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## Advice from the Economics Graduate School Seminar

Josh Kim

On October 23d, the Economics Undergraduate Board held a Graduate School Seminar for students interested in attending graduate school. Professor Yu-chin Chen, the graduate program director, and Pasita Chaijaroen, a graduate student were gracious enough to discuss what makes a strong candidate, share their experiences in graduate school, and answer several students' questions.

Professor Chen explained that letters of recommendation are an integral part of any strong application. "Recommendation letters counts a lot. There's a strategy to recommendation letters... Everything else equal, professors are a lot better than TAs. Typically, professors have more of a network, and credibility." Professor Chen suggests that if you know your TA better than your professor, ask your TA to help the professor write the letter of recommendation, filling in key details

that your professor might not know. However, students should still go to their professor's office hours and try to develop a personal relationship.

Research experience is another great way to make an application stand out from the rest. "Basically, we're looking for people who will eventually do research. We know most people don't have a very solid idea on what doing research is about. So if you can show that you worked with a professor, you know the process, you have hands on experience, that just gives your application more credibility" says Professor Chen. Thus, for sophomores and juniors interested pursuing a graduate degree in economics, one of the best ways to prepare is to do out-of-class research projects with an economics faculty member.

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## Counter-Intuitive Consequences: Exploring Environmental Impacts

Thomas Wright

There are very few among us who wish to see earth a barren wasteland. From capitalists looking to profit from natural resources, to environmentalists hoping to preserve the beauty of nature, to those of us who are merely interested in a planet to live on, preserving the environment is often of paramount importance. Not surprisingly, initiatives put forth to save the environment garner large and fervent support. Who would not want to increase the number of trees in the world, cut our energy consumption, reduce pollution, or perform some other incredible, selfless act for the environment? Before we all surge to the voting booths to pass the newest regulatory measure, we need to ask what are the real consequences of these policies and do they match our stated goals?

Recycling is often purported to "save trees". Even the stickers placed on our trusty paper towel dispensers claim to save up to 100lbs of paper every year just by letting us know that "these come from trees". But what does "saving trees" really entail? Michael Darby proposed in Paper Recycling and the Stock of Trees that saving trees actually means increasing current tree stocks with the goal of either increasing the equilibrium tree stock level to the socially optimal level (due to the positive externalities generated by a forest) or the joint recreation that they provide whilst being grown. Darby continues on to rain on the parade of recyclers the globe over by explaining that an increase in the amount of recycling decreases the demand for new paper products, which in turn decreases the amount of trees harvested every year. In forest equilibrium, the number

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**Economics Advising Office's blog : <http://uwecon.wordpress.com>**

## Continued: Graduate School Seminar

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For seniors applying to graduate schools this year and wondering how many schools to apply to, Pasita said “try to apply to as many schools as possible, but try to keep everything on track. For me, I kept a Google spreadsheet of the deadlines, required documents, who is writing the recommendations for these schools, and did they submit that letter yet or not.” Many economics undergraduates apply to anywhere from 10 to 16 schools – the marginal costs of applying to a school is low, but the potential benefits can be very high! But remember to consider the geographic location of the schools whilst applying. “When you pick a school, pick a school that you can comfortably

live in, because you’ll be spending a good five or six years there” Pasita continued. Make sure to consider the type of environment; whether it’s a large city or a rural town, no one wants to regret attending a school in a city they do not enjoy.

At the conclusion of the seminar, both Professor Chen and Pasita said that while applying to graduate school and being a graduate student is extremely difficult, for students interested in studying economics and doing economic research, attending graduate school can be very fulfilling.

## A Primer to the Undergraduate Economics Mentorship Program

Bryant Wong

For many students, one of the biggest questions they have throughout their college experience is what they can do with their degree. Oftentimes students feel compelled to pick their major based on what sort of opportunities they see with their degree. However, since these decisions often are made early on in college, they may not actually know what sort of opportunities are available to them. As a result, students may end on paths far different than what they had originally intended to pursue.

The Undergraduate Mentorship Program aims to tackle this problem by bringing in former University of Washington alumni with professional experience to share their wisdom and knowledge with current students. These alumni stem from a wide variety of fields, from finance to academia, consulting to law. This wide variety of backgrounds allows students to find a mentor that best fits with their career of interest.

“The most beneficial aspect of the mentorship program is the ability to grow a working relationship with an industry representative who can provide you the guidance and support you need to accomplish your professional, academic and personal goals and aspirations,” former mentee Mourya Mamidala said.

