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## From Particles to Progress: Introducing Professor Jason Kerwin

ZAYNA AARBI

In 2007, Jason Kerwin left Stanford University with an undergraduate degree in Physics and International Relations. Now, he is an Associate Professor in the Department of Economics at UW with more than 20 current and ongoing studies contributing to the world of Development Economics. Why did he change fields from physics to economics? How did this advocate for economic development find his way to UW? What wisdom can Professor Jason Kerwin share with UW students?

As an undergraduate student, Professor Kerwin's path to becoming a physicist was completely redirected when he was given the opportunity to travel to Tanzania and teach HIV prevention in schools. This experience opened his eyes to the various constraints preventing those in developing nations from living as they desire. It was here that his passion for development sprouted, eventually taking root in the field of economics when he enrolled in a welfare economics course. There, he learned how economists view social problems, and found out about a burgeoning movement to use randomized control trials to investigate solutions to those problems. This pivotal movement led to him shifting his focus from physics to economics. After graduation in 2007, Professor Kerwin

worked in an economics-related consulting job and then pursued a master's and PhD in Economics at the University of Michigan, finishing in 2015. After he completed his PhD, he was on the faculty of the University of Minnesota until 2024, first as an Assistant Professor and then as an Associate Professor. Finally, this academic year, he joined the UW Economics Department as an Associate Professor.

With such a comprehensive education, Professor Kerwin has plenty of advice for those interested in a higher education in Economics. He shared that, in his view, graduate school is essentially vocational school: it trains you for a specific job. He says that when deciding to pursue a master's or PhD in Economics, it's important to consider the associated job opportunities. Dr. Kerwin suggests first choosing your dream job, going on LinkedIn and finding individuals with that career, and then looking into their education and experience to determine the path necessary for achieving that specific position. He says that reaching out to these industry professionals for an informational interview about their

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## Independent or Exploited? The Gig Work Debate

GAV HUTKOFF

Gig economy companies including Uber, Lyft, DoorDash, and Instacart operate on a platform-based business model that connects independent workers with consumers through digital apps. Instead of hiring workers as full-time employees, these companies classify them as independent contractors. This model reduces labor costs, enabling companies to scale quickly and offer competitive pricing to consumers.

One of the strongest advantages of the gig economy business model is the flexibility it offers to workers. Unlike traditional full-time employment, gig workers can set their own schedules, choosing when, where, and how much they want to work. This is especially beneficial for

individuals who need supplemental income, such as students, caregivers, the working poor, or those with other jobs. The low barrier to entry allows people to start earning quickly, often without formal education or specialized skills. Consumers also benefit from lower prices and increased convenience, as gig platforms provide on-demand services at competitive rates. Ultimately, the gig economy offers a level of autonomy and accessibility that traditional jobs lack.

The gig economy also presents significant challenges for workers, primarily due to a lack of stability and benefits. Having gig workers classified as independent contractors means they do not receive health insurance, paid time

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# Independent or Exploited? The Gig Work Debate

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off, retirement contributions, or unemployment protections. Earnings can be highly unpredictable, as they fluctuate based on demand, location, and platform algorithm changes. Workers are also responsible for covering their own expenses, such as vehicle maintenance, fuel, and insurance, which can significantly cut into their earnings. Additionally, while companies market gig work as providing independence, platforms exert control through dynamic pricing, performance ratings, and algorithmic management, limiting workers' autonomy in practice. Without formal labor protections, gig workers lack recourse against unfair treatment or sudden account deactivation. These issues fuel the social argument that gig workers deserve better protections and benefits to ensure fair wages and job security.

One of the most significant legal battles over gig worker classification took place in California. In 2019, the state passed Assembly Bill 5 (AB5), which required gig companies including Uber, Lyft, and DoorDash to classify their workers as full-time employees rather than independent contractors. This entitled them to benefits such as minimum wage, health insurance, and unemployment protections. In response, Uber, Lyft, and other gig economy giants spent over \$200 million lobbying for Proposition 22, a ballot measure designed to overturn AB5 and keep gig workers classified as independent contractors. In November 2020, Prop 22 passed with 58% of the vote, marking a lucrative victory for gig companies. The measure specified gig workers remain independent contractors while granting some benefits, such as a minimum earnings guarantee and healthcare subsidies for drivers who met certain work-hour thresholds but eliminated the possibility of union organization and worker protection. However, the battle for gig workers' rights is not over as in 2021, a California judge ruled parts of Prop 22 unconstitutional, arguing that it restricted lawmakers' ability to regulate worker protections in the future.

