



MENARD FAMILY MIDWEST INITIATIVE FOR ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT AND RESEARCH

2019-2020 ANNUAL REPORT

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The Menard Family Midwest Initiative for Economic Engagement and Research (MFI) is proud to have completed a successful inaugural year. Our year has been one in which the world has seen tumult and challenging times. Through this difficulty, the tremendous support of our donors, students, faculty, staff, and the administration at the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse (UWL) have enabled the Initiative to grow, thrive, and adapt to our changing environment.

We dedicated our first year to developing a foundation of quality academic research and to building bridges that would create a network of partners and stakeholders that will help us maximize our impact as we grow.

We launched the Menard Family Experimental Economics laboratory. More than 200 students participated in the experiments and the research from the experiments should be ready for publication next year.

We collaborated with UWL's economics department and the political science department to host outstanding events this past year. We reached a campus-wide audience and our support is growing. We also established partnerships with off-campus groups, including EconomicsWisconsin and the Foundation for Economic Education, and other groups to hold more terrific events next year.

We hired four members to join the MFI team. Abdul Kidwai and Joe Ortiz will transition from faculty fellow positions to full-time MFI team members. Matthew Style from George Mason University and Perry Ferrel from West Virginia University will join us in the fall.

Obviously, the spring of 2020 went off-script. However, we pride ourselves in our flexibility and our ability to adapt. In May, we put out a call for papers that would highlight innovative responses by local businesses and organizations to the COVID-19 pandemic. We recognized that rapid innovations have been made in medicine, education, service industries, the nonprofit sector, and many other fields. Our goal with this first publication in the MFI Briefs series – Innovation During Crisis: Response to Covid-19 in the Coulee Region – is to identify our behind-the-lines innovators that took quick action when action was needed most. We would also like to highlight innovations that not only have been effective in the short term, but may be transformative to other organizations in the future.

Looking ahead, we are excited to publish our MFI Briefs. We hope to make these briefs an on-going series that can extend into multiple forms of media. We plan to engage with our local community and the briefs are a major first step toward reaching greater impact in Wisconsin.

We have a major research program planned, including the publication of our first book, Regulation and Economic Opportunity: Blueprints for Reform. We have several new programs designed to increase our footprint both on-campus and off. We are prepared to adapt to whatever the next year throws at us and we look forward to embracing new opportunities that change inevitably creates.

In concluding, this first year set a firm footing for advancing toward our long-run goals. We continue to value fundamental, scientific truth above all else. Based on our scientific findings, we hope to inform solutions to create a better world for as many people as possible.

Our ultimate success depends on the support of foundations and private individuals who share our commitment to exploring answers to today's social, economic, political, and legal challenges. We are deeply grateful to all who support our venture. To learn more about the Menard Family Midwest Initiative for Economic Research and Engagement, visit our web site <https://www.uwlax.edu/center/menard-family-initiative/> or look us up on Facebook.


Sincerely,
Adam Hoffer

WHO WE ARE

BACKGROUND

The Menard Family Midwest Initiative for Economic Engagement and Research was launched in September, 2019 with a generous gift from the Menard family. The Initiative is uniquely positioned to simultaneously engage nontraditional audiences in economics and conduct cutting-edge economics research.

The Initiative uses experimental economics to test the boundaries of markets and economic organization and the Initiative explores economic policy causes and outcomes with the most recent economic data.

Ideas regarding ways to improve society and increase well-being abound. Only with scientific grounding can these ideas take root and grow into opportunities. Our work builds on the tradition and work of Nobel laureates Vernon Smith, Daniel Kahneman, and Richard Thaler.

VISION

The Menard Family Midwest Initiative for Economic Engagement and Research integrates economic theory and practice to conduct state-of-the-art economic experiments and produce educational resources in order to contribute to a prosperous and civil society in Wisconsin and beyond.

