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[Sabbatical Report]

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SABBATICAL LEAVE REPORT
Western Kentucky University
Dr. Claudia Strow

To: Dr. Gordon Emslie, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs

From: Dr. Claudia Strow, Associate Professor of Economics

CC: Dr. Jeffrey Katz, Dean, Gordon Ford College of Business; Dr. Cathy Carey, Chair, Department of Economics

Date: June 18, 2014

RE: Sabbatical Activity Report

Summary

This document summarizes my sabbatical leave activities for spring semester, 2014. Below my accomplishments are discussed, and the value of the sabbatical leave to my teaching and research is assessed. The main activities I conducted during my sabbatical leave period included work on a new research project examining FMLA's impact on breastfeeding, the writing of a second edition of a textbook, substantial revisions for an accepted publication for the *Journal of Markets and Morality*, a revise and resubmit of a manuscript for the *Journal of Applied Economics and Public Policy*, an interview for *Voice of America*, the presentation of a paper at the Association of Private Enterprise and Education, teaching Junior Achievement in a Day at McNeill Elementary, and the development of a study abroad course in Costa Rica (including a site visit). Each of these activities is explained in further detail below.

FMLA and Breastfeeding Research

As I described in my sabbatical application, many debates have erupted concerning both maternal labor force participation and the health benefits to mothers and infants from breastfeeding. While sociologists and physicians have added their input to these debates, these topics have yet to be fully examined by economists. As these issues all purportedly have an impact on children's future contributions to society, intelligence, and health, this issue is clearly one of economic importance. Further, as the benefits of breastfeeding have become more and more documented, policy makers have remained divided on the role of government in requiring paid maternity leave. Thus, a major focus of my sabbatical was to begin my own research examining the relationship between women's labor force participation, their access to guaranteed paid and unpaid maternity leave, and their breastfeeding incidence and duration.

Utilizing data from the NLSY (National Longitudinal Survey of Youth), I researched the factors that influenced a women's decision to breastfeed, her duration of breastfeeding, and the relationship between those behaviors and her return to work.

I have selected the NLSY for my research because it offers information on both the mother and child and allows for the inclusion of valuable control variables such as the complete work histories of the mother. It also has a wealth of information about the child's feeding patterns and length of breastfeeding or other types of feeding. Finally, the NLSY offers detailed information concerning the amount of time the mother spent outside of the labor force after the birth of each child.

While combining these two data sets (mother and child) and reconciling the many years of data while combing through the large volume of data available has been quite time consuming, I believe it will pay off in a publication in a highly ranked journal as well as in yielding information that can prove valuable to policymakers and employers wrestling with decisions related to the amount of paid leave they should guarantee workers.

From the NLSY I discovered that in 1985, 56.7% of workers in the survey reported access to paid maternity leave, while by 2010 81.6% of survey respondents had access to paid leave. And yet, only 25% of all children in the survey were breastfed. In a world where the advantages of breastfeeding and being breastfed are well documented, policies that increase breastfeeding incidence and duration are needed.

In order to identify factors that determined breastfeeding likelihood and incidence, I examined first if there were racial differences in breastfeeding duration. My results suggest with a high level of statistical significance (99%), among working women that breastfed, white women breastfed 4.5 weeks longer than African American or Hispanic women. I also examined the relationship between maternity leave and breastfeeding duration. Not surprisingly, the longer a women took off work, the longer she breastfed. And, among those that breastfed, mothers who never worked breastfed an average of 6 weeks longer than those who worked before and after birth.

The number of weeks a mother waited before returning to work is negatively correlated with breastfeeding incidence. While this result was surprising at first, after further reflection and reexamination of the literature, I believe this may be the result of a correlation between each of these variables and education and WIC (women infant and child benefits for low income mothers) that would make formula feeding appear to be a cheaper option. Thus, my next step is to add in controls for education and access to subsidized formula.

Throughout the upcoming summer and fall, I plan to continue this work and consolidate my literature review with my own empirical findings and submit this work for publication in the American Journal of Economics and Sociology. The sabbatical has been instrumental in providing me the time needed to give this important topic the attention it needs. Furthermore, research in this area is greatly needed to guide both health organizations (as they work to educate individuals about the benefits of breastfeeding) and policymakers (as they make decisions about what level of paid leave is optimal for society).

