



## **Melissa Dell Recipient of the 2018 Elaine Bennett Research Prize**

Melissa Dell, Professor of Economics at Harvard University, is the recipient of the 2018 Elaine Bennett Research Prize. Established in 1998, the Elaine Bennett Research Prize recognizes and honors outstanding research in any field of economics by a woman not more than seven years beyond her Ph.D.

Professor Dell will formally accept the Prize at the Business Meeting and Award Ceremony of the American Economic Association (AEA) Committee on the Status of Women in the Economics Profession (CSWEP), held during the 2019 AEA/ASSA Meeting in Atlanta, GA. The event is scheduled for 12:30 – 2:15 PM on Friday, January 4<sup>th</sup> at the Atlanta Marriott Marquis.

Melissa Dell is one of the world's leading young economists, and has already made fundamental intellectual contributions to development economics, political economy, and economic history. One line of her research focuses on understanding the importance of state institutions for economic development. Despite the importance of this question, it has been difficult to establish convincing empirical evidence. Professor Dell has overcome these challenges by finding incredibly novel sources of variation in state institutions and undertaking extensive data collection to allow her to take advantage of historical natural experiments. In one paper, Professor Dell examines the long-term impacts of the Spanish Crown's forced labor system, comparing populations just within and just outside of the forced labor system boundary. She shows that today, hundreds of years after the system was abolished, incomes are lower, poverty is higher, and health is worse within these boundaries. Her work suggests that the forced labor system discouraged the formation of large landholdings, which in turn reduced the provision of public goods, including roads and education. In joint work with Pablo Querubin, Professor Dell examines the role of state violence on later development. She uses variation in the U.S. military bombing strategy in Vietnam to show that bombing results in worse local governance, less community participation, and worse economic outcomes. In another paper, she reveals the flipside of coercive state institutions on long-run economic outcomes. To isolate the extractive influence of colonial powers, she and co-author Ben Olken compare long-run economic outcomes in Indonesian villages that were located closer versus farther away from a 19<sup>th</sup>-century Dutch colonial sugar factory, and find that proximity to factories is associated with higher rates of income and industrialization today.

As exemplified by this work, many of her papers employ innovative data from unique historical sources to address long-standing questions in economic history and economic development. Her papers have also made innovative use of regression discontinuity designs to construct valid counterfactuals. Professor Dell's research has fundamentally changed our understanding of the role of state institutions in economic development.

Professor Dell received her Ph.D. in Economics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2012 and has already developed an outstanding publication record, including publications in the *American Economic Review*, *Econometrica*, and the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*. Among many prestigious honors, she has received an Alfred Sloan Fellowship in 2016 and the Calvo-Armengol International Prize for the best economist or social scientist under the age of 40. In addition to her outstanding research, Professor Dell is described as "an amazing colleague" and a "superb advisor to her students."

The Elaine Bennett Research Prize is given in memory of Elaine Bennett, who made significant contributions to economic theory and experimental economics during her short professional career, and who mentored many women economists at the start of their careers. Previous winners of this prize are: Marina Halac (Yale), Emi Nakamura (UC Berkeley), Anna Mikusheva (MIT), Erica Field (Duke University), Amy Finkelstein (MIT), Monika Piazzesi (Stanford University), Marianne Bertrand (University of Chicago), Esther Duflo (MIT), Susan Athey (Stanford University), and Judith Chevalier (Yale University).

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*CSWEP is a subcommittee of the AEA charged with addressing the status of women in the economics profession. It directs mentoring activities for women at the beginning of their careers, organizes sessions at the annual meetings of the AEA and the regional economics associations, publishes a thrice yearly newsletter, monitors the progress of women within the profession, and reports annually to the AEA on the status of women in economics. CSWEP associates are women and men in the diverse areas of the profession – in academe, government and business.*

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