Atara S. Oliver

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Citizenship: United States
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Research and Professional Experience

Research Associate, ESMT Berlin   2020 – Present
    European Research Council grant: Digital Platforms: Pricing, Variety and Quality Provision

Teaching and Research Assistant, Rice University   2014 – 2020

Research Assistant, Hilltop Institute   2013–2014

Internship, United States Bureau of Labor Statistics   2012

Instructional Designer, The Leslie Group   2006–2010

Education

Ph.D. in Economics, Rice University   Summer 2020
    DISSERTATION: Essays on the Economics of Communication and Disclosure

M.A. in Economic Policy Analysis, University of Maryland – Baltimore County   May 2014

B.A. in Economics, University of Maryland – Baltimore County   May 2013

B.A. in Mathematics, University of Maryland – Baltimore County   May 2013

Research and Teaching Fields

Primary: Applied Microeconomic Theory.

Secondary: Political Economy, Industrial Organization, Media Economics.

Teaching Experience

Instructor, ESMT Berlin   Summer 2021
    Graduate: Microeconomic Theory (part of the course)

Teaching Assistant, ESMT Berlin   Summer 2022
    MBA: Business Economics

Instructor, Rice University   Fall 2016 – Summer 2019
    Graduate: Math Camp for Economics (in-person and online)

Teaching Assistant, Rice University   Fall 2014–Present
    Graduate: Microeconomics (Game Theory)
    Undergraduate: Market Design, Math for Economics, Law and Economics, Corporate Finance.

LANGUAGE, TECHNICAL, AND PROGRAMMING SKILLS

Languages English (native), German (Goethe Certificate B2)

Technical Skills Economic modeling, game theory, static and dynamic programming, regression analysis, e-learning design, instructional design.

Programming Languages Python, Stata, Mathematica, MATLAB.

Other Skills Microsoft Office; Adobe Illustrator, Indesign, and Photoshop; LaTeX.

WORKING PAPERS

Online News and Editorial Standards

The internet enables a media firm to post information received from leads at any time. To examine the effect that this has on the probability of posting incorrect news, I compare a scenario in which the news can be posted and updated at any time on a continuum to a scenario in which news can only be posted at a fixed time. I determine the editorial standard, which is a cutoff that determines how certain a firm must be in order to initially post an article. When changing a story is costless, if the firm can post at any time, it will post with weakly less information than it would with a predetermined posting time. If changing a story is costly, then the firm's editorial standard is weakly higher when it can post at any time than when there is just one posting time, and this editorial standard decreases over time. A lower editorial standard implies that the firm will be more likely to post incorrect news, so this implies that a firm may be more cautious with releasing internet news than it would be with releasing a newspaper article. However, if the firm has a strong prior about the event, it may post earlier with less information when it can post on the internet at any time.

When to Ask for an Update: Timing in Strategic Communication
with Ying Chen, Johns Hopkins University
> *Revise and resubmit at the Journal of Economic Theory*

A principal (receiver) considers whether to accept a project of uncertain value. The total value depends on the values of two aspects. In each period, an agent (sender) privately learns the value of one aspect with positive probability. We compare two reporting protocols: frequent updating and infrequent updating. Frequent updating requires the sender to report in each period; infrequent updating requires him to report only at the end of the learning process. The sender is biased towards acceptance; he may conceal his signal, but cannot misrepresent his information in other ways. If the project's expected value is lower than the receiver's acceptance threshold, then the equilibrium outcome is the same regardless of the reporting protocol under certain regularity conditions. This equivalence implies that if soliciting a report is costly, then frequent updating is inefficient, but if there is gain from early resolution, then frequent updating is better. In contrast, if the project's expected value is sufficiently high, then reporting protocol matters. Specifically, if it is sufficiently unlikely for the sender to observe an informative signal in a later period or the divergence of interests is sufficiently low, then the receiver is better off by requiring frequent updating since it encourages the sender to reveal provisionally unfavorable information early on. When the probability of the sender observing an informative signal in a later period is sufficiently high, however, the receiver is better off asking for only one report at the end of the learning process.

