Matthew Pesner
Curriculum Vitae, July 2021

Email: matthew.e.pesner@vanderbilt.edu
Cell phone: (973) 747-6480
Website: matthewpesner.com

Vanderbilt University
Department of Economics
VU Station B 351819
Nashville, TN 37235

Education

Vanderbilt University, Department of Economics

Ph.D. in Economics: Expected Completion May, 2022
Ph.D. Advancement to Candidacy: February, 2020
M.A. in Economics: May, 2018

Colorado College, Department of Economics

B.A. in Mathematical Economics: May, 2016

References

William Collins: william.collins@vanderbilt.edu
Lesley Turner: lesley.j.turner@vanderbilt.edu
Andrew Goodman-Bacon: andrew.j.goodman-bacon@vanderbilt.edu (current contact)

Research Fields

Economic History, Labor Economics, Public Economics

Honors and Fellowships

Vanderbilt University, Department of Economics

Vanderbilt University Economics Fellowship: 2016 – Present
Kirk Dornbush Dissertation Fellowship: Fall, 2020
Kirk Dornbush Summer Research Grant: Summer, 2018

Colorado College, Department of Economics

Van-Skilling Award: April, 2015

Additional Research Experience

Vanderbilt University, Research Assistant

Professor William Collins: December, 2017 – May, 2018
Professor Andrew Goodman-Bacon: December, 2017 – May, 2018; Summer, 2020
Professor Michelle Marcus: September, 2018 – May, 2019

Work in Progress

"Public Pensions and the Elasticity of Elderly Labor Force Nonparticipation: Evidence from the Railroad Retirement Act" (Job Market Paper)

This paper estimates the elasticity of elderly labor force nonparticipation with respect to public pensions in the late 1930's for industrial workers, helping to reconcile sharply declining estimates over the 20th century. The Railroad Retirement Acts (RRA) of 1934-1937 federalized private pensions covering roughly 5% of the nonagricultural workforce, crediting up to 30 years of work *ex-post* and allowing for immediate and unexpected vested retirement under substantially higher benefits. Using linked Census records between 1920-1930 and 1930-1940, I compare labor force participation a decade after measuring worker's industries. To identify the effect of the RRA, my triple-differences design compares exit of railroad to other industrial pension-covered workers, between 1930 and 1940, for pension-eligible (≥65) and ineligible (<65) ages. Internal validity is supported by specifications that imbed falsification tests of exit at ineligible ages. Railroad workers differentially exited only at ages 65 plus, accounting for roughly 4% of the 1930-1940 aggregate elderly labor force participation decline. To estimate the elasticity of elderly nonparticipation, I combine the new benefit progressivity under the RRA, which generates variation in benefit percent increase along the wage profile, with the industrial and cohort comparisons of my design. Crucially, this procedure limits comparisons to be from benefit changes for workers of similar wages. My estimate of roughly .1 is lower than estimates from earlier or comparable periods, but similar to modern estimates from Social Security. These findings suggests that pre-exit labor force attachment and the marginal group affected matter when estimating the responsiveness of retirement to pensions.

"The Expansion of Social Security and the Decline of Elderly Public Assistance" (Joint with Daniel Fetter)

Among the most consequential changes in the American economy over the 20th century was the growth of the government's role in providing social insurance and transfers, especially to the elderly. A central element of this growth was a change in the level of government that administered and funded transfers. We investigate the expansion of the nationally-administered Old Age and Survivors Insurance (commonly known as Social Security) and its role in the decline of the state-administered Old Age Assistance (OAA) program from the 1940s through the 1970s. We document the degree to which Social Security crowded out OAA and the ways in which states responded to its expansion.

"Who Benefits from Federal Welfare Spending? Evidence from the Introduction of Progressive Cost Sharing" (Joint with Andrew Goodman-Bacon)

In 1958 the federal government began to provide more generous financial matching for welfare programs in poorer states than in richer ones. The goal was to encourage the least generous states to pay higher benefits. We evaluate the effect of this reform on benefits, on state savings, and other state tax/spending policies.

Teaching Fields
Economic History, Public Economics, Labor Economics, Microeconomics, Econometrics

Teaching Experience
Vanderbilt University, Teaching Assistant
Urban Economics: Fall, 2017
Economic Statistics: Spring, 2018
Health Economics: Fall, 2018; Spring, 2019; Fall, 2019; Spring, 2020
Public Finance: Fall, 2019: Spring, 2020; Spring, 2021

Additional Teaching Experience
Colorado College, Tutor, Quantitative Reasoning Center: 2014-2016

Conference / Seminar Presentations

2021 (including scheduled)
Annual Cliometric Conference (Graduate Student Session)
NBER Summer Institute Development of the American Economy (Poster Session)
Economic History Association Annual Meeting (Poster Session)
Southern Economic Association Annual Meeting

2020
Vanderbilt Empirical and Applied Microeconomics Seminar

2019
Economic History Association (Poster Session)
Southern Economic Association (Two Presentations)
Vanderbilt Empirical and Applied Microeconomics Seminar

Additional Professional Activities
Referee: Industrial Relations, A Journal of Economy and Society

Professional Affiliations
Economic History Association

Skills
STATA, LaTeX, ArcGIS