Department of Economics

The MIT Department of Economics is widely regarded as one of the world’s premier institutions for economics research and education. Our faculty balance substantial commitments to training both undergraduates and doctoral students with active and influential research programs. With one of the youngest senior faculties among its peer institutions, the department plays a central role as an innovator in economics research and a source of exciting new directions in undergraduate and graduate economics education.

One faculty member who exemplifies this young leadership is Amy Finkelstein, who won this year’s John Bates Clark Medal. The Clark Medal, awarded biennially from 1947–2008 and annually thereafter, is given to the American economist under the age of 40 who is judged to have made the most significant contribution to economic thought and knowledge. Amy Finkelstein joins Esther Duflo, Daron Acemoglu, and Jerry Hausman as active Economics faculty who received the Clark Medal.

Highlights of the Year

Many members of our faculty received academic recognition during the past year. Daron Acemoglu received the 2012 Erwin Plein Nemmers Prize in Economics, given biennially by Northwestern University to recognize work of outstanding significance. Robert Townsend was elected to the National Academy of Sciences and also received the Frisch Medal of the Econometric Society and the Jean-Jacques Laffont Prize. David Autor and Amy Finkelstein were inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (AAAS), joining the majority of tenured Economics faculty. Parag Pathak was selected as an Alfred P. Sloan Research Fellow. Heidi Williams received the National Science Foundation (NSF) CAREER Award. Glenn Ellison and Sara Ellison received the 2011 Best Paper Award from the American Economic Journal: Microeconomics for “Strategic Entry Deterrence and the Behavior of Pharmaceutical Incumbents Prior to Patent Expiration. Nancy Lin Rose was named a 2012 MacVicar Fellow for her outstanding contributions to MIT undergraduate education. Abhijit Banerjee’s and Esther Duflo’s book Poor Economics was named the 2011 Financial Times and Goldman Sachs Business Book of the Year.

Our most recent cohort of PhD graduates did exceedingly well in a challenging labor market. The Stanford University Department of Economics made four junior offers, all to MIT students, and three of the four offers made by the Harvard University Department of Economics were to MIT students. Continuing the trend of past years, MIT students had an outstanding representation among the invitees of the prestigious Review of Economic Studies tour—this year, three of the seven students selected for the tour were MIT students. No other school has had more than two students invited on the tour over the entire three-year period.
Future Plans

The Department of Economics is proud of its outstanding young faculty, most of whom were hired as junior faculty. Recent retirements and departures have created an ongoing need for faculty renewal, and the department plans to continue to hire the best junior faculty and to fill senior positions as opportunities arise with outstanding senior faculty, irrespective of field.

The department is excited about the prospect of a renovated building, and plans have been developed for space that will foster the innovative research and community culture that is such a significant feature of MIT Economics.

Continuing efforts to raise funds for faculty and graduate student support have been successful, with an additional fellowship commitment and other funds received this year. The department will also continue to support the raising of funds for building renovation.

Undergraduate Education

The recently debuted freshman-oriented course 14.73 The Challenge of World Poverty, developed by Esther Duflo and David Donaldson, continues to receive excellent responses from undergraduates. We anticipate that this course may play a role in a proposed Institute curricular reform calling for “first-year focus” classes. At present, the course serves as the entry point for a new concentration in development economics. Students not majoring in economics may use this course, a more advanced course in development economics, and 14.01 Principles of Microeconomics to meet the requirement of a concentration in a humanities and social sciences field.

The MIT Undergraduate Economics Association (UEA) continued to be a fertile ground for rounding out the economics education of undergraduate students. UEA sponsored two public lectures during the year. The first lecture was by Lawrence Summers ’75, former US Secretary of the Treasury and now Charles W. Eliot University Professor at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government. His talk focused on “Stimulating Growth in the Short and Long Run.” The second lecture was by Elizabeth and James Killian professor of economics Daron Acemoglu, discussing his 2012 book (with James Robinson), Why Nations Fail. Both lectures were overflowing with undergraduate majors as well as other interested students. UEA presented its faculty and graduate student teaching awards to Sara Ellison and Gabriel Carroll, respectively.

