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RILEY K. ACTON

Curriculum Vitae

CONTACT INFORMATION

Department of Economics
Bowdoin College
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EMPLOYMENT

Assistant Professor of Economics, Bowdoin College, 2026 – present
Assistant Professor & Frank H. Jellinek Jr. Endowed Assistant Professor (2025 – 2026) of Economics, Miami University, 2020 – 2026 (*awarded tenure 2026*)

PROFESSIONAL APPOINTMENTS

Research Fellow, Institute of Labor Economics (IZA), 2025 – present
Research Affiliate, Institute of Labor Economics (IZA), 2021 – 2024
Research Affiliate, College Crisis Initiative, 2020 – 2023

EDUCATION

Ph.D., Economics, Michigan State University, 2020
M.A., Economics, Michigan State University, 2016
B.S., Economics & Mathematics, Ursinus College, 2015 (*summa cum laude*, Phi Beta Kappa)

FIELDS OF INTEREST

Economics of Education, Labor Economics, Public Economics, Health Economics

PUBLICATIONS

* denotes current or former student coauthor
ⓡ denotes random author order

Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles

"Distance to Degrees: How College Proximity Shapes Students' Enrollment Choices and Attainment across Race and Socioeconomic Status" (with Kalena Cortes, Lois Miller, & Camila Morales). *Economics of Education Review*, 114, 2026.

"The Effect of Vaccine Mandates on Disease Spread: Evidence from College COVID-19 Mandates" (with Emily Cook, Wenjia Cao, Scott Imberman, & Michael Lovenheim). *Journal of Human Resources*, 61(4), 2026.

"Suspended from Work and School? Impacts of Layoff Events and Unemployment Insurance on Student Disciplinary Incidence" (with Jo King* & Austin Smith). *Labour Economics*, 98, 2026.

"Is a Name Change a Game Change? The Impact of College-to-University Conversions." *Economics of Education Review*, 88, 2022.

"The Influence of Peer Institutions on Colleges' Decisions: Evidence from Fall 2020 Reopening Plans" (with Emily Cook & Allison Luedtke). *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 195, 2022.

"Do Health Insurance Mandates Spillover to Education? Evidence from Michigan's Autism Insurance Mandate" (with Scott Imberman & Michael Lovenheim). *Journal of Health Economics*, 80, 2021.

"Community College Program Choices in the Wake of Local Job Losses." *Journal of Labor Economics*, 39(4), 2021.

"Effects of Reduced Community College Tuition on College Choices and Degree Completion." *Education Finance and Policy*, 16(3), 2021.

Book Chapters

"Covid and Higher Education" (with Emily Cook). In: *Live Handbook of Education Policy Research* (Doug Harris, Ed.), 2025. Association for Education Finance and Policy.

"Distance to Opportunity: Higher Education Deserts and College Enrollment Choices" (with Kalena Cortes & Camila Morales). In: *Financing Institutions of Higher Education* (John Campbell & Kaye Husbands Fealing, Eds.), 2025. National Bureau of Economic Research.

WORKING PAPERS

"The Labor Market Value of Community College Bachelor's Degrees: Initial Evidence from a Resume Audit Study in Early Childhood Education" (with Camila Morales ⓡ, Julia Turner ⓡ, Lois Miller ⓡ, & Kalena Cortes). NBER Working Paper No. 35404, IZA Discussion Paper No. 18786, & Annenberg Institute EdWorkingPaper No. 26-1518.

"Political Views & College Choices in a Polarized America" (with Emily Cook & Paola Ugalde Araya). CESifo Working Paper No. 12113, IZA Discussion Paper No. 18099, & Annenberg Institute EdWorkingPaper No. 25-1280.

"Community College Bachelor's Degrees: How CCB Graduates' Earnings Compare to AAs and BAs" (with Camila Morales ⓡ, Kalena Cortes ⓡ, Julia Turner ⓡ, & Lois Miller ⓡ). NBER Working Paper No. 34684, IZA Discussion Paper No. 18400, Annenberg Institute EdWorkingPaper No. 26-1397. *Also circulated for the Postsecondary Employment Outcomes (PSEO) Coalition: link.*

"Spending & Achievement Effects of Increased Funding to Rural School Districts: Evidence from Wisconsin" (with Cody Orr & Salem Rogers). IZA Discussion Paper No. 15915 & Annenberg Institute EdWorkingPaper No. 23-724.

