

Fall 2019

LEO QUARTERLY REPORT



In This Issue

LEO News and
Announcements

Faculty Affiliate
Updates

Research Project
Update

Partner and Faculty
Spotlights



WILSON SHEEHAN
LAB FOR ECONOMIC
OPPORTUNITIES

LEO NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

All across America, service providers are doing great work to take on poverty in all its complexity. But we still know too little about what's working and why. The Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities (LEO) at the University of Notre Dame helps service providers apply scientific evaluation methods to better understand and share effective poverty interventions.



EVANS SHARES VETERAN HOMELESSNESS STUDY IN D.C.

The President's proposed fiscal year 2020 federal budget includes no growth in funding for HUD-VASH—the supportive housing voucher program for homeless veterans—eliminating new vouchers for anyone not currently holding one. LEO co-founder Bill Evans was on Capitol Hill in October to share his research showing that the program effectively reduces veteran homelessness, and to demonstrate to lawmakers the importance of evidence in considering support for veterans now and in the future.

Homelessness is a persistent public health issue and veterans are especially vulnerable to experiencing homelessness. The Housing and Urban Development-Veteran Affairs Supportive Housing Program (HUD-VASH) pairs housing vouchers with case management services to get homeless veterans into safe and stable housing and on the path to reaching other self-sufficiency goals.

Evans and his study co-authors found that for every HUD-VASH voucher distributed, one fewer veteran is living on the streets. The program is especially effective for the chronically homeless. The study concluded that HUD-VASH may have lowered veteran homelessness by as much as 70% in the past decade.

Despite this proven success, the President's proposed federal budget eliminates funding for new HUD-VASH vouchers. This is concerning in light of the



Evans presents LEO's HUD-VASH research results at a congressional policy briefing in D.C. hosted by Catholic Charities USA.

recent rapid growth in the populations of post-9/11 veterans and those discharged from the military with a service injury.

“The Housing First model that HUD-VASH employs is a leading example of the potential impact of evidence-based public policy,” Evans remarked. “We’re building a really robust body of evidence that shows that getting people into housing first, and then working on issues like mental health and sobriety and employment, is an effective strategy to reduce chronic homelessness.”

While in D.C., Evans also shared his research results with representatives from Indiana Senator Todd Young's office, Indiana Representative Jackie Walorski's office, HUD, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, and the House Financial Services Committee's Subcommittee on Housing. He was met with bipartisan support for LEO's focus on building evidence to support policies and programs that serve vulnerable populations.

FACULTY AFFILIATE UPDATES

LEO's research network is comprised of faculty affiliates from universities around the country with experience evaluating anti-poverty programs. This fall, we welcome six new faculty affiliates to our network.

BILL SKIMMYHORN is an Assistant Professor of Finance and Economics at the College of William & Mary. He researches the causes and consequences of individual financial decision making and human capital development.

BRIAN CADENA is an Associate Professor of Economics at the University of Colorado Boulder. His research interests lie in immigration, low-skilled labor markets, the economic consequences of government policies, behavioral economics, and applied econometrics.

DANNY TANNENBAUM is an Assistant Professor of Economics at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. His research is in the field of labor and public economics.

JULIAN REIF is an Assistant Professor of Finance and Economics at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. His research interests include population health, public finance, and environmental economics.

RUSTY TCHERNIS is a Professor of Economics at Georgia State University. His primary areas of research are applied econometrics, health economics, and labor economics.

TANIA BARHAM is an Associate Professor of Economics at the University of Colorado Boulder. She has research interests in health, development, and environmental economics.



RESEARCH PROJECT UPDATE

Partner Agency:
Goodwill of Central and
Southern Indiana

Policy Focus Area:
Education

Investigators:
Patrick Turner
David Phillips
Becca Brough

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Goodwill Excel Center is a free public charter school that provides adults the resources and guidance to earn an Indiana Core 40 high school diploma. The Excel Center provides a flexible class schedule, free childcare and transportation, and opportunities to earn industry-recognized certificates and/or college credits towards undergraduate degrees at local colleges and universities. Any adult who has not completed high school or has earned a GED is eligible to take classes and receive an Indiana Core 40 diploma. Beginning in Indianapolis in 2010, the Center has opened locations all over Central and Southern Indiana, and has now expanded nationally to locations in Tennessee, Texas, and Washington, D.C.

SIGNIFICANCE

The Excel Center aims to increase attainment of high school diplomas for low-income workers by giving them the necessary guidance and tools to be successful in school and achieve better labor market outcomes. However, due to limited funding and the high volume of interest from 2011 to 2013 that ultimately led to the expansion of the Excel Center to other locations, a wait list was formed because the program could not serve all of the eligible applicants in the Indianapolis area. Thus, the Indianapolis programs are best suited for evaluation due to a longer follow-up period and the high volume of enrollees between 2011 and 2013 that created this wait list for applicants.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The evaluation will explore the impact of the Excel Center on outcomes for participants. Specifically, LEO seeks to answer the following question: What is the impact of the Excel Cen-

ter on degree attainment, employment, earnings, and receipt of public assistance? LEO is also interested in understanding if the wait times for orientation impact success within the Excel Center.

EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

We will conduct a retrospective, quasi-experimental evaluation of these Excel Centers whose wait lists created a comparison group. We will compare applicants with longer versus shorter wait times for orientation. Those assigned to the program should, on average, look just like those assigned to the comparison group at the time of application. This evaluation will measure how enrollment and completion of the Excel Center program affects receiving a degree, employment, earnings, and receipt of public assistance.