The debate over gig worker classification is not limited to the United States. Governments around the world are reassessing labor laws to determine whether gig workers should be classified as employees or independent contractors. In the European Union, a 2023 directive introduced measures to improve gig worker protections, making it easier for them to claim employee status if companies exert significant control over their work. In the United Kingdom, the Supreme Court ruled in 2021 that Uber drivers must be treated as "workers", granting them rights to minimum wage, paid leave, and pension contributions, though they are still not classified as full

employees. In Spain, the "Rider Law" passed in 2021 requires gig platforms to classify delivery workers as employees rather than independent contractors. This law aimed to curb tenuous work conditions but led to gig economy companies exiting the Spanish market entirely due to increased labor costs. Canada is also moving toward stronger gig worker protections, with provinces like Ontario exploring legislation granting gig workers some employee-like benefits while maintaining their independent status.

So what's next? The future of gig work is likely to be shaped by ongoing legal battles, evolving regulations, and shifting business models. As governments continue to reassess labor laws, more regulations are expected to protect gig workers while preserving some degree of flexibility. At the same time, gig companies may adapt their business models to accommodate new labor laws or rely more on automation to reduce their dependence on human workers. Some workers are also pushing for unionization and collective bargaining rights, as seen in New York and California, where gig workers have organized to demand better wages and protections. The future of the gig economy will depend on how governments, businesses, and workers negotiate the balance between innovation, cost efficiency, and fair labor practices in the coming years.

## ECON NETWORKING EVENT

Happening on May 6th, 5 pm, HUB 250

Discussion circles with industry professionals who have worked at Amazon, Deloitte, and more. Current UW Seattle Econ undergrads have the chance to ask about post-graduation plans, careers, and more.

## WANT TO JOIN UW ECON'S EUB?

We are the EUB, a group of UW undergrad Econ majors that advocate on behalf of the Econ majors and communicate with students, faculty, and staff. Applications to join the club open on March 3rd.

# From Particles to Progress: Introducing Professor Jason Kerwin

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careers is a good way to learn about what the best path is. Additionally, he contends that although PhD programs supply the credentials for teaching at the college level, practically, they train students in methods of research. He advises that a love of learning alone is not sufficient reason to pursue a PhD, as only the first two years of the program typically involve classroom learning, with the following years dedicated to developing a dissertation.

Throughout his career, Dr. Kerwin has conducted many economics studies, many of which involve randomized controlled trials about interventions in various developing nations. Professor Kerwin's areas of focus within development economics are financial inclusion, education, and health. One of his notable projects is a long-run study in Uganda about improving literacy rates through providing teachers detailed lesson plans, instruction guides, and training. By demonstrating the program's effectiveness and measuring the long-term benefits of improved literacy, his work has paved the way for further interventions, eventually enabling more children to learn to read and benefit from the economic opportunities that literacy creates.

With plenty of experience gathering data, analyzing findings, and reporting results, Professor Kerwin offers plenty of wisdom for students writing up their own research. He encourages students to first think about the question they would like to answer, then research previous literature about that question, and lastly see what data is available, rather than starting with a dataset and formulating a research question around it. Additionally, Professor Kerwin emphasizes the importance of writing concisely and is a firm believer that unnecessary length is harmful to a research paper. In a blog post called "[How to get your paper done](#)", Kerwin describes a useful method for completing a paper. In it he writes, "Figure out your story and write it in 100 words maximum (the AER limit), which is 5 sentences. This is your abstract." He says that everything else in your research paper should solely be support for that 100-word abstract.

Professor Kerwin currently teaches at the undergraduate and graduate levels. He hopes that his students can leave his courses with practical skills, such as problem solving and a knowledge of how optimization works, that they can use in future academia or industry positions. Additionally, he thinks his approach to teaching writing is useful in the private sector, not just in economic research. He says he has enjoyed the "entrepreneurial spirit" of the students at UW and loves to hear their questions and ideas. He strongly encourages students in

the department to take advantage of his office hours to share their thoughts.

All in all, we are very glad that Professor Jason Kerwin took the lifechanging trip to Tanzania. Had he not, development economics—and the UW community—might not be the same. We warmly welcome him to the UW Economics Department and can't wait to learn more from him as we witness the phenomenal contributions he will continue to make.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Economics Tutoring

The EUB offers free tutoring every weekday at various times every quarter! Check the schedule on the EUB website to see tutoring times. If you need help with an upper-level class, however, make sure you check the website to see which tutor can help.

### Contribute to the Economizer

The Economizer will be seeking guest writers for our Spring quarter issue. Interested writers should check their emails from the department in the early Spring quarter for submission instructions.