Wage Disclosure

Job applicants are often asked for their current wage, but recently implemented policies in a number of jurisdictions have prohibited this question. This policy change makes wage disclosure a strategic choice for the applicant. What effect does this policy change have on who is hired and how much they are paid? I

consider a model in which an applicant applies for a job, and the employer can choose to make an offer to the applicant at a cost. I find that if the applicants do not know how much they will benefit from the job when submitting the application, then there can exist a partial disclosure equilibrium in which an applicant with a high or low wage conceals her current wage, while an applicant with an intermediate wage reveals it. This implies that the typical unravelling results common in models of voluntary disclosure may not occur. If the applicant knows this benefit in advance, there can also exist an equilibrium in which no applicant would reveal her current wage.

WORKS IN PROGRESS

Social Media and News Content

Social media platforms have provided a new means through which consumers can access news, potentially expanding their reach. A platform does not, however, just passively provide news, rather it has information about consumers that it can use to target them and provides its own user-generated-content as well. This paper considers a news firm that chooses the quality of a fact and opinion article, how to prioritize these articles on its website, and how the targeting algorithms of a social media firm affect these decisions. If the value to consumers of the platform's user-generated-content is sufficiently high, then the firm will produce a lower quality fact article, and the relative quality of the opinion article would be higher. This may also lead the news firm to prioritize the opinion article over the fact article on its own website. If the value of user-generated-content is lower, the effect of the platform on the quality and order decisions is ambiguous. This analysis shows that social media targeting algorithms affect the news viewed by all consumers, even those who do not visit the platform.

Information Acquisition: A First-Order Approach
with Willy Lefez, ESMT Berlin

We consider an information-acquisition problem in an environment of imperfect information, and apply it to the information acquisition and pricing decisions of a platform. In particular, we address the question of how much costly information a firm would choose to acquire about its customers in order to determine the price to show to a given customer. We develop a novel approach of directly using first-order conditions of the firm's optimization problem to find the optimal information acquisition strategy for the platform. This approach enables one to directly analyze the effect of a change in a platform's profit structure or incentives on its information acquisition decision.

Student Loan Debt and Home Purchase
with Mehreen Gul, Rice University

The rapidly increasing levels of educational debt incurred by American students raises concerns over the effects that the debt could have on their ability to achieve their long-term goals, including homeownership. While amount of student loan debt held by households has increased over the last few decades, homeownership rates among young adults have declined. Additionally, if borrowers are taking out more loans to attain higher education, then higher future earnings could potentially mitigate the effect of student loan payments on home purchase. It is important to determine if the negative effect of student debt on housing demand is exceeded by the positive effect that comes from higher future earnings. The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship between student loan debt and housing demand.

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

Presentations

Social Media and News Content BCCP Forum, Berlin Microeconomic Colloquium, Stony Brook Game Theory Conference 2022

Online News and Editorial Standards EARIE Conference 2021, Berlin Microeconomic Colloquium,

UCSD Rady School of Business, US Food and Drug Administration, Southern Economic Association Conference 2019, Texas Economic Theory Camp 2018, Stony Brook Game Theory Conference 2018, Jerusalem Summer School in Economics 2018 (Poster), Midwest Economic Theory Conference 2018, Western Economic Association International Conference 2018, Rice University Brown Bag Seminar

When to Ask for an Update Texas Economic Theory Camp 2017, Rice University Brown Bag Seminar 2017

Wage Disclosure Texas Economic Theory Camp 2019

Other Theoretical Political Economy Session at the American Economic Association meeting (discussant), The Consumer Expenditure Survey Microdata Users Workshop at the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics in Washington, DC

Summer Schools

Summer School in Economics, Jerusalem, Israel	2016, 2018
Summer School of the Econometric Society, Kyoto, Japan	2016

Other

Chair of the Graduate Student Recruitment Committee, Rice University	2015–2019
Student representative, Graduate Economics Association	2015–2016, 2018–2019

Referee for Journal of Politics, Dynamic Games and Applications, Econometrica, International Journal of Game Theory, Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization, Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics.

Scholarships, Honors, and Awards

The Timothy and Katharine Gunning Award for Best Third Year Paper, Rice University *"Online News and Editorial Standards"*	2018
The George Zodrow Award for Best Performance in a Workshop, Rice University	2018
The Michael Maher Graduate Student Teaching Prize in Economics, Rice University	2017
Rica and Tony Ligeralde Fellowship Award for Best Performance in Economic Theory Qualifying Exam	2016
Newcombe Scholarship, University of Maryland – Baltimore County	2011–2013
Gerald R. Goldman Economics Scholarship, University of Maryland – Baltimore County	2012–2013
Summer Economics Scholarship, University of Maryland – Baltimore County	2012
Transfer Student Scholarship	2011–2013