PROJECT STATUS

The preliminary analysis of the effects of the Excel Center will utilize data on outcomes from the Indiana Department of Education. The primary outcomes of interest are enrollment and completion rates.



As Vice President, Mission and Education Initiatives, Betsy Delgado is responsible for leading Goodwill of Central and Southern Indiana's efforts to help individuals and families access education, employment, and health services. Delgado served as the executive director of the Excel Center, Goodwill's school for adult learners, from 2011 to 2013. Prior to joining Goodwill, she served for six years in Community and Continuing Education at the Metropolitan School District of Washington Township. A graduate of University of North Dakota, Delgado earned a bachelor of English and education. She has also earned a certification in leadership from ProLiteracy.

BETSY DELGADO

What is your role in the Excel Center?

I lead 15 Excel Center schools run by Goodwill of Central and Southern Indiana. I am also the leader of our National Network of Excel Centers run by other Goodwill organizations. These schools are located in D.C., Tennessee, Arkansas, Missouri, and Texas.

Why do you think the Excel Center is important?

More than 31 million adults in America do not have a high school diploma and face significant barriers to employment, health, and economic self-sufficiency. These barriers to economic and social mobility not only impact individuals, but also their families and communities.

The Excel Center is changing this reality. We provide uncredentialed adults with the opportunity to earn the high-quality high school diploma they need to increase their independence, attain meaningful employment, and reach their full potential—all at no cost. Some of the results of our work include:

- The Excel Center has awarded 6,200 adults a free, rigorous, and state-recognized high school diploma. Every graduate creates a ripple effect that improves the well-being of families, children, and communities.
- 73% of Excel Center graduates also attain college credits and certifications in high-demand industries such as healthcare, information technology, and advanced manufacturing. As employers face a shortfall of qualified talent, our graduates are a “found workforce” with the skills needed to fill today's jobs.
- In just ten years, the Excel Center has grown from a single school in Indianapolis to 23 campuses operating in six states and the District of Columbia.
- Our rapid expansion is due to our innovative school model, which is committed to meeting students where they are in their education.

What have you gained from working on a LEO research project?

The research that LEO has done helps us do a number of things. It has helped us look at our work with a critical eye and adjust the model to better serve students and families.

The research also helps us share our story and establish a case for the Excel Center to scale across the country to serve the 31 million people who have not completed their high school diploma. As we continue to work with LEO and they expand their research to our national schools, we will be able to help our national partners do both as well.

How do you anticipate the Excel Center will be improved as a result of LEO's research study?

We have already started vetting the national Industry-Recognized Certification to ensure we are providing the opportunity for our graduates to earn higher wages based on the research. We have also revamped our enrollment process to make sure it can be easily navigated by potential students. Finally, we are piloting different approaches to improve retention.

In your opinion, what role does research play in reducing poverty?

Research plays a key role in determining what is working in efforts to reduce poverty. With limited public and private resources available to families living in poverty, we owe it to them to use these resources on opportunities that we know will work to improve their well-being. Research can produce evidence on what is working so that families can utilize schools like the Excel Center to get the education needed to improve their economic and social mobility.



Patrick Turner works in the Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities (LEO) within the Department of Economics at the University of Notre Dame. His research interests are primarily in migration and employment programs. Prior to joining LEO, he graduated with a Ph.D. in Economics from the University of Colorado Boulder. While there, he was a research assistant for two projects: the ReHire Colorado Evaluation and the Matlab Health and Socioeconomic Survey. Before going to graduate school, he worked for Edward Jones in St. Louis as an equity securities trader and had also been a novice in the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits). Patrick went to college at Saint Louis University and lived in St. Louis, MO after graduation before attending graduate school.

PATRICK TURNER

What is your role at LEO?

I am an Assistant Research Professor and am interested in programs designed to help workers be successful in the labor market. I work as an investigator on projects related to education, job training, and workforce development. Much of my time is currently spent communicating with LEO service provider partners to design and implement research projects.

Why did you join LEO?

I am a product of Jesuit higher education (Go Billikens!), and there is a Latin word that permeates the formation I received as a student at Saint Louis University: *magis*. The principle behind this word calls one to think about how they can do something “more” for the greater glory of God. I have always enjoyed thinking analytically and working with numbers, but through the mission of LEO—building evidence on programs that successfully reduce poverty and improve lives—I am able to closely align the work that I do professionally with doing more for others.

How are you involved in the Excel Center project evaluation?

I work closely with LEO’s David Phillips (Research Faculty) and Becca Brough (Research Associate) on the Excel Center evaluation. This project is different from much of my other LEO work in that we are using retrospective data—information collected on previous Excel Center applicants—to facilitate an evaluation. To date, we have partnered with Goodwill to better understand their school and data, as well as Indiana’s Management Performance Hub to link applicants to information on education and earnings outcomes.

In your opinion, what role does research play in reducing poverty?

Policy makers and social service providers are faced with scarce resources. There are only so many program dollars, case worker hours, or seats in a classroom or training program. By evaluating the effectiveness of anti-poverty programs, we can empower decision making with science to better allocate resources and scale up successful programs.

What makes LEO’s approach to research unique?

We build close research partnerships and accompany our service provider partners as they do the hard work of fighting poverty. While being sensitive to the needs of our partners, we aim to design and implement evaluations that provide our partners with actionable information and credibly answer important economic questions.

BY THE NUMBERS: HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION CRISIS



ON-TIME HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES,
BY SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Source: Data is from National Center for Education Statistics (2014/15).



ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF NOT GRADUATING FROM HIGH SCHOOL,
BY RESULTING POVERTY RATE

Source: Data is from National Center for Education Statistics (2009).