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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Visit EUB's website at:

<http://depts.washington.edu/ecnboard/>

# Election of Japan – The End of Abenomics?

HIROTOSHI MIURA

In 2013, Japan's economic landscape underwent significant shifts with the introduction of "Abenomics," a set of economic policies initiated by former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Prior to this, Japan had suffered from persistent deflation and stagnation, often referred to as the "Lost Decades," which lasted from the 1990s to the 2010s. During this period, the country grappled with anemic growth, deflation, natural disasters, and economic shocks. Abenomics aimed to reverse these trends. It comprised three principal components or "arrows": aggressive monetary easing, fiscal stimulus, and structural economic reforms.

## The Pillars of Abenomics

**1. Aggressive Monetary Easing:** This policy aimed to combat deflation by dramatically increasing the money supply through the central Bank of Japan (BoJ) quantitative easing program. The BoJ undertook unprecedented monetary expansion, pushing interest rates into negative territory and purchasing large amounts of government bonds and other assets. This was intended to lower borrowing costs, weaken the yen to boost exports, and encourage inflation.

**2. Fiscal Stimulus:** The second arrow of Abenomics was a plan for large-scale government spending designed to stimulate demand and boost the economy. Initially, Abe's government enacted several stimulus packages aimed at infrastructure spending and disaster recovery (which were unfortunately far from enough due to the political opposition). The total government spending only increased at a miserable 2.6% in 2013 although the Japanese economy needed at least more than 5% increase based on GDP-gap calculation.

**3. Structural Reforms:** The third arrow focused on long-term reforms aimed at improving Japan's competitiveness and addressing structural challenges in the labor market, demographics, and corporate governance. Reforms included efforts to increase female participation in the workforce, attract more foreign investment, and liberalize certain sectors of the economy. While progress was made in some areas, such as corporate governance and labor market reforms, the scope and impact of these reforms were uneven – focused on Japanese behemoths like Toyota, Sony, and Mitsubishi while most other small companies were left behind.

## Outcomes of Abenomics

Abenomics had some notable successes. By aggressively pursuing monetary easing, Japan escaped the persistent deflationary spiral that had gripped its economy for over two decades. Inflation, while never reaching the BoJ's 2% target consistently, was higher or at the very least non-negative during the Abenomics years compared to the preceding decades. The country also experienced a

period of modest but positive economic growth, in contrast to the stagnation that characterized the previous years. Additionally, the labor market improved, with unemployment falling from average 4.7% before Abenomics to historically low levels of 2.5% in five years after Abenomics started. Japan also saw improvements in corporate profitability and stock market performance, particularly in the early years of Abenomics. Corporate profit doubled five years after the start of Abenomics, and within the two years, the Nikkei 225, Japanese S&P 500 index, doubled.

Unfortunately, despite the initial ambition of the policy package, only two of these three arrows, monetary policy and structural reform, were fully implemented – fiscal stimulus wasn't implemented at all – leaving its long-term legacy a subject of debate among economists. Furthermore, structural reforms were not implemented to the degree necessary to address fundamental demographic challenges, such as an aging population and shrinking workforce. Moreover, while monetary easing succeeded in reducing the yen's value and boosting exports, Japan's reliance on global trade made its recovery vulnerable to external shocks, such as trade tensions and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Abenomics, while ambitious in scope, produced mixed results over its decade-long implementation. It succeeded in pulling Japan out of deflation and stimulating economic growth, but it failed to implement the fiscal stimulus – making it an imperfect policy. With the death of Abe and the rise of Ishiba, Japan seems poised to go back to an era of fiscal conservatism and more restrained monetary policy. Whether this shift will prove successful in addressing Japan's deep-seated economic challenges remains to be seen, but it is clear that the legacy of Abenomics will continue to influence Japanese economic discourse for years to come.

## WOMEN IN ECONOMICS SYMPOSIUM

The St. Louis Fed is hosting the 2025 Women in Economics Symposium on March 27th! The Symposium will feature keynote speakers Cecilia Rouse (President of the Brookings Institution) and Ali Wolf (Chief Economist at Zonda), along with panel discussions and networking opportunities. The Foster School of Business will be hosting a watch party for the Symposium from 2:00 pm to 6:00 pm PST on Thursday, March 27th. Register for the watch party here: <https://lu.ma/0uyto0pd>

Alternatively, individuals may register to attend virtually: <https://events.stlouisfed.org/event/f5ef29c6-7f5c-432b-afb-4a64abd77735/event-overview>