

NEWS RELEASE

Wilfrid Laurier University



Laurier economics professor earns prestigious Fulbright Scholar Award

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WATERLOO — Laurier economics professor Dr. David Johnson is the recipient of a prestigious Canadian Fulbright Scholar Award for 2007.

Johnson, one of just 17 Canadians to receive the award this year, was chosen for his work on the economics of elementary education. As The Fulbright Visiting Chair at the University of California – Santa Barbara (UCSB), from January to June of 2008, his research will be on “Policy Interventions in Elementary Schools: Evidence from Ontario 1998-2006.”

“David has done some very interesting work on the connection between school characteristics and test results,” said Dr. Terry Levesque, chair of the economics program at Laurier. “His work is establishing him as an influential commentator on important aspects of education policy in Ontario. He has deservedly earned the Fulbright chair.”

Johnson, who is currently on sabbatical, said in a telephone interview that he will be joining a number of people in the economics department at UCSB who do work in education.

“There is an enormous interest in the economics of education,” he said. “Education is the second-largest industry in Canada, after health care.”

As an economist, he is interested in seeing if education resources are used wisely, if good decisions related to those resources are being made, or if resources could be used differently to produce a better outcome.

“A central issue,” said Johnson, “is whether smaller class sizes are related to better outcomes. It’s an extremely difficult problem to solve.”

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For example, he said, it may be that smaller class sizes are beneficial if the students come from disadvantaged backgrounds, but not at all helpful where students are not disadvantaged. It may make sense, then, to not reduce class sizes for the latter group, but put additional resources into helping students from the disadvantaged group.

In addition to his research, Johnson will be giving talks at UCSB and Stanford University. He will soon be off to give a paper at a MESA (Measuring the Effects of Student Aid) conference, where he will give his findings on the question of whether increasing tuition fees causes students to drop out (they don't).

The Canada-U.S. Fulbright Program is a bi-national program supported by the Government of Canada, through the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada; the Government of the United States, through the Department of State; and a large number of public and private-sector partners.

The program's mandate is to enhance mutual understanding between the people of Canada and the people of the United States by providing support to outstanding graduate students, faculty members, professionals and independent researchers, who lecture, conduct research, or enrol in formal academic programs in the other country.