

Cynthia van der Werf

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Employment

Economics Specialist, Migration Unit, Inter-American Development Bank, Aug 2021 – Present.
Assistant Professor of Economics, Louisiana State University, Aug. 2020 – July 2021.

Education

PhD in Economics, University of California, Davis. June 2020.
M.A. in Economics, Universidad de Los Andes. Bogotá, Colombia. March 2012.
B.S. in Economics, Universidad de Los Andes. Bogotá, Colombia. September 2010.

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

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.

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.

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 to 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.

Awards, Honors, and Grants

- 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

- 2021 (includes scheduled): Vanderbilt University, Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management.
- 2020: Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management, Southern Economic Association Annual Meeting, 10th Annual Conference on Immigration in OECD Countries.
- 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.

Teaching Experience

Louisiana State University

Labor economics (graduate)

Fall 2020

Labor economics (undergraduate)

Fall 2020

Referee Experience

Journal of Public Economics, Journal of Human Resources, Economics of Education Review, Journal of Policy Analysis, Southern Economic Journal, Desarrollo y Sociedad.

Languages

Fluent in Spanish and English