



SIUE's Plemmons Shares Economic Insights with U.S. House of Representatives

by Megan Wieser
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EDWARDSVILLE - Southern Illinois University Edwardsville's Alicia Plemmons, PhD, has established herself among U.S. legislators, policy groups and community

leaders as a go-to expert with research-backed insights related to the economic impacts of regulation, particularly in healthcare.

Plemmons, assistant professor of economics in the SIUE School of Business and undergraduate economics program director in the College of Arts and Sciences, has advised legislators in the U.S. House of Representatives and routinely testifies at the local, national and federal level on bipartisan bills related to occupational licensing and certificate of need laws.

“The overall purpose of the research is to try and understand how policymakers can best improve access and quality of healthcare for disadvantaged communities,” Plemmons explained.

The public economist counsels on the feasibility of a project and workshops if the wording of a bill matches its intended meaning. The current critical need for Plemmons’ expertise at all legislative levels centers on healthcare regulations amid COVID-19.

“COVID-19 acted as a natural experiment on the potential burden of some laws,” she said. “Many states temporarily expanded scope of practice or suspended certificate of need laws during the pandemic, and now they are wondering how it affected access to healthcare for our most vulnerable populations, and if some of these changes should be considered long-term.”

“These experiences have added value to my work as a researcher, because I can physically see the changes that occur in policy because of my research, which is a rare and unique experience in academia,” Plemmons added. “Working with legislators, policy groups and community members has taught me to think outside the raw numbers and understand the many facets of policy questions. It’s easy to say ‘we should do things this way or that way,’ but to truly understand and precisely measure both the intended and unintended consequences of a policy change is critically important, because they affect real lives.”

A true teacher-scholar, Plemmons uses her worldly experiences and noted research advancements to teach her students about the economics of taxation, expenditures, and regulation at the local, state and federal levels.

“As much as I love participating in the legislative process, I love teaching about it more,” she said. “I teach my students about my research to contextualize the process of research and advocacy, and then I have students explore their own interests. My students pick policies and laws that excite them, and they use our economics tool kit to analyze the potential economic impacts of the policies and proposed changes.”

She notes that potential biases must be checked when pursuing academic research, especially related to policy work that affects daily life.

“The purpose of academic research is not to take sides, it is to research and communicate the history, data, analytical tools, and professional insight to help inform decision making,” Plemmons explained. “It is important to caution anyone who wants to get more involved in the policy world to remember to check your own potential biases and contextualize what these changes would mean for other people from different life situations.”

Plemmons serves as a research affiliate at the Center for the Study of Occupational Regulation at Saint Francis University, and is co-founder and leader of the Scope of Practice and Medical Licensure Research Group at the University of Central Arkansas.

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Photo: SIUE's Alicia Plemmons, PhD, assistant professor of economics in the SIUE School of Business and undergraduate economics program director in the College of Arts and Sciences.