Students and mentors meet as they see fit – there is no strict plan or requirements since the program is largely designed to suit the specific needs of each stu-

dent/mentor pairing. As well as mentee specific meetings, there are various networking socials and a career workshop to investigate potential career fields.

The Mentorship Program is unique in supplying a close one-on-one relationship with a caring and knowledgeable professional, which otherwise might not have been able to form.

“Being paired up, one to one, helped me develop my own personal and professional skills,” former mentee Joshua Kim said. “My mentor was luckily very helpful and supportive, answering all the questions I have about post-college life as an economics major.”

Mamidala echoes this sentiment; “The part I most enjoy about the experience is the opportunity have one-on-one interaction with a mentor with which I can converse about anything from personal happenings in my life to my academic and professional interests”.

All in all, the response to experience is almost unanimously positive from both mentors and students involved in the program.

Though applications for the program are now closed, students interested in the program in 2015-2016 can find information on the Undergraduate Mentorship Program website located here: <http://econ.washington.edu/alumni/mentorship/>

## Continued: Counter-Intuitive Consequences

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of trees planted is equal to the number harvested. Meaning that an increase in recycling has actually decreased global tree stocks, saving fewer trees.

Rising energy costs can have an economy wide contractionary impact. The oil crisis of the 1970s raised the cost of factor inputs across the nation, leading to a reduction in real income for firms, workers, and an overall reduction in output. To avoid energy costs spiraling towards crisis levels, governments enact consumption reducing and switching policies, with Daylight Savings being one of the most popular.

Benjamin Franklin came up with daylight savings in an attempt to curb French energy consumption. Whilst in Paris, he noticed that the French slept in until noon and then stayed up late at night, burning endless candles. His brilliant solution was to blow trumpets at dawn in Paris to shift the hours of production to lower energy consumption. While the French didn’t embrace his bugle blowing, governments ever since have been employing daylight savings in an attempt to shift peak consumption hours to times of the day that require less energy; Egypt has just reinstated emergency daylight savings hours to attempt to alleviate their crushing energy crisis. However, they are ignoring the research of our very own Professor Hendrik Wolff. Wolff and Kellogg proved in Daylight Time and Energy that daylight savings actually increases energy consumption. In studying Australia’s additional DST during the 2000 Olympics, they found that the reduction in energy consumption was negated by an increase in morning energy consumption due to the darker mornings that people experienced, causing a sharp peak in the morning, and substantially increase the wholesale prices of energy. Again, the best laid plans of the policy setters backfired.

Pollution is not a very popular commodity; everyone wants less pollution in their local environment. However, pollution poses a series of problems that prevent the market from correctly allocating the efficient amount of pollution. The negative externalities associated with pollution cause a violation of private property rights; the owner of the good does not exclusively receive all of the benefits or damages associated with their good, and prevents an efficient, competitive market from forming. Consumers are mired in an even more complex dilemma when it comes to choosing their level of pollution. If global pollution levels are to be reduced, we should all reduce

