

MacAndrew-Stout Scholarship Possible PhD topics

Below is a list of suggested PhD topics, that have been put forward by staff. Note that in some cases staff have listed broad topic areas, whereas others have given specific topics. You are welcome to also come up with your own topic, but there is no guarantee we will be able to provide supervision for this.

Neha Agarwal

Neha's research interests are in applied microeconomics with a focus on topics related to health, labour, education, and gender. She uses large scale datasets from both developing and developed countries to study these questions. Some of the possible topics for supervision in this area include:

- Health inequities and their causes,
- Impact of public policies on health and labour outcomes,
- Female labour force participation and its drivers,
- Impact of family composition on marital and labour market outcomes.

Please refer to [this page](#) for her current list of projects.

Neha Agarwal and Viktoria Kahui

Analysis of river water quality data in India and economic development

While India has some of the most polluted rivers and water bodies in the world, the link between water pollution levels and socio-demographic variables in India has not been systematically analysed. The global WaterAid's water quality index ranks India 120th in 122 countries around the world.

We have collated a comprehensive dataset on water quality in India provided by the ENVIS Centre on Control of Pollution, Water, Air and Noise. This dataset provides a host of yearly water pollution variables such as lead levels, dissolved oxygen, E coli etc. across all major and medium sized rivers, lakes, and canals in India, starting from 2007. The proposed research will study the relationship between water quality and its relationship to socioeconomic variables in India. This will require combining the water quality data with other survey datasets in India and building testable hypotheses around it. The student needs to have strong quantitative and computing skills and be able to work with large datasets.

Nathan Berg

Nathan would welcome thesis students interested in:

- the economics of entrepreneurship,
- heuristics for innovation,
- analysis of large-scale business data to guide a high-stake business decision such as pricing, staff compensation, location choice, or marketing/innovation/export strategy,
- consumer behaviour,

- quantitative evaluation of outcomes achieved by innovation policy, business incubators or entrepreneurship education.

Murat Genc

Murat is an applied microeconomist who has done research in various areas of economics. He has developed expertise in estimating gravity models and demand systems. His research investigates the links between immigration and international trade, discrimination in labour markets, and the impact of taxes on sugary drinks on health outcomes, amongst other things. He would be happy to supervise students who are interested in these areas or in areas where microeconomic techniques are used.

Murat Genc and Viktoria Kahui

Analysis of catch method and bycatch in New Zealand's commercial fishery

Using catch landings data provided by Fishserve and the Ministry of Primary Industries in New Zealand, we can determine each fisher's catch, fishing method, target species, revenue and bycatch for a given year. This data can be used to identify portfolios of fish catch by individual fishers and method of catch, allowing us to analyse the economic incentives and amount of control fishers have over the choice of catch and bycatch. The student is expected to have skills in data analysis and econometric methods.

Peter Gibbard

Peter has a broad interest in supervising research relating to the following topics within industrial organisation:

- consumer search
- economics of electricity
- energy economics
- digital platforms.

Please see the following link for more details on Peter's research agenda:

<https://sites.google.com/view/peter-gibbard/research>

Stephen Knowles

Can Donors be Primed to be Effective Altruists?

The effective altruism movement argues that donors to charity should target donations to the charities that do the most good per dollar. These charities will typically be international development charities helping people in need in the developing world (e.g. MacAskill, 2015). However, most donors in the developed world prefer to donate to local charities (e.g. Knowles and Sullivan, 2017; Genc et al., 2020). The proposed research will carry out online experiments to test whether there are ways of priming potential donors to behave more like effective altruists. Priming refers to the process in which external stimuli influence

judgements or decisions. For example, it has been shown that priming people to think about money makes them less generous (e.g. Vohs et al., 2006). Part of the PhD student's work would be to develop ideas about what form this priming might take.

I am also interested in supervising topics on altruism, charitable giving and other regarding preferences more generally.

References:

Genc, M., Knowles, S. and Sullivan, T. (2020) "In search of effective altruists", *Applied Economics*, 53(7): 805-819.

Knowles, S. & Sullivan, T. (2017) "Does charity begin at home or overseas", *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 46: 944-962.

MacAskill, W. (2015) *Doing Good Better: How Effective Altruism Can Help You Make a Difference*. New York, New York: Gotham Books.

Vohs, K.D., Mead, N.L. and Goode, M.R. (2006) "The psychological consequences of money", *Science*, 314: 1154-1156.

Dorian Owen

Dorian's research interests are mainly in the areas of sports economics, applied macroeconometrics, and econometric methodology.

Possible topic areas for supervision include:

- Competitive balance and competition design in sports leagues
- Empirical modelling of the fundamental determinants of economic growth and development
- Cross-country analyses of climate change and well-being
- Macroeconomic aspects of health and development
- Replication, misspecification testing, severe testing

Ronald Peeters

I am interested in supervising topics within the fields of game theory and behavioral & experimental economics; in particular on topics related to cooperation, coordination, generosity/altruism, (dis)honesty, elicitation/aggregation of information/beliefs/expectations and social networks, and applications related to industrial organisation, collusion and auctions.

Please refer to [this page](#) for past and current list of projects, many of which involved former PhD students.