Graduate Education

This spring, the department will open up a new semester-long graduate class in the rapidly expanding field of health economics. The class was jointly designed and will be co-taught by Jonathan Gruber, Amy Finkelstein, and Heidi Williams. Last year, organizational economics offerings were expanded to include a full year’s worth of courses beyond contract theory. Our graduate program ran smoothly in the third year of the “new” organization in which students take macroeconomics from the start of their first year.
Several faculty members, students, and staff were recognized during the past year for their outstanding service to the Economics Department and MIT. Graduate student Gabriel Carroll received the James A. and Ruth Levitan Award for Excellence in Teaching from the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. Amy Finkelstein won the Graduate Economic Association (GEA) award for Best Professor. Daron Acemoglu and Stephen Ryan were honored as Outstanding Dissertation Advisors. Graduate student Michael Peters was honored as Most Outstanding Teaching Assistant by the GEA. The Robert Solow Prize for Excellence in Teaching and Research was awarded to Gabriel Carroll and Michael Peters.

Lectures

During the fall semester, the department hosted Thomas Piketty from the Paris School of Economics who delivered a department-wide lecture titled “A Theory of Optimal Capital Taxation.” Amir Sufi from the University of Chicago Booth School of Business delivered the spring departmental lecture with a talk titled “Household Debt, Aggregate Demand, and the Great Recession.”

Members of the department were also involved in several public lectures. Mitsui Professor of Economics James Poterba moderated a panel: “The Federal Budget Deficit: Causes, Consequences, and Potential Remedies.” Panelists included Nobel Prize–winners and professors emeriti Peter Diamond and Robert Solow, MIT Sloan School of Management distinguished professor of finance Deborah Lucas, and professors Gregory Mankiw and Jeffrey Liebman (both of Harvard University). Professor Solow delivered an Institute-wide lecture titled “The State of the Economy and Some Implications for the Energy Industry.”

Research and Service

Faculty members have carried out research on a broad array of frontier topics in economics, the span of which is illustrated below with a selection of recent academic publications. This research has attracted attention within the academic sphere and, in many cases, in the national and international press as well.

MIT faculty members continue to provide leadership and service to the economics profession. Bengt Holmström served as president of the Econometric Society and now serves on the society’s executive committee. Nancy Rose is vice president of the American Economic Association. Jim Poterba has been elected president of the Eastern Economic Association, and is president and chief executive officer of the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER).

Daron Acemoglu serves as editor of *Econometrica*, a journal of the Econometric Society. George-Marios Angeletos is co-editor of *Journal of the European Economic Association*. David Autor is editor of *Journal of Economic Perspectives*. Esther Duflo has had great success in building the *American Economic Journal: Microeconomics* as its founding editor. Muhamet Yildiz serves as foreign editor for the *Review of Economic Studies*. Other faculty members serve on various editorial boards, including Victor Chernozhukov as associate
editor of the journals *Econometrica, Economic Theory, Econometric Theory*, and *Journal of Econometrics*. Amy Finkelstein is co-director of the Public Economics Program at NBER, and Parag Pathak continues as founding co-director of the market design working group at NBER.

Other faculty members continue the department’s tradition of broader public service. Olivier Blanchard remains on leave as chief economist at the International Monetary Fund, Michael Greenstone serves as director of the Hamilton Project, Joshua Angrist is a member of the US Census Bureau Scientific Advisory Committee, and Michael Piore continues as a member of the research council for the Economic Policy Institute in Washington, DC.

The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), directed by Ford international professor Abhijit Banerjee and Abdul Latif Jameel professor of poverty alleviation and development economics Esther Duflo, continues to expand the scope and influence of its research. J-PAL is widely recognized as one of the leading global institutions for research on poverty alleviation. The publication of Banerjee’s and Duflo’s book *Poor Economics* brought even greater prominence to J-PAL’s research, education, and policy successes. To date, J-PAL’s affiliated research faculty have conducted over 270 randomized evaluations in 43 countries to find the most effective approaches to critical development issues, including how to reduce the spread of AIDS, increase student attendance, reduce industrial pollution, and decrease corruption in government projects.

**Personnel**

The department hired two assistant professors in 2011–2012. Paulo Somaini, whose work is in industrial organization, comes to us after completing his PhD at Stanford University. Alp Simsek PhD ’10, whose work is in finance and macroeconomics, will join the department from the Harvard University faculty. Heidi Williams, who was hired in 2009–2010 and spent the following year as a visiting scholar, joined the faculty full-time as an assistant professor in fall 2011. The department also promoted Benjamin Olken to the rank of tenured professor and Arnaud Costinot and Anna Mikusheva to the rank of untenured associate professor.