MISSION

The Menard Family Midwest Initiative for Economic Engagement and Research engages participants in economics through experimental research and enriching, interactive experiences to ultimately discover answers to our social, economic, political, and legal challenges. The Initiative's work will shine a light on effective solutions and help advance positive change.

Targeted Research and Engagement Areas

- Regulation
- Tax and Budget Policy
- Economic Opportunity
- Sports Economics
- Education
- Political Economy
- Behavioral Economics

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

2019-2020 MFI STUDENT FELLOWS



Kacy Wesolowski

Kacy Wesolowski graduated UWL in May 2020 with a bachelor of science in Economics. Kacy was the lead recruiter for the Menard Family Experimental lab, directly recruiting more than one hundred students for the research conducted in the lab.



Kyle VanDeursen

Kyle graduated UWL in the fall of 2019 with a bachelors of science degree in economics. Kyle was the first student to design and fully execute his own experiment in the experimental laboratory. Kyle collected data for his study, "The Effect of the Presence of a Cell Phone on Contributions to a Public Good," and hopes to publish his results next year.



Alex Wasieleski

Alex graduated UWL in May 2020 with a double major in Marketing and Economics double major. He took on the role of Research Assistant in the experimental laboratory and conducted data collection in the field. After graduation, Alex accepted a position with the local River Valley Media Group.

DISCUSSION GROUP

Economic Engagement is a pillar of our organization. We have found that economic ignorance remains a persistence hurdle in our attempts to promote data-driven, scientific best-practice public policy. Our goal for the Discussion Group series is to use an informal discussion environment to engage our audience in the economic way of thinking and to highlight how basic economics and public choice concepts can be seen in every field.

Throughout the academic year, the MFI organized and hosted our discussion group. The MFI faculty joined a group of students from a diverse set of academic backgrounds to discuss economic policy and current events. The Discussion Group series was held both on-campus and off-campus at local restaurants. Interested students were given read-ahead material and always came prepared to discuss and debate the weekly topics which ranged from economic costs associated with "Medicare for All" to research behind government subsidies for the construction of new professional sporting venues.

ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

PRESENTATIONS

- Abdul Kidwai presented “The effect of explicitly assigning property rights in common-pool resources” at the North American Economic Science Association (ESA) conference, October 2019, Los Angeles, CA
- Adam Hoffer presented “Housing Prices and MSA Economic Freedom” at the Southern Economic Association (SEA) annual meetings, November 2019, Ft. Lauderdale, FL.
- Adam Hoffer presented “Housing Prices and MSA Economic Freedom” at the North American Regional Science Council annual meetings, November 2019, Pittsburgh, PA..

POPULAR MEDIA PUBLICATIONS AND APPEARANCES

Authored Opinion Editorials

- “The NCAA Solved One Problem—and Maybe More.” (with Jared Pincin). Multiple outlets, including the McClatchy-Tribune News Service (Washington, D.C), Chicago Tribune, Newsday, Post-Tribune, Daily Journal, Wisconsin State Journal, November 4-14, 2019.
- “Failed selective consumption taxes are red meat for politicians.” The Hill. November 1, 2019.

MEDIA APPEARANCES

- May 28, 2020. Campus News, La Crosse, WI. Adam Hoffer was highlighted in, “Creativity in a crisis.”
- March 30, 2020. WKBT television, La Crosse, WI. Adam Hoffer discussed, “Federal Reserve lowers interest rates to 0%, what it means for you.”
- April 28, 2020. WKBT television, La Crosse, WI. Adam Hoffer discussed, “Wisconsin gas prices the lowest in the U.S.”
- May 22, 2020. WKBT television, La Crosse, WI. Adam Hoffer announced, “Menard Family Initiative at UWL seeks COVID-19 coping examples.”
- February 9, 2020. The Lantern, La Crosse, WI. Adam Hoffer was featured on the cover of The Lantern.
- October 31, 2019. Campus News. Adam Hoffer was interviewed for, “Research reflects policy change,” to discuss the role his research played in the NCAA’s decision to allow college athletes to profit from their name, image and likeness. [image below]
- September 26, 2019. The Lantern, La Crosse, WI. Adam Hoffer was interviewed for, “UWL receives \$2.1 million.”
- September 20, 2019. The Raquet Press, La Crosse, WI. Adam Hoffer quoted in, “UWL receives 2.1 million dollar donation for the College of Business Administration.”
- September 19, 2019. Campus News, La Crosse, WI. Adam Hoffer was interviewed for, “UWL receives \$2.1 million.”

