November 2019

MINGLI ZHONG

WHARTON SCHOOL, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

https://bepp.wharton.upenn.edu/profile/mingliz/

mingliz@wharton.upenn.edu

Placement Director: Gilles Duranton	duranton@wharton.upenn.edu	(215) 898-2859
Graduate Administrator: Diana Broach	dhs@wharton.upenn.edu	(215) 898-7761

Office Contact Information

Business Economics and Public Policy Department
349A Vance Hall, 3733 Spruce Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104-6302
Mobile: (585) 754-8647
mingliz@wharton.upenn.edu

Education:

PhD in Applied Economics, Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, May 2020 (expected)
Dissertation: *Essays in Public Economics and Social Insurance*

Dissertation Committee and References:

Olivia S. Mitchell
The Wharton School
University of Pennsylvania
mitchelo@wharton.upenn.edu
(215) 898-0424

Hanming Fang
Department of Economics
University of Pennsylvania
hanming.fang@econ.upenn.edu
(215) 898-7767

Benjamin B. Lockwood
The Wharton School
University of Pennsylvania
ben.lockwood@wharton.upenn.edu

BA in Economics, University of Rochester, May 2013
BS in Applied Mathematics, University of Rochester, May 2013

Teaching and Research Fields:

Primary fields: Public Economics, Household Economics
Secondary fields: Behavioral Economics, Applied Microeconomics

Grants, Honors, and Awards:

2019	Dissertation Fellowship from the Social Security Administration and the Center for Retirement Research at Boston College
2019	"OregonSaves – An Analysis of Participating in State-Sponsored Retirement Plans", U.S. Social Security Administration, $71,250 (with Olivia S. Mitchell)
2019	"The Effect of Default Retirement Savings on Credit Scores", Wharton's Boettner Center/Pension Research Council, $20,000 (with Olivia S. Mitchell)
2019	Robert R. Nathan Fellowship
2018	"Phase II Survey Incentives for the OregonSaves Project", AARP, $10,000 (with Olivia S. Mitchell)
2018	"Understanding Retirement Plan Default Behavior: The Case of OregonSaves", The Pew Charitable Trusts, $5,000 (with Olivia S. Mitchell)
2017	"Understanding Retirement Plan Default Behavior", Wharton's Boettner Center/Pension Research Council, $20,000 (with Olivia S. Mitchell)
2016	Wharton Risk Center Russell Ackoff Doctoral Student Fellowship

Job Market Paper:

Optimal Default Retirement Saving Policies: Theory and Evidence from OregonSaves

Many U.S. states are launching state-sponsored auto-enrollment retirement plans, with the goal of boosting retirement savings among private-sector workers lacking access to employer-sponsored retirement plans. This paper provides an analysis of state-sponsored auto-enrollment plans, and specifically, the plan's default contribution rate. We develop a tractable framework to derive the optimal default contribution rate taking into account workers' decisions on adhering to the default contribution rate. The optimal default contribution rate is shaped by the social benefits of increased savings due to adherence to the default that keeps workers from undersaving, while reducing reliance on means-tested social transfers. The optimal default contribution rate is also counterbalanced by the social benefits of action when an undesirable default option compels workers to make an active decision. To estimate these counterbalancing social welfare forces, we use individual-level administrative and survey data from OregonSaves, the state-sponsored plan offered by the Oregon state government, and suggest the optimal default contribution rate to be 8%.

Research in Progress:

Auto-Enrollment Retirement Plans for the People: Choices and Outcomes in OregonSaves (with John Chalmers, Olivia S. Mitchell, Jonathan Reuter, and Geoffrey Sanzenbacher)

Insuring retirement security is an important challenge for our aging society, and many policymakers are seeking ways to help individuals save more for retirement. The state of Oregon recently launched an auto-enrollment retirement savings program for private sector workers who lack access to workplace retirement plans; many of these workers are lower-paid employees working at smaller firms. Our paper investigates early results from the OregonSaves program using data through June 2019. We find that OregonSaves is serving firms across many industries, including food services, health care, retail trade, and agriculture. In June 2019, approximately 24,000 contributing participants deposited an average of $110 per month, or about 5% of their pay, which is the default savings rate. To date, over 40,000 individuals have accumulated combined assets over $22.7 million. We also find that OregonSaves has provided access to workplace retirement accounts for employees of small to mid-sized firms (average firm size 36 employees), with participating employees' earning an average of $2,182 per month.

Unemployment Insurance, Moral Hazard, and Age Discrimination in the Labor Market

This paper investigates whether the effect of unemployment insurance benefits on unemployment duration varies by age over the business cycle. When tested individually, the unemployment durations of younger workers are significantly raised by the same level of increase in UI benefits more in a boom than in a recession, while those of older workers are equally affected over the business cycle. This difference between age groups is not significant when tested as an interaction effect in a more stringent regression model. Similarly, I also find that the age effect reported in previous study is non-significant when subjected to the same procedure of regression analysis. The current findings suggest that incorporating age into the design of UI benefits should require further study and more credible evidence.

Professional Activities:

2019	Financial Economics of Insurance Workshop, Princeton University
2019	Internal Presentation at the U.S. Social Security Administration, Washington, D.C.
2019	21st Annual Social Security Administration Research Consortium Meeting, Washington, D.C.
2017	Pension Research Council Annual Conference, Philadelphia, PA

Teaching and Research Experience:

2015	Intermediate Microeconomics, Teaching Assistant for Gilles Duranton, Wharton
2014	Research Assistant for Olivia S. Mitchell and Daniel Gottlieb, Wharton
2012	Research Assistant for Toni M. Whited, University of Rochester

Personal

U.S. Permanent Resident