Three faculty members are moving on to other pursuits. Tenured professor Guido Lorenzoni has taken a position at Northwestern University, in Chicago. Untenured professor Stephen Ryan is leaving MIT to teach at the University of Texas, in Austin. Michael Piore will retire from teaching in the Economics Department in fall 2012, although he will continue to teach in the Department of Political Science. All three faculty members have been outstanding researchers, educators, and citizens of the department and the Institute. We will greatly miss them.

There were 41 non-visiting Economics faculty members in AY2012. This number will decrease to 40 for AY2013, reflecting the hiring of the two new assistant professors and the departure of three faculty members.

Six faculty members visited the Department of Economics for all or part of AY2012. The department’s annual visitors participate in central ways to our educational


The department also had several visitors who came to conduct research and work with Economics faculty. These visitors included David Vines, a macroeconomic theory professor from the University of Oxford, UK; Marianna Belloc, an international trade associate professor from Sapienza University of Rome, Italy; Stefan Boes, a statistics and econometrics assistant professor from the University of Bern, Switzerland; Matias Cattaneo, an assistant professor of econometrics from the University of Michigan; Nicolas Coeurdacier, an associate professor of international macroeconomics and finance from SciencesPo, Paris, France; Sanjeev Goyal, professor of economics at the University of Cambridge and Fellow of Christ’s College, Cambridge, UK; Veronica Guerrieri PhD ’06, a professor of macroeconomics from the University of Chicago Booth School of Business; Matti Sarvimaki, a postdoctoral researcher in the Department of Economics at Aalto University in Finland; and Kenichi Ueda, a senior economist in the research department at the International Monetary Fund.

There are seven women on the Economics faculty: three tenured professors (Esther Duflo, Amy Finkelstein, and Nancy Rose), one associate professor (Panle Barwick), two assistant professors (Anna Mikusheva and Heidi Williams), and one senior lecturer (Sara Ellison). The fraction of Economics faculty who are women is greater than that in any other leading economics department. There are no African American faculty members. All faculty search committees are instructed to identify outstanding women and minority candidates as part of their search process.

As part of the regular recruitment process for junior faculty, the department solicited or received 372 curriculum vitae. Thirty-seven candidates were selected for interviews, and seven candidates were invited to the department to present seminars. Offers were made this year to new PhD candidates Joseph Vavra, from Yale University, and Paulo Somaini, from Stanford University. Vavra declined, and Somaini accepted.

**Honors and Awards**

Daron Acemoglu won the Erwin Plein Nemmers Prize in Economics and the Galatasaray Award. He was awarded an honorary doctorate at Bosphorus University in Istanbul.

Joshua Angrist gave the McKenzie Lecture at the University of Rochester.
David Autor was elected a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He was the keynote speaker at the Technology, Assets, Skills, Knowledge, and Specialization Conference in Bonn, Germany, and at the conference on Housing, Human Capital, and Inequality at the Federal Reserve Bank in Cleveland, OH. He gave the 2012 lecture at the Philip E. Austin Forum on Economics and Public Policy at the University of Connecticut and the Wellington Burnham Lecture at Tufts University.

Abhijit Banerjee was one of Foreign Policy magazine’s Top 100 Global Thinkers of 2011. He was also named Shera’r Shera (Best of the Best) at the STAR Ananda Shera Bangali Awards.

Olivier Blanchard was appointed an Honorary Patron of the University Philosophical Society, Dublin. In addition, he gave the Susan Bies Lecture at Northwestern University.

Ricardo Caballero received the Emerald Management Review Citation of Excellence Award.

David Donaldson was invited to speak at the University of California campuses of Berkeley, Davis, Los Angeles, San Diego, and Santa Cruz; Northwestern University; Stanford University; Princeton University; McGill University; and at the Northwestern Nemmers Prize Conference.

Arnaud Costinot was nominated for the Best Young French Economist Prize by Le Cercle des économistes/Le Monde. Professor Costinot received an Excellence in Refereeing Award from American Economic Review.

Esther Duflo and Abhijit Banerjee were finalists for the Gerald Loeb Award for Distinguished Business and Financial Journalism for their book Poor Economics. Professor Duflo was also a featured speaker at the Tanner Lectures on Human Values, presented by the Mahindra Humanities Center and the Office of the President at Harvard University, and received an honorary degree from the London School of Business.

Glenn Ellison and Sara Ellison were awarded the 2011 Best Paper Award from American Economic Journal: Microeconomics for “Strategic Entry Deterrence and the Behavior of Pharmaceutical Incumbents Prior to Patent Expiration.”