Macroeconomic Truths and Myths

My sabbatical application also detailed work on a second edition to my coauthored textbook *Macroeconomic Truths and Myths*. As the first textbook was divided into 26 small chapters and included numerous tables and descriptions that were quickly becoming dated, we felt that a major revision was necessary to keep our textbook up to date and signed a contract with a due date of May 1, 2014. So, I spent a great deal of time revising tables with more current information and adding new tables and figures, revising the practice problems at the end of each chapter, and completely reorganizing the chapters into 14 larger chapters (including adding some new chapters while deleting others and rewriting parts of many chapters). I also added an index and glossary to the text. This revision has been sent to the book's editors and I am now copy editing proofs for so that the second edition can be printed later this summer.

Journal of Markets and Morality

Unexpectedly, a paper that had been accepted for publication in the Journal of Markets and Morality came back from the editor in February with a number of final revisions recommended prior to publication. Theologians and economists alike read this journal, and so the editors felt that we needed to expand on and deepen some of the theological arguments explored in our papers. Thus, these additional revisions required a great deal of research into a body of literature that I had been less familiar with. The sabbatical provided me with the time needed to more thoroughly investigate the theological research in this area and to greatly strengthen the paper. The editor responded quite favorably to my changes saying that the paper had been much strengthened for my fine work. Further, the research conducted for these revisions will undoubtedly strengthen all future work I do in this area and in the end made the published paper a much stronger piece.

Journal of Applied Economics and Public Policy

A paper written for this journal received a revise and resubmit at the end of fall semester. So, for a portion of my sabbatical time, I worked towards revising this paper for resubmission.

Voice of America

In May, I was interviewed for a segment on *Voice of America*. This broadcast is the "official external broadcast institution of the United States federal government." In particular, I was interviewed regarding the minimum wage, unemployment in Kentucky, the national debt, and the upcoming May primary election in Kentucky. This broadcast airs internationally and so is consistent with expanding the University's international reach.

Presentation at Association of Private Enterprise and Education

On April 13-15, I attended the Association of Private Enterprise and Education meetings in Las Vegas, Nevada. I attended numerous sessions, especially those dealing with Poverty and Labor Economic Issues. I also attended several teaching sessions and presented a paper on "Teaching Economic Policy and

Sustainability.” In my presentation I discussed ways to provoke thoughtful discussion on blackboard, readings to include in such a class (for which no textbook exists), assessment measures, challenges, and successes. I had numerous participants come up to me afterward to tell me that my presentation had reinvigorated them and made them realize ways in which they could improve upon their own courses. I also received follow-up emails from others wanting more information. From the sessions I attended, I took away several new teaching ideas and research ideas.

Junior Achievement in a Day at McNeill Elementary

I taught Junior Achievement to Mrs. Wilder’s fifth grade class at McNeill Elementary on April 4th. This was an all day commitment, as the lessons typically taught over five different visits are taught all in one day. This opportunity to volunteer in Junior Achievement is important because it allows me the chance to get elementary students thinking about things from an economic perspective. Further it gets them thinking about WKU and their college and career goals. Finally, many of these students I have taught JA since they were in Kindergarten, so volunteering repeatedly has allowed me the opportunity to build upon the concepts introduced each year. Although I have volunteered for JA while not on sabbatical in the past, I have never before done JA in a day. The fifth grade JA is taught in one day at McNeill, and this gave me the chance to be able to stay for the entire day as a volunteer.

Economics of Costa Rica

Having studied abroad as an undergraduate, I have a huge admiration for the unique learning opportunities offered outside of the college campus and have always wanted to lead a study abroad course of my own. Upon discussing this desire with my newly hired colleague Susanne Leguizamon in the fall of 2013, we learned that we had a mutual interest in doing so. As such, we applied for and received a grant to take a site visit to Costa Rica in March of 2014 for the purpose of developing a course in Economics in Costa Rica.

As a major exporter for a variety of industries with a focus on sustainability and a major destination for ecotourism, Costa Rica is a country ripe for study of economics. During the 10-day site visit, I visited the towns of Jaco, Manuel Antonio, Monteverde, Arenal, Puerto Viejo, and San Jose to discern which locations and stops would best fit into a study abroad course. While there I lined up future visits and talks with representatives from Del Monte Pineapple, Monteverde Cheese Factory, Don Juan Coffee and Chocolate Plantation, BriBri Natives, an Arenal Stable Owner, Owners of a Monteverde Ziplining and ATV Eco tour operator. I also visited the Monteverde Institute and arranged for class lectures from their speakers on topics including sustainability, healthcare, and Costa Rica’s welfare system. My colleague and I also lined up a volunteer opportunity at the Proyecto Asis Orphanage and also located a working farm and Eco lodge that offers unique learning/lodging experience nearby. In addition, I lined up a visit with specialized lectures at the Dole Banana plantation and identified cultural museums in San Jose to include. I also discerned which parts of Costa Rica to go to with the course in order to visit the

most industries and sites of Economic interest. Finally, I visited numerous accommodations in each town and narrowed down the most viable options for housing our group of students.

