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Economist Shelly Lundberg wins prestigious Mincer Award, releases book on gender economics

Economist and demographer [Shelly Lundberg](#), a distinguished professor and Leonard Broom Professor of Demography at UC Santa Barbara, has won the 2026 Jacob Mincer Award by the Society of Labor Economists (SLE) for her lifetime contributions to labor economics.

The honor coincides with the release of her latest book, "[How Economics Discovered Women: Bringing Gender Economics into the 21st Century](#)" (UC Press, 2026).

"Economic research focusing on women as workers became common in the mid-1970s as I started in an economics Ph.D. program, so the history of modern gender economics has coincided with and shaped my own career," Lundberg said. "I consider the profession's 'discovery' of women, though, not as the growth of empirical studies of women's employment, but rather as two later steps — the replacement of old 'unitary' models of the household as a single decision-maker with new models that recognize women as independent agents with their own preferences and interests, and an understanding (still developing) of the powerful social and cultural influences on the goals and behaviors of both women and men. I argue that economics has had to discover women before it could hope to effectively analyze the behavior of men."

Lundberg's 1983 American Economic Review paper with Richard Startz, and her 1985 Journal of Labor Economics analysis of the added worker effect, "together advanced our understanding of household labor supply responses to economic shocks," according to SLE. Her research has also shown how broader social and economic forces shape family structure and inequality, while her work on family change, including studies of cohabitation, marriage and childbearing patterns, "highlights the growing divergence in family outcomes across socioeconomic groups and its implications for inequality."

Her new book, published in August, argues that despite decades of progress and expanded data on men and women in the labor force, persistent gender disparities remain unresolved because the discipline relies on outdated economic models. Drawing on crossdisciplinary insights, the book outlines why occupational segregation persists, why female-dominated fields yield lower pay and how policies like paternity leave often fall short.

Beyond her scholarship, Lundberg "has provided exemplary service to the profession" as a past president of SLE and a former chair of the American Economic Association's Committee on the Status of Women in the Economics Profession, among several other leadership, mentorship and editorial roles, the society noted. "Through these activities, along with her theoretical innovations, empirical insight and sustained influence on the field, Lundberg has made enduring contributions that exemplify the spirit of the Mincer Award."

Beyond theoretical and empirical contributions — including her foundational work on labor supply responses to economic shocks and the widening divergence in family structures across socioeconomic groups — Lundberg has led efforts to address the gender gap within economics itself. Her work detailing how women are lost from the academic pipeline has pushed institutions to address structural barriers, mentoring and implicit bias.

"Shelly Lundberg is one of those rare scholars whose research has been truly field transformative," said Charlie Hale, dean of UCSB's Division of Social Sciences. "The economics discipline will never return to gender-blind models of economic behavior, which she played such a central role in challenging. While such transformations rest on groundbreaking research, they also emerge from mentorship, advocacy and institutional leadership, all of which have formed Shelly's illustrious and amply recognized career. We are fortunate beyond words for her presence as Distinguished

Professor and Leonard Broom Chair in Economics.”

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