Time Series Analysis (ECON586); Applied Microeconometrics (ECON587); Research Issues in Econometrics (ECON599); Advanced Theory of Statistical Inference (STAT581).

Selective Advanced Finance Courses

Theoretical corporate finance (FIN580); Theoretical asset pricing (FIN590); Empirical corporate finance (FIN591); Empirical asset pricing (FIN592).