How Diverse Is Your Reading List? An Analysis Of BSc Economics Curriculum

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Introduction

• Gender and ethnicity imbalance in Economics discipline has been a long-standing issue:
  – An AEA survey shows that among tenured and tenure-track faculty in economics, only 23.5% are women and only 6.3% are black or Hispanic (Bayer & Rouse, 2016).
  – A RES study shows that in the UK women only represented 26% academic economists in 2018/19, and around 8 percent of standard academic posts in economics were held by Black and minority ethnic women in 2018 (Bateman et al, 2021).
  – The recent RES report shows that out of all UK Economics undergraduate students in 2020/21, only 32% are female and white students account for 58.9% (Paredes Fuentes et al, 2023).

• The content of university knowledge remains dominated by the West for the West (Bhambra, et al. 2018).
Introduction

• In this study, we present micro-level evidence on diversity within Economics by looking into the BSc economic curriculum in a top UK university.
  – Analyze data on gender, ethnicity, and geographic location of the authors in the essential reading lists for all BSc economics modules including both compulsory and optional ones.
  – Examine their relationship with the characteristics (gender, ethnicity) of module leaders who assign the readings.

• Similar studies are done in other disciplines, for example, political science (Arshad et al, 2021).
Introduction

Main findings

- The evidence suggests that the essential reading lists are dominated by white male authors based in North America or Europe.
- Modules with female lecturers or mixed (both male and female) lecturers tend to assign more readings by female authors compared to modules with male lecturers.
- Modules with non-white lecturers tend to assign more readings by non-white authors compared to modules with white lecturers.
Introduction

• Start with a first-year compulsory module:
  – We diversify the reading list to have a more diverse set of authors, topics, examples and applications.
  – We re-design the module research project, as part of summative assessment, to have more diverse perspectives reflected.

• Reflect on the supply of female and minority economists and offer some thoughts on how to address the diversity issue in both short and long terms.
Data

• BSc economic curriculum (a 3-year programme) in a top UK university in 2021/22.
  – Compulsory modules (Years 1 and 2 mandatory ones)
    • Year 1: Economics (intro level), Statistics, Mathematics, Applied Econ (intro econometrics).
    • Year 2: Microeconomics (intermediate level), Macroeconomics (intermediate level), Econometrics (intermediate level).
  – Optional modules: all other 35 modules open for selection in Years 1, 2 & 3.

• Reading lists for all modules (both compulsory and optional ones), obtained from both University library and module syllabi.
Methodology

• Coding
  – Characteristics of authors of the readings (focus on essential readings)
    • Gender: male and female
    • Ethnicity: white, non-white and not clear
    • Geographic location (obtained at the time of publication): Asia, Australia, Europe, North America, South America, others
  – Characteristics of the module leaders who assigned the readings
    • Gender: male and female
    • Ethnicity: white, non-white and not clear
Methodology

• Analysis
  – Descriptive statistics of characteristics (gender, ethnicity and geographic Location) of the authors in the reading lists.
  
  – Relationship between the characteristics of authors and characteristics of module leaders.
  
  – Analysis by nature of modules, compulsory vs optional ones, as well as aggregate level.
RESULTS I:
Characteristics (Gender, Ethnicity and Geographic Location) of the Authors
Gender of the authorship

Statistics regarding the gender of the authorship for compulsory and optional modules across all three years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Compulsory</th>
<th>Optional</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>556</td>
<td>609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Authors</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>676</td>
<td>742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Readings</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>506</td>
<td>526</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Male-to-Female Ratio
• Compulsory: 4.08
• Optional: 4.63
• Total: 4.58
Gender of the authorship

![Gender of Authors](image)
Ethnicity of the authorship

Statistics regarding the ethnicity of the authorship for compulsory and optional modules across all three years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Compulsory</th>
<th>Optional</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>58 (87.88%)</td>
<td>586 (86.69%)</td>
<td>644 (86.79%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-White</td>
<td>7 (10.61%)</td>
<td>70 (10.36%)</td>
<td>77 (10.38%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Clear</td>
<td>1 (1.52%)</td>
<td>20 (2.96%)</td>
<td>21 (2.83%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Authors</td>
<td>66 (100.00%)</td>
<td>676 (100.00%)</td>
<td>742 (100.00%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Readings</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>506</td>
<td>526</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ethnicity of the authorship

![Ethnicity of Authors](chart)

- **White**: 88% (Compulsory), 87% (Optional), 87% (Total)
- **Non-White**: 11% (Compulsory), 10% (Optional), 10% (Total)
- **Not Clear**: 2% (Compulsory), 3% (Optional), 3% (Total)
Geographic location of the authorship