The site visit not only further invigorated my interest in teaching this course abroad it was invaluable for my planning. It helped me to hone in on the topics to focus on and also helped me to rule out excursions and locations that would be less valuable for the students. Without the site visit, I would not be prepared to teach this course and so it would not have been offered this winter.

Upon return from the site visit, I had to move quickly following the return from our site visit to meet the deadline for approval for the course to be offered in Winter 2015. I completed all of the necessary proposal documentation and received course approval from the International Education Advisory Council and by the Chief International Officer. My Colleague and I then set up an informational meeting and already have a number of students who have applied.

While this was not part of my original sabbatical outline, the sabbatical proved instrumental in letting me take the lead on the course planning and site visit coordinating. Without this, I do not believe we would have been able to get the course approved for this upcoming January offering. Teaching this course will not only allow me to expose students on the course to a greater perspective of the world around them, it will undoubtedly offer numerous new examples to share in my on campus classes. Even the site visit has given me new examples that I will include in my classes this fall and will certainly change the way I approach some issues in my Economics of Poverty and Discrimination course. Further, the site visit has given me a wealth of new research ideas, especially in the area of economic solutions to poverty.

Summary of how the sabbatical leave has contributed to the university, community, and my own professional enhancement in terms of teaching, research, and service.

Contributions to Teaching:

In terms of teaching, my sabbatical provided the time necessary to develop and gain approval for an Economics of Costa Rica class to be offered next January. I took the lead on working out the logistics for both the site visit and the course itself and have already developed a syllabus and itinerary and have secured field trips and excursions that will compliment the lecture portion of the class. The majority of these excursions and face-to-face discussion with business owners could not have happened without visiting them in person and meeting them during the site visit. Furthermore, the site visit allowed me the opportunity to scout out lodging accommodations that will fit both the needs and budget of the course. I put together a PowerPoint presentation and flyers to advertise the course along with a budget and held an informational meeting to garner interest in the course.

The sabbatical also provided me the opportunity to present on my own teaching methods at a conference and to attend sessions at that conference that reinvigorated my enthusiasm for teaching and provided new ideas such as ways to “flip” the classroom and

hands on examples. Further, the experience in Costa Rica has reminded me of the importance of teaching about Poverty and Discrimination and has given me countless examples to use in my classes.

Contributions to Research/Creative Activity:

My sabbatical provided numerous research dividends. I was able to get a great start on a body of research that had long interested me but had been too time consuming to begin during a regular teaching semester. This start on the research into breastfeeding and labor force participation has the potential to morph into a number of publishable papers and has the ability to affect public policy decisions.

Furthermore, the opportunity to revise my textbook has allowed me to produce a better product that will not only have a greater likelihood of being adopted at other universities but will also help my own students to have an easier time understanding and applying economics.

The time needed to further delve into theological viewpoints on giving and taxation as related to my *Journal of Markets and Morality* paper has not only made my own present research stronger, it has better equipped me for future papers in this area and for related class discussions. And, finally the time used to revise and submit the paper for the *Journal of Applied Economics and Public Policy* should lead to a subsequent publication.

Contributions to Service:

In terms of service, my sabbatical allowed me the opportunity to teach "Junior Achievement in a day" at McNeill Elementary. It also allowed me the opportunity to be interviewed by Voice of America and to prepare for that interview so that I could represent WKU internationally. Most importantly, it allowed me the time to visit Costa Rica and has reinvigorated my interest in developing service opportunities for my Econ club students that use their backgrounds to help out the poor in Warren County.

Conclusion

I want to conclude by thanking you for the opportunity to take this sabbatical leave. This has been an invaluable opportunity for me to advance my professional career. It has left me with a plate full of research under way, a study abroad I am excited about leading in January, a renewed passion for using my training to help others, and a reinvigorated enthusiasm for returning to the classroom. Further, the time spent reading new research labor economics will greatly enhance my lectures in Labor Economics, Economics of Poverty and Discrimination, and my principles courses and will strengthen my own research. Please let me know if you have any questions regarding any of my sabbatical activities.

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