



Industrial Relations Unit (IRRU)

Seminar Speaker Series – Spring 2022 (2021/22 Term 2)

Speaker: **J. Ryan Lamare, School of Labor and Employment Relations, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign**

Title: **Why Am I Travelling to Work When Everyone Else is Staying Home? An Empirical Examination of Work Mobility during COVID-19 Lockdown**

Date: **Wednesday 26 January 2022**

Venue: **Zoom Meeting**

Time: **14:00 – 15:30 (GMT)**

Abstract: At the height of mobility restrictions aimed at curtailing the spread of COVID-19, many employees could alter their work movement patterns, avoiding potential exposure to a disease whose risk factors were not well understood. But concurrent with these restrictions, variations in mobility to workplaces emerged. Anecdotal evidence suggested that Black workers were compelled to continue traveling to work during lockdown, risking disease exposure, and that political conservatives felt entitled to continue traveling to work and elsewhere despite restrictions. In this study, we empirically test these anecdotal suggestions after accounting for job type sorting and other factors. Theories of racial capitalism and structural racial vulnerability suggest that Black counties may have felt compelled to travel to work, but not elsewhere, during lockdown. Theories of US conservative political identity hold that pro-Trump counties may travel to work, but also to other places, during lockdown. Finally, we posit that unions may have moderated Black work mobility differences. Empirically, we use US county level Google Mobility Data collected from February-April 2020. Google tracked aggregate movement changes to work and non-work locations, and we link these to ethnicity measures and union density, as well as geographic, demographic, and socioeconomic information. Regression analysis shows that Black counties traveled to workplaces at significantly higher rates than white counties, but not to other places, while conservative counties traveled to both workplaces and non-workplaces at higher rates than liberal counties. We also see some evidence that union density moderated these effects, where highly unionized and highly Black counties were less likely to travel to workplaces. The results imply that there may have been unequal burdens imposed upon Black workers (and especially those that were

non-union) during COVID-19, which may have contributed to greater infection and mortality rates among these groups, but also that conservatives chose to expose themselves to COVID-19 both at workplaces and elsewhere.

Registration:

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