SCHOLARLY PUBLICATIONS

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Adam Hoffer

- “Economic Freedom and Migration: A Metro Area-Level Analysis.” (with Imran Arif, Dean Stansel, and Don Lacombe). Southern Economic Journal.
- “Las Vegas Point Spread Values and Quantifying the Value of an NBA Player.” (with Jared Pincin). International Journal of Sports Finance.
- “Expenditure Effects of the 2010 Washington Soda Tax.” (with Kate Sheehan). The Review of Regional Studies. 50(1), 127-141.
- “Behavior when the Chips are Down: An Experimental Study of Wealth Effects and Exchange Media.” (with Adam Stivers, Ming Tsang, and Richard Deaves). Journal of Behavioral Finance.
- “Quantifying NFL Player Value with the Help of Vegas Point Spreads Values.” (with Jared Pincin). Journal of Sports Economics. 20(7), 959-974.
- “Students’ grade expectations in principles of economics courses: How do they vary throughout the semester and what’s the impact of feedback?” (with Matthew C. Rousu, David Harris, et. al). Journal of Business, Economics and Technology. 22(1): 163-174.

Abdul Kidwai

- “Threshold and Group Size Uncertainty in Common-pool Resources: An Experimental Study” (with Angela C.M. de Oliveira) Public Finance Review.

THE MENARD FAMILY EXPERIMENTAL LABORATORY

An important goal of the Initiative is to conduct rigorous academic research to aid policymakers. Finding out ‘ what works’ requires a systematic investigation of the numerous and varying underlying factors for which an experimental approach is well-suited. Our lab seeks to contribute to the mission of evidence-based policymaking.

Our Faculty Fellow, Dr. Abdul H. Kidwai, undertook two tasks towards that end. First, the infrastructure of the experimental lab was developed. Students were trained to run experimental sessions. Extensive outreach programs were organized to publicize the lab on campus to establish a robust subject-pool. Second, several research projects were designed. Two experimental studies were conducted which examined the effect of in-group identity on cooperation and individual behaviors such as generosity and risk-taking. As the country today grapples with political unrest driven by identity issues, these studies will help policymakers in better understanding the link between in-group identity and individual behaviors. A total of 200 subjects participated in these studies. Moving forward, the lab is reaching out to the local business community to design field experiments to address issues of interest to them.

SPEAKER SERIES



Dan Kapanke



Andrew Grobe



Liz Martin

During the academic year, The Menard Family Midwest Initiative for Economic Engagement and Research sought to provide opportunities for students to engage with professionals from a spectrum of occupations through a Speaker Series.

On February 13, Dan Kapanke, owner of the La Crosse Loggers joined the MFI and students on campus to discuss the Business of Baseball. Dan discussed his personal experience in launching the baseball team in La Crosse and his years of entrepreneurial experience of keeping the franchise operational in ever-changing business environments.

Assistant Deputy Director of Recreation for Allegheny Parks, Andrew Grobe, visited the MFI to speak to economics. Andrew spoke to the difficulties of accomplishing goals in the red-tape laden, government entity. He also discussed the success of various new startups in the sports world and the entrepreneurial opportunities available to those who are interested in running their own business.

The Initiative brought the Director of Marketing Partnerships at New York Red Bulls, Liz Martin to campus to discuss innovation in sports. Certain major sports leagues have been quick to capitalize on new opportunities in sports memorabilia and branding. Liz describes how selling dirt (literally dirt from baseball infields) became a multi-million dollar business through creativity, innovation, and some experimentation.

