

# Cynthia van der Werf

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## Academic Positions

Louisiana State University

2020 – Present Assistant Professor of Economics

## Education

PhD candidate in Economics, University of California, Davis. June 2020.

M.A. in Economics, Universidad de Los Andes. March 2012.

B.S. in Economics, Universidad de Los Andes. Bogotá, Colombia, September 2010.

## Dissertation Committee

Prof. Giovanni Peri (Chair)  
Economics Department, UC Davis.  
[gperi@ucdavis.edu](mailto:gperi@ucdavis.edu)

Prof. Marianne Page  
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Scott Carrell  
Economics Department, UC Davis.  
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## Research Interests

Immigration, Labor, and Public Economics.

## Publications

Beatty, T. K. M., Bitler, M. P., Cheng, X.H., van der Werf C., (2019). SNAP and Paycheck Cycles. *Southern Economic Journal*, 86: 18-48. [Click for full text](#)

van der Werf, C. (2014) The Effects of Bullying on Academic Achievement. *Desarrollo y Sociedad.*, 74(2):275-308. (Most read article). [Click for full text](#)

Bernal, R., van der Werf, C. (2011) Situación de la infancia en Colombia. In: *Colombia en Movimiento: Un análisis descriptivo basado en la Encuesta Longitudinal Colombiana de la Universidad de los Andes ELCA*. Universidad de los Andes. Bogotá, Colombia. [Click for full text](#)

## Working Papers

*The Impact of Refugees on Native Students' Academic Achievement* [JMP]

The number of asylum seekers worldwide has reached its highest point in history, motivating heated debate among politicians about the effects of such large migrations on host countries. Over 80,000 refugees entered the U.S. in 2016, including large numbers of children, and there is uncertainty about how this inflow will affect native children's schooling outcomes. This paper studies how the largest inflow of refugees in U.S. history – the inflow of Indochinese refugees at the end of the Vietnam War – affected native children's academic

achievement and post-secondary education. To identify the causal effect of refugees on native students' academic success, I use novel data from the U.S. National Archives that contain refugees' first county of destination, which was determined by the voluntary resettlement agencies. I show that first location was uncorrelated with previous schooling conditions. I find zero or small positive effect from the inflow of Indochinese refugees on native children's academic achievement. These estimates are small and precisely estimated. There is also evidence of an improvement in the quality of native students' post-secondary education as native students were more likely to complete bachelor and graduate degrees if they were living in counties where refugees were a higher share of the population.

*Quasi-Experimental Evidence on Language Proficiency, Employment, and Welfare Dependency* (with Mette Foged)

Using travel time by public transport to language training centers as an instrument for host-country language acquisition by refugees, we show that language instruction has a strong positive effect on proficiency in the host-country language and enrollment in formal education in the host country. As refugees are dispersed across municipalities and allocated to public housing in the municipalities based on availability at the date of arrival, travel time is uncorrelated with refugees' characteristics at arrival. Moreover, we also exploit variation in travel time that results from the opening and closure of language training centers. We find positive effects on employment and annual earnings, but our IV results are not significant. The increase in earnings comes mainly from the extensive margin as we find no evidence of a positive effect on hours of work per week or hourly wage. The findings suggest that language instructions increase language proficiency and stimulate immigrants invest in human capital which likely delays and increases any positive labor market return to early language learning investments. Interestingly, we find similar effects for men and women.

*Is Food Assistance Like Cash for Retailers?* (with Marianne Bitler and Timothy Beatty)

Food assistance is a large part of the food economy, with SNAP redemptions totaling \$76 billion in 2013, or more than 10% of sales at supermarkets. Yet, we know next to nothing about how food assistance shapes the retail food environment. We fill this gap, using validated causal research strategies from the literature. Did the roll-out of Food Stamps during the 1960s and 1970s affect the retail environment at the time? We find that locations with earlier Food Stamp programs have more food stores, more workers in those stores, and higher real sales.

### **Honors and Awards**

- 2019: UC Davis Institute for Social Sciences Dissertation Improvement Grant
- 2018: Miguel Velez Fellowship
- 2018: Graduate Student Association Spring Travel Award
- 2017: Institute for Social Sciences Summer Research Support Award
- 2014-2015: UC Davis Nonresident Tuition Fellowship

### **Invited Presentations**

- 2019: Stanford Institute for Theoretical Economics Summer Workshop (migration), Western Economic Association International Annual Conference, UC Davis, Agricultural and Applied Economics Association Annual Meeting, Migration Research Cluster Workshop.
- 2018: Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management California Regional Student Conference, Migration Research Cluster Workshop.
- 2017: Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management California Regional Student Conference, Population Association of America Annual Meetings, UC Davis (x2).

### **Relevant Experience**

Research Assistant. Social Sector Front Office, Inter-American Development Bank, Washington, United States. February 2013- July 2014.

- Araujo, María Caridad; Carneiro, Pedro; Cruz-Aguayo, Yyannú; Schady, Norbert. A Helping Hand? Teacher Quality and Learning Outcomes in Kindergarten. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*.

Research Assistant. Chief Economist Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, World Bank, Washington, United States. December 2011- February 2013.

- Ferreira, F. et al. (2013). Economic Mobility and the Rise of the Latin American Middle Class. The World Bank. Washington, USA.
- De La Torre et al (2012). The Labor Market Story Behind Latin America's Transformation. The World Bank. Washington, USA.

### **Teaching Experience**

- Teaching Assistant, Department of Economics, University of California Davis, California, United States. Courses: Introduction to Microeconomics (Spring 2015), Intermediate Microeconomics (Fall 2014), Health (Fall 2015, Fall 2019), Introduction to Data Analysis (Winter 2015), Econometrics (Winter 2016, Fall 2018).
- Lecturer, Department of Economics, Universidad de Los Andes, Bogota, Colombia. Courses: Impact Assessment, October 2011.
- Graduate Teaching Assistant, Department of Economics, Universidad de Los Andes, Bogota, Colombia. Courses: Advanced Econometrics, August 2010 — December 2011.
- Undergraduate Teaching Assistant, Department of Economics, Universidad de Los Andes, Bogota, Colombia. Courses: International Trade, January 2010 — July 2010.

### **Referee Experience**

Journal of Human Resources, Journal of Policy Analysis, Desarrollo y Sociedad.

### **Departmental Service**

Applied Econometrics Reading Group organizer	Fall 2017 — Spring 2018
Applied Microeconomics Brown Bag Series organizer	Fall 2017
Migration Research Cluster Workshop organizer	Fall 2017 — Spring 2019
Economics Graduate Student Association President	Fall 2017 — Summer 2018

### **Languages**

Fluent in Spanish and English