WORKS IN PROGRESS

"Estimating the Value of a New Postsecondary Credential: An Audit Study of Community College Bachelor's Degrees" (with Kalena Cortes, Lois Miller, Camila Morales, & Julia Turner)

"Do (Mis)Perceptions of Campus Political Climates Affect College Choices?" (with Emily Cook, Andrew Simon, & Paola Ugalde Araya)

"Distance to College as a Barrier to Application: Documenting Evidence and Exploring Solutions" (with Emily Cook, Kalena Cortes, Lois Miller, & Camila Morales)

"Gendered Returns to Community College Access" (with Kalena Cortes, Emileigh Harrison, Lois Miller, and Camila Morales)

"Access to Family Planning Services and Inequalities in Education and Labor Market Outcomes" (with James Flynn, Daniel Marthey, Maranna Yoder, & Jiee Zhong)

"Modifying Introductory Course Material to Increase Participation in College Majors: A Randomized Curriculum Intervention" (with Peter Nencka, Carla Nietfeld, Aiday Sikhova, & Bruce Weinberg)

"Workforce-Aligned Financial Aid in Ohio and Kentucky" (with Johnathan Conzelmann & Rajeev Darolia)

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS & INVITED SEMINARS

2027: Wesleyan University (scheduled)

2026: ASSA Annual Meeting, Williams College, Swarthmore College, Bowdoin College, University of Kentucky, Northeast Economics of Education Workshop, APPAM Fall Research Conference (scheduled)

2025: Northern Kentucky University, Oberlin College, AEFP Annual Conference, Federal Reserve Bank of New York, University of Cincinnati, Miami University, MidSouth Education Policy Workshop, APPAM Fall Research Conference

2024: Bates College, AEFP Annual Conference, NBER Financing Higher Education Meeting, Miami University, Kent State University, University of Tennessee, APPAM Fall Research Conference

2023: ASSA Annual Meeting, University of Connecticut, AEFP Annual Conference, Conference on Skills and Postsecondary Response (University of Michigan)

2022: APPAM Fall Research Conference (delayed from 2021), University of Central Oklahoma, Ohio State University, NYU Wagner, Elon University, RAND Corporation, APPAM Fall Research Conference, NBER Education Program Fall Meeting

2021: University of Memphis, University of North Texas, AEFP Annual Conference, SOLE Annual Meetings, University of Exeter, Liberal Arts College Labor & Public (LAC-PaL) Conference, WEAI Annual Conference, Kansas State University, Davidson College

2020: University of Notre Dame, Miami University, Wake Forest University, Dickinson College, Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, The Brookings Institution

2019: AEFP Annual Conference, University of Michigan H2D2 Day (poster session), University of Toledo, SOLE Annual Meetings, UM-MSU-UWO Labor Day, APPAM International Conference, APPAM Fall Research Conference, American University, University of Michigan CIERS, University of Texas at Dallas

2018: AEFP Annual Conference, University of Michigan CIERS, APPAM Fall Research Conference

GRANTS RECEIVED

2026 – 2028: Arnold Ventures: "Project on Postsecondary Education and Geography" (Co-PI with Johnathan Conzelmann & Rajeev Darolia). $380,000.

2026 – 2028: Ascendium Education Philanthropy: "Assessing Returns to Community College Bachelor's Degrees" (Co-PI with Kalena Cortes, Lois Miller, Camila Morales, & Julia Turner). $739,700.

2026 – 2028: National Science Foundation: "Collaborative Research: Introductory Course Material to Increase Participation in College Majors: A Randomized Curriculum Intervention in Economics" (Co-PI with Peter Nencka, Carla Nietfeld, Aiday Sikhova, & Bruce Weinberg). $397,239.

2026 – 2027: Ohio Department of Higher Education: "The Impact of Workforce-Aligned Grant Aid in Ohio" (Co-PI with Johnathan Conzelmann). $49,793.

2026 – 2027: Strada Education Foundation: "Phase 2: Understanding Enrollment in and Returns to Community College Bachelor's Degrees" (Co-PI with Kalena Cortes, Lois Miller, Camila Morales, & Julia Turner). $199,686.

2025 – 2027: Spencer Foundation: "Political Views & College Choices in a Polarized America" (Co-PI with Emily Cook & Paola Ugalde Araya). $50,000.

2025 – 2026: Strada Education Foundation: "Understanding Enrollment in and Returns to Community College Bachelor's Degrees" (Co-PI with Kalena Cortes, Lois Miller, Camila Morales, & Julia Turner). $49,680.

2025 – 2026: J-PAL North America: "Estimating the Value of a New Postsecondary Credential: An Audit Study of Community College Bachelor's Degrees" (Co-PI with Kalena Cortes, Lois Miller, Camila Morales, & Julia Turner). $44,546.