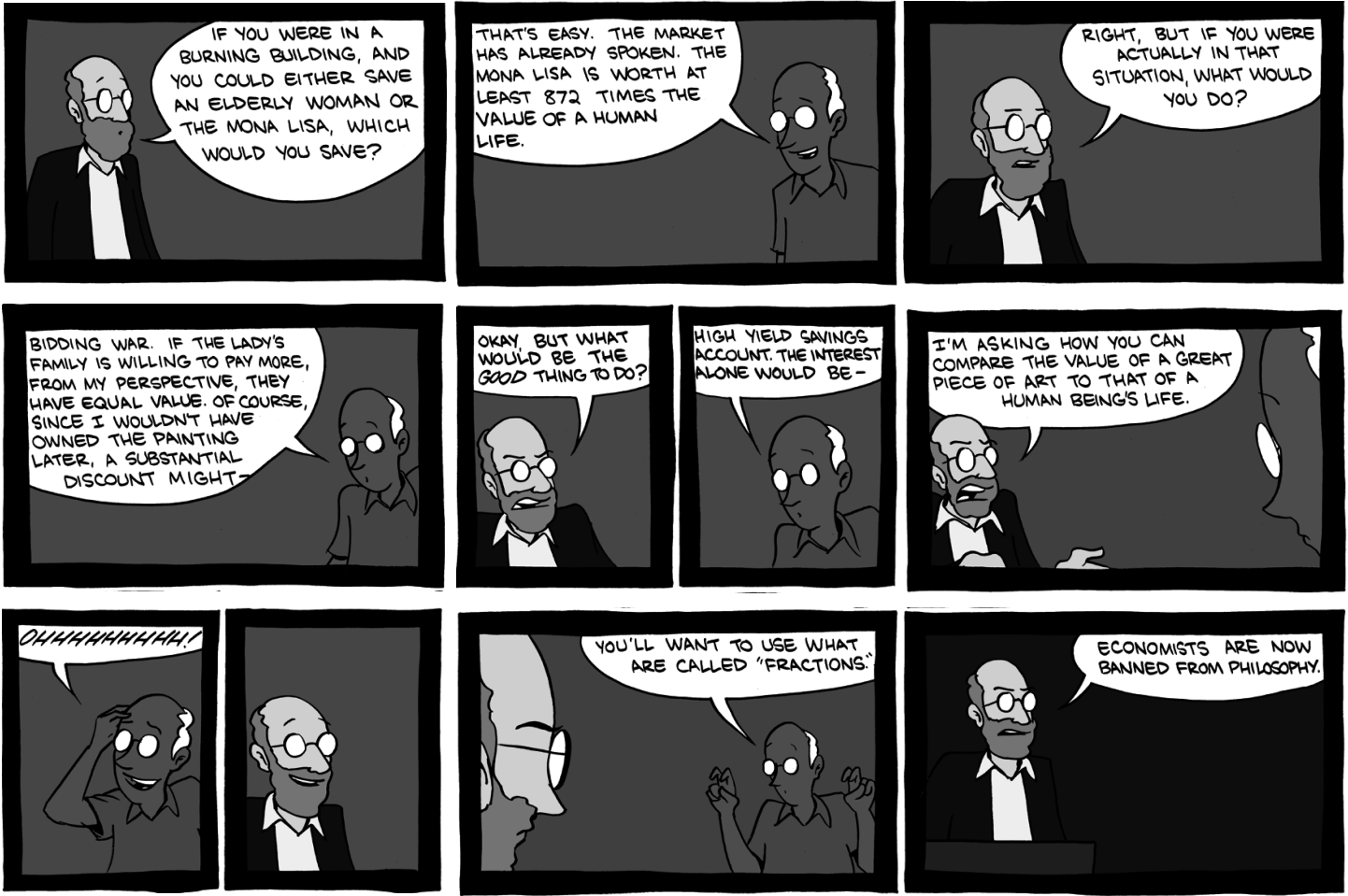
our consumption by, for example, driving less. If we all pledged to not drive our cars, emissions would decrease. However, the individual still has incentive to drive, as they will make a negligible impact on global pollution levels and will not have to give up the convenience of driving. This incentive to defect creates a prisoner’s dilemma where as a collective we default, drive, and increase pollution. Often the only way to curb pollution levels is for the government to intervene.

As air pollution skyrocketed in Beijing and Mexico City, their respective governments stepped in and attempted to correct the pollution problem. In both cases, the number of days that you could drive was reduced based on the last digit of the license plate. For example, if your license plate ended in an odd number, you would not be allowed to drive your car on Monday and Thursdays. These license plate quota laws were made with the express goal of reducing pollutants from traffic by reducing the number of cars on the road. Lucas Davis explains that, in fact, the opposite has occurred. In *The Effect of Driving Restrictions on Air Quality in Mexico City*, he explains that the restrictions lead to an increase in the number of vehicles in the city as well as a change towards high emission vehicles. As people still need to drive, they sell their newer, more efficient cars for two, older, less efficient cars with alternating license plate numbers (ensuring that they can drive on every day). The regulation led to more cars with worse emissions standards, increasing the pollution and car levels that the regulation was meant to combat.

One of the first things that an economics’ student learns is that the government muddles everything up, we would all be better in a laissez-faire system, and that taxes and subsidies merely allocate capital to the wrong hands. However, government is later revealed to be an important player in righting inefficient markets, enforcing property rights, and creating the system through which the economy can function. The purpose of this article was highlighting some of the instances where the government makes the problem worse rather than better. This is often in response to chasing some ideally, politically popular goal. So the next time you read a sticker that will save you trees, hear of a way to cut energy costs, or an easy way to reduce pollution, take it with a grain of salt. Remember you are a student of the dismal science, anything that sounds too good to be true probably is.

*If you were interested by any of the articles mentioned, check out Econ 435, 436, or 437 for similar material*

# Comic Relief



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The EUB would like to wish all of you a wonderful and restful thanksgiving Break!

The Economizer is a quarterly newsletter published by the Economics Undergraduate Board. The articles herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the department or its faculty.

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