Amy Finkelstein was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and won the 2012 John Bates Clark Medal. She also gave the Arrow Lecture in Economics at Columbia University.

Michael Greenstone was the keynote speaker at the Southern California Conference in Applied Microeconomics.

Jonathan Gruber won the National Institutes for Health Care Management Foundation Health Care Research Award. He was named “One of the Top 25 Most Innovative and Practical Thinkers of Our Time” by Slate Magazine, and was also awarded the 2011 Partners Health Care Connected Health Leadership Award.
Jeffrey Harris was appointed as visiting professor for the Universidad de la República, Uruguay, for November–December 2011. In addition, he received a Fulbright Specialist Grant from the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board and the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs of the US Department of State.

Jerry Hausman was the keynote speaker at the Econometrics Conference at Cambridge University, UK. He also gave the Hermann Otto Hirschfeld Lecture at Humboldt University, Berlin; the Gorman Lectures at the University College London; and a conference on the Hausman Specification Test at Louisiana State University.

Bengt Holmström received two inaugural prizes: the Senior Banque de France–Toulouse School of Economics Prize in Monetary and Financial Economics, Paris; and the OP–Pohjola Honorary Award in Economics, Helsinki. In addition, he served as president of the Econometric Society in 2011.

Mihai Manea lectured at Universidad de Chile; Universidad de los Andes; the University of Toronto; the University of California, San Diego; and the University of Chicago on his paper “Bargaining in Dynamic Markets with Multiple Populations.”

Benjamin Olken was appointed director of the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab.

Parag Pathak was named an Alfred P. Sloan Research Fellow.

James Poterba was elected president of the Eastern Economic Association. He also gave the Clarendon Lectures at Oxford University and the W.A. Macintosh Lecture at Queens University.

Nancy Lin Rose was elected vice president of the American Economic Association. In addition, she was named a MacVicar Faculty Fellow for her excellence in teaching.

Stephen Ross was awarded the 2012 Onassis Prize in Finance by City University London and the Onassis Foundation. He also placed second in the Best Unpublished Paper in the Past Year category awarded by AQR Capital Management.

Robert Townsend was elected to the National Academy of Sciences. He received the Jean-Jacques Laffont Prize in Toulouse, France, and was a distinguished visiting scholar at the Stanford Graduate School of Business.

Heidi Williams received a CAREER award from the National Science Foundation. She also received an Excellence in Refereeing Award from the Quarterly Journal of Economics and was added as an associate editor for the Review of Economics and Statistics.
Publications

The following selection of publications during AY2012 illustrates the scope of the department’s research activities.


Abhijit Banerjee published “Targeting the Poor: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Indonesia” with B. Olken, V. Alatas, R. Hanna, and J. Tobias in *AER*.


Victor Chernozhukov’s article “Square Root Lasso: Pivotal Recovery of Sparse Functions via Conic Programming” with A. Belloni and L. Wang was published in *Biometrika*. He also has a forthcoming article, “Inference Methods for High-dimensional Sparse Econometric Models” with A. Belloni and C. Hansen to be published in *Advances in Economics and Econometrics — 10th World Congress of the Econometric Society*.


Jerry Hausman’s article “Telecommunications Deregulations” with W. Taylor was published in *AER*. 

Paul Joskow published “Dynamic Pricing of Electricity” with C.D. Wolfram in AER.


Anna Mikusheva published “One-dimensional Inference in Autoregressive Models with the Potential Presence of a Unit Root” in Econometrica.

Whitney Newey’s paper “Average and Quantile Effects in Nonseparable Panel Models” with V. Chernozhukov, I. Fernandez-Val, and J. Hahn, is forthcoming in Econometrica.


Michael Piore published “Keynes and Marx, Duncan and Me” in Critical Economic Theory: Essays Inspired by Duncan Foley.


Nancy Rose’s article “After Airline Deregulation and Alfred E. Kahn” was published in AER Papers and Proceedings.


Heidi Williams published “Innovation Inducement Prizes: Connecting Research to Policy” in the Journal of Policy Analysis and Management. She also published “The Role of Hospital Heterogeneity in Measuring Marginal Returns to Medical Care: A Reply to Barreca, Guldi, Lindo, and Waddell” with D. Almond, J.J. Doyle, Jr., and A.E. Kowalski in QJE.


Whitney K. Newey
Department Head