2025 – 2026: Russell Sage Foundation: "Access to Family Planning Services and Inequalities in Education and Labor Market Outcomes" (Co-PI with James Flynn & Jiee Zhong). $50,000.

2025: Texas Higher Education Foundation: "PSEO Research Grant" (Co-PI with Kalena Cortes, Lois Miller, Camila Morales, & Julia Turner). $15,000.

2025: Miami University Farmer School of Business: "Abortion Access and Inequalities in Education and Labor Market Outcomes: Evidence from Texas Policy Changes" (PI). $10,000.

2024 – 2025: Miami University Ryan Center for Educational Opportunity: "Political Views & College Choices in a Polarized America" (PI). $10,000.

2021 – 2022: Gates Foundation: "Impact of Sparsity Funding in State Formulas" (PI). $78,983.

FELLOWSHIPS, HONORS, & AWARDS

University Junior Faculty Scholar Award, Miami University, 2026
James Robeson Junior Faculty Research Excellence Award, Miami University, 2025
Creativity & Innovation Award, Miami University, 2022

Honorable Mention, Jean Flannigan Outstanding Dissertation Award, AEFP, 2021
Department of Economics Excellence-in-Teaching Award, Michigan State University, 2018
Red Cedar Award (best third-year paper), Michigan State University, 2018
University Distinguished Fellowship, Michigan State University, 2015 – 2020

Compton-Rose Prize (top graduating economics major), Ursinus College, 2015
Olive Sergeant Hamm Award (top senior woman in academics & athletics), Ursinus College, 2015

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Microeconomics, Bowdoin College (2026)

Economics of Compensation, Miami University (2024 – 2026)
Topics in Microeconomics (M.A.), Miami University (2021 – 2026)
Intermediate Microeconomic Theory, Miami University (2020 – 2021, 2023, 2025)

Analysis of Labor Markets, Michigan State University (2018)
Introduction to Macroeconomics, Michigan State University (2017)

ADVISING

Miami University – with initial placement

Grace Howard (honors thesis), 2026 – OTC Industrial Technologies
John Waterhouse (MA thesis), 2025 – Worldpay
Maya Serrano (honors thesis), 2024 – Texas A&M University School of Law
Kailey Kraft (honors & MA thesis), 2024 – Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago
Teresa Maloney (honors & MA thesis), 2023 – Deloitte
Emma LaGuardia (honors & MA thesis), 2022 – Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago

SELECTED PROFESSIONAL & INSTITUTIONAL SERVICE

Professional Service

Member, Editorial Board, *Education Finance & Policy* (2026 – present)
Organizer, NBER Economics of Community College Conference (2028)
Co-Organizer, MidSouth Education Policy Workshop (2025)
Section Chair, AEFP Annual Conference (2027)
Program Committee, AEFP Annual Conference (2022, 2023, 2026)
Program Committee, APPAM Fall Research Conference (2023, 2024, 2025)
Session Organizer, APPAM Fall Research Conference (2018, 2019, 2022)
Member, Women in Economics Leadership Network (2024 – present)
Mentor, Association for Mentoring & Inclusion in Economics (2022 – 2023)
Mentor, American Economic Association Summer Program (2018)
External Reviewer (ad hoc) for: Spencer Foundation, National Science Foundation, William T. Grant Foundation

Institutional Service

Miami University
Co-Chair, Ad-Hoc Committee on Increasing Economics Majors (2025)
Co-Coordinator, Economics Summer Seminar Series (2023 – 2025)
Member, Economics Assistant Professor Search Committee (2022 – 2023)
Member, Economics Graduate Studies Committee (2021 – 2026)
Member, Economics Diversity and Inclusion Task Force (2020 – 2021)
Member, Economics Seminar Committee (2020 – 2026)
Advisor, Women in Economics Club (2020 – 2026)

REFEREE SERVICE

Economics of Education Review (9), Education Finance and Policy (7), Journal of Public Economics (5), American Economic Journal: Economic Policy (3), Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis (3), Journal of Health Economics (3), Journal of Human Resources (3), Journal of Policy Analysis & Management (3), American Economic Review (2), Economic Inquiry (2), Quarterly Journal of Economics (2), AERA Open, *American Educational Research Journal, American Sociological Review, Contemporary Economic Policy, Education Economics, Higher Education, Higher Education Policy, Journal of Human Capital, Journal of Labor Economics, Journal of Political Economy Microeconomics, Journal of the European Economic Association, Labour Economics, Review of Economics and Statistics*