Trent Smith

Implications of the “Metacrisis” for New Zealand’s Political Economy

We live in an age of crisis: the global financial crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic, military conflicts between major powers, and a climate crisis that seems to escalate with every passing year. While much remains to be learned about the political-economic causes and consequences of all this turmoil, it can be said that many longstanding orthodoxies in economics are in the process of being overturned [Mirowski 2013; Furman 2016; Smith 2016; Cengiz, Dube, Lindner & Zipperer 2019; Kelton 2020; Smith 2023; Ellis 2024]. New Zealand is a small country, but in many ways it is primed to take good advantage of new insights coming from economics and other social sciences. A nation of immigrants from the beginning, Aotearoa/New Zealand has a long history of social and policy innovation and a parliamentary system of governance that can facilitate rapid economic and social change [Kelsey 1997; Cowen 2000; Smith 2012; Ellis 2021]. This project will provide a scholarly analysis of New Zealand’s economic history, current circumstance and place in the world economy, with implications for future prospects.

Based in the Economics Department, Trent also participates in teaching and governance of the Philosophy, Politics, and Economics Programme, and encourages students with interdisciplinary interests to apply (noting that for some students the PhD thesis might most appropriately take the form of a monograph [short academic book] rather than the usual—in Economics—three essays suitable for publication in peer reviewed journals). In addition to the general research question summarised above, Trent is also interested in supervising topics that relate to economic insecurity, modern monetary theory, behavioural economics, and/or neuroeconomics.

References:

Cengiz, D.; Dube, A.; Lindner, A. and Zipperer, B. (2019). The effect of minimum wages on low-wage jobs, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 134 : 1405-1454.

Cowen, T. (2000). *Why Does Freedom Wax and Wane?*, Working Paper, Mercatus Center at George Mason University.

Ellis, E. (2024). *A Social Contract Case for a Carbon Tax: Ending Aviation Exceptionalism*, *Revista de Ciencia Política* (forthcoming).

Ellis, E. (2021), *Just transition to climate resilient coastal communities in Aotearoa New Zealand*, *Policy Quarterly* 17 (3): 23-30. <https://ojs.victoria.ac.nz/pq/issue/view/798>.

Furman, J. (2016). *The new view of fiscal policy and its application*, from *Proceedings of Conference: Global Implications of Europe's Redesign*.

Kelsey, J., 1997. *The New Zealand Experiment: A World Model for Structural Adjustment?*. Bridget Williams Books.

Kelton, S., 2020. *The deficit myth: modern monetary theory and the birth of the people's economy*. Public Affairs.

Mirowski, P., 2013. *Never let a serious crisis go to waste: How neoliberalism survived the financial meltdown*. Verso Books, .

Smith, P. M., 2012. *A concise history of New Zealand*. Cambridge University Press.

Smith, T. G. (2016). Is behavioural economics ready to save the world?, *Lancet Diabetes & Endocrinology* 4 : 982.

Smith, T. G. (2023). Endocrine state is the physical manifestation of subjective beliefs, *Journal of Economic Psychology* 96 : 102620.

Murat Ungor

Murat's research investigates the quantitative consequences for the structural transformation of employment and output, and for the optimal pattern of trade in goods and services, in a country experiencing productivity driven economic growth which favours some sectors more than others.

Some of the possible topics for supervision in this area include:

- Applied theoretical analysis of structural transformation, i.e., the reallocation of economic activity across the broad sectors of agriculture, manufacturing, and services.
- Structural transformation in open economy settings
- Explaining sectoral productivity differences across countries

Please refer to his webpage for his current list of projects: <http://www.muratungor.com/>

References:

Alvarez-Cuadrado, F., Van Long, N., Poschke, M. (2017). "Capital-labor substitution, structural change, and growth." *Theoretical Economics*, 12(3), 1229-1266.

Boppart, T. (2014). "Structural change and the Kaldor facts in a growth model with relative price effects and non-Gorman preferences." *Econometrica* 82(6), 2167-2196.

Comin, D. A., Lashkari, D., Mestieri, M. (2021). "Structural change with long-run income and price effects." *Econometrica* 89(1), 311-374.

Herrendorf, B., Rogerson, R., Valentinyi, A. (2014). "Growth and structural transformation," in: P. Aghion, S. N. Durlauf (Eds.), *Handbook of Economic Growth Volume 2B*, Elsevier, 855-941.

Herrendorf, B., Rogerson, R., Valentinyi, A. (2021). "Structural change in investment and consumption: A unified analysis." *Review of Economic Studies*, 88(3), 1311-1346.

Üngör, M. (2017). "Productivity growth and labor reallocation: Latin America versus East Asia." *Review of Economic Dynamics*, 24, 25-42.

Dennis Wesselbaum

Dennis is a theoretical macroeconomist by training but has both theoretical and empirical interests across various fields. His research activity is split between macroeconomic topics and the interaction between climate, environment and society. His research is interdisciplinary in nature and covers macroeconomics (especially monetary and fiscal policy), economic development, labour, health and environmental impacts.

For examples and topics of interest see his [Google Scholar](#) page.