Statistics regarding the geographic location of the authorship, obtained through their affiliation at the time of publication, for compulsory and optional modules across all 3 years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographic Location</th>
<th>Compulsory</th>
<th>Optional</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South America</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Affiliations</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>685</td>
<td>753</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Readings</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>506</td>
<td>526</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Geographic location of the authorship

Geographic Location of Authors

- Asia: 4.4% Compulsory, 1.6% Optional, 1.9% Total
- Australia: 0.0% Compulsory, 0.9% Optional, 0.8% Total
- Europe: 61.8% Compulsory, 39.1% Optional, 41.2% Total
- North America: 32.4% Compulsory, 57.4% Optional, 55.1% Total
- South America: 1.5% Compulsory, 0.6% Optional, 0.7% Total
- Other: 0.0% Compulsory, 0.4% Optional, 0.4% Total
RESULTS II

Relationship between the characteristics of authors and characteristics of module leaders
Relationship between gender of module leaders and gender of authors

Note: (Male - Female) means Male Module Leaders & Female Authors
Relationship between ethnicity of module leaders and ethnicity of authors

**Note:** (White - Non White) means White Module Leaders & Non White Authors
Diversify a first-year module: an example
(to be effective from 2023/24)

• Start with a first-year compulsory module “Applied Economics”. It covers intro econometrics in the first half term, and focuses on the applications to various economics topics such as consumer demand, consumption and saving, employment and minimum wage and labour supply in the second half term.

• Actions taken:
  – Summarize the biographies and contributions of top Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) and/or female economists.
  – Identify a list of videos by diverse economists on their research.
  – Diversify the reading list to have a more diverse set of authors, topics, examples and applications.
  – Redesign the module research project to have more diverse perspectives reflected.
Diversify a first-year module: an example

- Summarize the biographies and contributions of top BAME and/or female economists at https://ideas.repec.org/top/top.person.all.html
Diversify a first-year module: an example

• Identify a list of videos by diverse economists on their research and integrate the relevant videos to the module, for example:
  • Women in Economics Series: https://learn.mru.org/women-economics-series/.
  • Videos on economists and their research at https://diversifyingingecon.org/videos-on-economists/
Diversify a first-year module: an example

• Diversify the reading list to have a more diverse set of authors, topics, examples and applications. For example:
  – On the topic of employment and minimum wages, in addition to Card and Krueger (AER, 1994), we add research in less developed countries/regions such as China, Thailand, Indonesia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and have discussion on the minimum wage puzzle in less developed countries to reconcile theory and evidence.
  – On the topic of labour supply, we add more readings on Female labour supply, e.g. Goldin, C. (AER, 2006) with video at https://learn.mru.org/women-economics-series-claudia-goldin/, and discussion in various countries such as China, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam.
• Re-design the module research project, as part of summative assessment, to have more diverse perspectives reflected.

  - *Before:* ask students to study an economic question in a given country with a given dataset, e.g. “How effective are the measures implemented by the UK government to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic?”

  - *After:* ask students to study an economic question in a country of their choice with suggested datasets, e.g. research the impact of Covid-19 on labour supply in a country of their choice and their subsequent policies.
Discussion

- Move forward
  - Diversify the reading lists to have a diverse set of authors, topics, examples and applications for more modules.
  - Enhance the exposure of students to the work by female/ethnic minority economists ("Role Model" effect)
    - More female/ethnic minority professors teach UG modules.
    - Interviews with more female/ethnic minority professors.
  - Foster the learning environment for relevance, belonging, and growth mindsets.
    - Bayer et al. (2020) find that women and underrepresented minority students experience lower measures of relevance, belonging, and growth mindsets in introductory economic courses compared to men and non-underrepresented students.
Discussion

• Move forward
  • In the longer term, increase the supply of female/ethnic minority economists.
    • Economics pipeline in undergraduates: Access, Continuation, and Degree outcomes (Paredes Fuentes et al, 2023)
    • Support those students so inclined to pursue their further study and academic careers. Some good practices includes the Economics PhD Applicant Mentoring Programme (AMP) which helps applicants from underrepresented backgrounds prepare their applications to economics PhD programmes by matching applicants to mentors who are PhD students in the top Economics departments, including UCL Economics.
  • Mentoring, retention and promotion of female and ethnic minority economists.
References


References


• Bhambra, Gurminder K, Dalia Gebrial and Kerem Nişancıoğlu, eds. 2018, *Decolonising the University*, Pluto Press.


Thank You!

Questions/Comments:  
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