



Economics solutions sought

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A new organization at Kansas State University hopes to close the gender gap they say exists in economics, starting with stronger bonds among themselves. The Women in Economics club started last fall when Florence Neymotin, an assistant professor in K-State's Department of Economics, noticed her female students individually asking similar questions, such as the pay disparities that exist between men and women, the difficulty women face when entering the profession and issues related to raising children while advancing their career. "I felt like these were big questions," Neymotin, an assistant professor in her fourth year at K-State and one of four women in the economics department. "I thought it was time to have an organized forum for this discussion."

According to data from the Committee on the Status of Women in the Economic Profession, a branch of the American Economics Association that looks at women's influence and status in the profession, 17 percent of tenure and tenure track professors at Ph.D. granting departments were women. In the private sector, about 20 percent are women, according to the 2009 report. Neymotin said she sees similar numbers herself. "It's important for them to have role models and networking opportunities," Neymotin said. "If you go to a place where you are the only woman in a department, you're missing some of that social capital based interaction." Those networking opportunities are a major component of the club, said Yuting Li, the club's vice president and treasurer and a graduate student in economics. "We do not usually communicate much although we see each other in class," Li said. "It really provides us a great opportunity to gain knowledge, exchange ideas, discuss and solve problems, have fun and build friendships." The club also helps the budding economists find role models in the economics world, something that is also lacking for many of the club members. "In the economics world, there are only a handful women economists," Li said. "If we can do something right now, we may be able to make some changes." A big pull for the club is the list of speakers they are able to bring to campus. Earlier this month, the club brought Ellen McGrattan, a monetary adviser at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, to speak. Neymotin said it is a unique opportunity for students, but an expensive one for the growing organization. As they find role models in the field, they also are becoming role models themselves for the next generation of women economists.