

# Economics in Action

UC San Diego

Department of Economics

---

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

## Melissa Famulari

*Helping Undergraduates Thrive*



Melissa Famulari joined the Department of Economics in 2004 as vice chair of undergraduate studies and has implemented many initiatives to help students thrive at UC San Diego. She spearheaded the revamping of the undergraduate program in 2007 and started the Undergraduate Economic Society, which she advises, and a chapter of Omicron Delta Epsilon (the international economics honor society). She also negotiates directly with publishers to produce custom textbooks for our core classes at substantial savings.

### Finding Economics

Melissa was born in Newark, N.J., and spent her elementary years in South Orange, N.J. As a child, she did a lot of baby-sitting – including taking care of Elisabeth Shue, who went on to make the movie *Adventures in Babysitting* – and saved every penny toward the goal of purchasing a horse. When Melissa was in seventh grade, her family relocated to her great-grandmother's 200-year-old stone farmhouse in Phoenixville, Pa., and she realized her dream of buying her horse, Gina.

Melissa left rural Pennsylvania to attend college and explored many educational options before earning her bachelor's degree in economics at Temple University. She started out as a communications major, quickly decided it was not for her, and in true undergraduate fashion, took introductory classes offered for nearly every major. The survey paid off, as she recalled: "I really enjoyed philosophy and math. Then I took my first economics class. I knew right away that I had found my new major. I loved everything about economics: the rigor, the models to organize one's thoughts about complex issues, and the important and interesting questions economists asked."

Melissa continued her education, entering a doctoral program at the University of Washington and specializing in labor and health economics. After completing her degree, she worked as a research economist at the Bureau of Labor Statistics and then built a twelve-year career as an educator and researcher at the University of Texas at Austin.

### In Support of Undergraduates

Melissa came to UC San Diego to manage and improve the undergraduate program. She said, "I have always been

interested in research, teaching students, teaching pedagogy – learning how to be a better and more effective instructor – and curriculum design. The position at UC San Diego was perfect for someone with my interests.” Melissa holds weekly office hours that are open to our 2,500 undergraduates; they can offer feedback on their experience and obtain guidance on applying to graduate school or building their careers. She also teaches intermediate microeconomics, the senior essay seminar and our health economics courses. According to Melissa, the best thing about working with these young minds is “their enthusiasm, ideas and potential.”

To increase the information and opportunities for students, Melissa designed our Senior Exit survey, which gathers feedback on our undergraduate program and information about what our graduates are doing, and worked with the undergraduate team to start the Undergraduate Blog to post the results of the surveys, information on job openings and internships, and announcements from student organizations. She also initiated the annual Undergraduate Student and Faculty Mixer and the Grad-Undergrad Student Mixer.

Melissa enjoys living San Diego with her two children, Toni and Matt. She travels and likes to spend time with her extended family: “I look forward to two weeks each summer when we meet at my parents' cabin on a lake in the Adirondack mountains.”

Published by the Department of Economics faculty and staff.  
Designed by UC San Diego Creative Services and Publications  
Questions, comments, complaints? Have a story idea? Email us!



*Economics in Action* is produced with the support of UCSD Alumni.