** Additional speakers were planned but had to be postponed due to COVID-19.*

BUILDING BRIDGES



The MFI joined the UWL Political Science department in hosting libertarian-conservative political commentator, George Will, on campus on October 17, 2019.

How does student debt affect La Crosse's economy?
How's the job market for college grads? Why are wages low? Are we headed toward a recession?



Here's your chance to bring your questions and comments to a man in the middle of all these issues, and more.

Neel Kashkari, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, a frequent guest and contributor to CNBC, CNN, and the Wall Street Journal, wants to hear from you at a free public town hall.

Town Hall
November 13, 2019
The Bluffs, second floor of UWL-La Crosse Student Union, 521 East Ave North
12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m.
Free entry for students after 12 p.m.

The MFI supported UWL's economics department in hosting Neel Kashkari, Chairman of the Minnesota Federal Reserve Bank, for a town hall meeting on campus on November 13, 2019.

In September, 2019, the MFI also joined several other centers to collaborate at the Advancing Economic Opportunity Through Research Conference in Logan, Utah. The conference was A conference co-hosted by the Mercatus Center and Center for Growth and Opportunity at Utah State University.

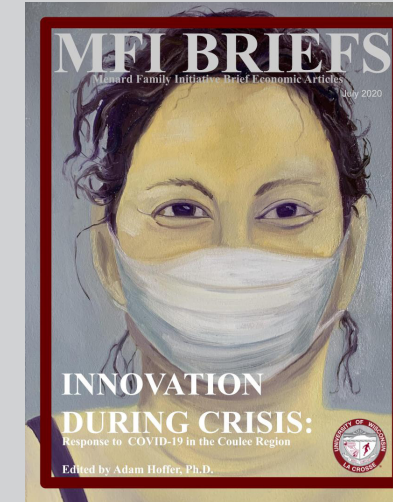
FACULTY



ADAM HOFFER

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COMING SOON FROM MFI



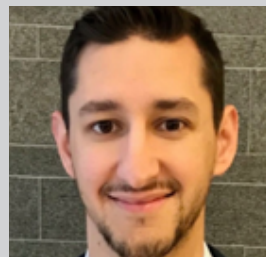
MFI BRIEFS: INNOVATION DURING CRISIS: RESPONSE TO COVID-19 IN THE COULEE REGION

FELLOWS



Abdul Kidwai

2019 Fellow
2020 Researcher
akidwai@uwlax.edu



Joe Ortiz

2019 Fellow
2020 Outreach Specialist
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NEW HIRES



Perry Ferrell

Currently at West Virginia University and will join the MFI this fall.



Matt Style

Currently at George Mason University and will join the MFI in the fall.

REGULATION AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY: BLUEPRINTS FOR REFORM

Edited by Adam Hoffer and Todd Nesbit | (Expected publication - Fall 2020)

Regulatory expansion has been stunning. The Code of Federal Regulations – the accumulation of rules imposed by the departments and agencies of the federal government – now exceeds 180,000 pages. With a reading speed of two minutes per page, the average American would need more than 250 days of consecutive, around-the-clock reading to wade through the comprehensive list of regulations promulgated by federal government agencies. The CFR does not even include the additional regulations imposed by Executive Order, state governments, and local municipalities.

Regulation matters. Functional, evidenced-based regulation can provide significant public benefits, such as protecting uninformed consumers, limiting the effects of monopoly power, improving public health and safety, safeguarding civil rights, and protecting the environment.

Poor regulation can be devastating. Interest groups can convince the government to use its coercive powers to their own benefit and profit at the expense of everyone else. The financial and time costs of complying with regulations can drastically outweigh the benefits. Even regulations created with the best intentions can have such perverse effects in the form of eroding the fundamental market processes that underpin the remarkable level of economic development we in the West enjoy, leaving in its wake poverty and civil unrest.

The goal of this volume is to study regulation. We ask fundamental questions that include not only the actual effects of regulation, but also a study of how regulations are created.



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