

POLICY SUGGESTIONS

The Female Economists of Wesleyan (FEW) is a recently formed caucus of female-identifying Econ students. If you wish to discuss any of the issues raised in this article, come to our OPEN MEETING FOR ALL STUDENTS ON SUNDAY, 4/26, 4:30-5:30pm, PAC001.

Here is a list of FEW-approved policy suggestions to improve equity and inclusion in Wes's Econ department:

1) ECON PEER MENTORS PROGRAM

Prospective or recently declared majors would benefit from the guidance of an Econ Peer Mentor. Econ Peer Mentors should be a diverse group of students interested in helping their academic community. Mentors would hold one or two office hours per week, provide fellow students with advice on course selection, and direct students toward Econ department or university resources, internship and career guidance, or homework help. The list of Econ Peer Mentors, including their contact information and primary academic and co-curricular interests, should be visible to all students; all Econ professors should announce the program to their classes.

2) PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS OF UPPER-LEVEL STUDENTS' COURSEWORK

Upper-level Econ students could present final research projects at informal talks or poster sessions, open to all. In upper-level Econ courses, students complete research projects on topics of their choice, typically applying theoretical concepts to real-world issues. Seeing strong student work can pique interest and make the prospect of majoring in Econ more attractive, especially for students who associate Econ solely with Wall Street, who think it's irrelevant to their day-to-day experiences, or who don't have a solid idea of what economists do. These events can also highlight the accomplishments of female and minority Econ students. Posters could be mounted in high-visibility spaces, such as the Exley lobby. Presentations can also increase upper-level students' accountability for their coursework, and thus engagement in class.

3) INFORMAL GATHERINGS for Econ professors and students

Events could be focused around current events and economic issues. At some events, multiple professors could attend and discuss their research, while students could join whichever group interests them. At such gatherings, all students would benefit from the opportunity to engage with Econ outside of class, and from improved camaraderie with fellow Econ students and with faculty. Interdisciplinary-themed gatherings could appeal especially to female students, who upon arrival at Wes may have greater initial interest in interdisciplinary crossovers between Econ and other academic disciplines.

4) TEACHING EVALUATIONS AND COURSE EVALUATIONS: incorporate professors' sensitivity to equity and inclusion in the classroom, and allow professors greater flexibility and incentive to innovate their teaching styles

Professors' teaching evaluations are heavily weighted in decisions about tenure. The course evaluations we fill out at the end of each semester make up one part of teaching evaluations. A professors' efforts towards increasing equity and inclusion within the

classroom should be rewarded; incorporating questions on course evaluations that focus on equity and inclusion in the classroom could push students to think about these issues, offer professors focused feedback, and promote dialogue. Students should be informed about the teaching evaluation process and recognize the power of thoughtful course evaluations.

Importantly, professors should be encouraged to innovate their teaching and move away from lectures, which may not create the most effective learning environment. Often, experimenting with classroom structure leads to a professor receiving more negative course evaluations, which can put them at risk of not getting tenure. Professors seeking to improve teaching and students' learning outcomes should feel supported by their department, and equity and inclusion in learning should be a departmental priority.

5) TA OFFICE HOURS: increase the availability and visibility of extra help

For each course, professors could designate one or two TAs to hold specialized office hours, in which several upperclassmen Econ majors could offer help and engage with students interested in deepening their understanding of course material. With greater peer support, professors could increase students' individual accountability on class assignments as well as the rigor of course material.

As female and minority students may be more grade-sensitive than their male peers, opportunities for attaining extra help are crucial. To achieve equity of educational opportunity, all students should have access to resources that will help them realize their academic potential. Harvard Business School (HBS) redefined leadership to reward students who help their communities. The Econ department should encourage students to help their peers; a more collaborative academic culture could help to normalize seeking extra help and improve camaraderie within the major.

6) RE-WORK CREDIT to reward students who excel outside the classroom

HBS created a new mode of earning credit so that students not as comfortable participating in classes could be rewarded for excellence outside the classroom in collaborative projects. Econ, similarly, could incorporate new opportunities for Econ credit. NSM departments at Wes currently offer quarter-credit Journal Club discussion-based courses; Econ could do the same, plus offer more opportunities for department and peer-supported independent or collaborative projects.