

Kasie Whitener ([00:02](#)):

Welcome back to More Impact. My name is Kasie Whitener, I'm your host, and with me today, Dr. Orgul Ozturk, who is the department chair of the economics department, and the director for the Economic Policy and Innovation Center or "EPIC" at the Darla Moore School of Business. Welcome in or

Orgul Ozturk ([00:21](#)):

Thank you. Thank you.

Kasie Whitener ([00:22](#)):

I'm glad you're here.

Orgul Ozturk ([00:23](#)):

I'm very happy to be here.

Kasie Whitener ([00:25](#)):

Alright, so let's talk a little bit about your journey. How did you get to the Darla Moore School of Business? Tell us what your background is.

Orgul Ozturk ([00:32](#)):

Sure. So I'm from Turkey. I came from southern part of Turkey first to Istanbul for college, then to Wisconsin for graduate school, and this was my first job. I fell in love with Columbia when I came for the visit and been here ever since 10, since 2006. It's been 18 years.

Kasie Whitener ([00:52](#)):

18 years, yes. That's fantastic. Yes. And all the time working in the Darling Moore School of Business. Yes.

Orgul Ozturk ([00:57](#)):

I came as an assistant professor. I'm towards the end of my journey. I'll probably retire from here. Kind of sad to say, but probably true.

Kasie Whitener ([01:06](#)):

But this is a family business, so you're not the only one in your family that's at the Darla Moore School. Tell us about your husband and what his specialty is.

Orgul Ozturk ([01:12](#)):

He's also an economist and we met in graduate school after one year apart. He went to Amherst College for his first job. I was able to bring him here too, so we worked together. His boss, but at home and <laugh>, he doesn't like to hear it, but yes,

Kasie Whitener ([01:30](#)):

That's a common story in academia though. And I, the reason I pointed out is because it's interesting when we think about academic careers, when we meet in graduate school, we meet our, our life partner in graduate school and then think, how are we gonna build our career together? And frequently when

we go to hire a new faculty, the question is, well, my partner also has a specialty. Is there a place for them at this school? So I think it's amazing that you and he have been able to find a place and, and have been here for 18

Orgul Ozturk ([01:53](#)):

Years. Yes. Actually, I'm preparing a newsletter for the new candidates, new job market candidates. And it's been a common story. It's so hard to navigate two careers. Yes. This two body problem is truly a two body problem.

Kasie Whitener ([02:06](#)):

But you're here in Columbia, you said you fell in love with it. What's your favorite part of Columbia?

Orgul Ozturk ([02:11](#)):

At first it was being warm almost all the time. The weather.

Kasie Whitener ([02:17](#)):

Well, you were, you said Michigan before, right?

Orgul Ozturk ([02:18](#)):

It was Wisconsin. And I loved Wisconsin too. It was, you know, a beautiful city of medicine, Wisconsin. The, our job market is timed perfectly. My job visit was in January. Oh, gotcha. While we were dealing with snow and blizzard, et cetera, in Wisconsin. It was sunny. Beautiful. I mean, it was three days of bliss. I thought it was gonna be all through the year that way. Yeah.

Orgul Ozturk ([02:45](#)):

You know, I wasn't here on the summers. Right.

Kasie Whitener ([02:48](#)):

<Laugh>, you travel over the summers. Yes.

Orgul Ozturk ([02:50](#)):

Yeah, exactly. So and people, I mean, definitely people were a big factor. And they told me I can have goats in my backyard and lemon trees in my you know yard. And that was very much home for me, the goats part and the lemon trees together. Nice. So I am like, yeah, sign me up. That's

Kasie Whitener ([03:09](#)):

Awesome. And you all have been here. You've been raising your family, you teaching at the university? Tomorrow is the first day of school. Yes. By the time this airs and people are listening to it, we'll be well into the semester, but today it's the day before, the first day of school. Tell us about your classes. What kinds of classes do you teach?

Orgul Ozturk ([03:23](#)):

So I teach undergraduates upperclassmen. I teach an intermediate micro theory course. I know it doesn't mean anything to the lay person. It basically talks about how decisions are made, how we look

at decisions as an economist and try to understand for the consumers and the producers, how the best decisions take place. So, so optimization problems, basically how the people choose the best options for themselves as consumers, and how producers choose the best set of inputs to produce the most at the highest profits possible. And for PhD students, I teach an econometrics class, again, that's not very informative, I guess. So it is a data class. How do we make sense of large data sets? And it kind of apply it to our research. How do we analyze the question at hand with the data at hand? How do we analyze it so that we can reach to causal links? Identifying causal links is crucial in our you know, business. Being able to say this causes that is very hard. Yes. Especially in social sciences, we are not, like natural sciences. Things don't happen in our control. Right. So we try to model, we try to make the most sense, and I teach them how to do that.

Kasie Whitener ([04:49](#)):

Your economics classes are preparing researchers Yes. Helping these folks get ready to make sense of what they're seeing out in the world. Exactly. Exactly. Most of the people who come are undergraduates who come in to study economics. Where do they go from here? What do they do with an economics degree? There

Orgul Ozturk ([05:04](#)):

Is a lot they can do. That's one thing we definitely tell everyone who's thinking about economics. It is about skills they gather and a way of thinking about things than a particular subject necessarily. A lot of our students go to grad school, that's one option. But bunch of them go to consulting. Bunch of them go to research positions and they also go to banking. And there's endless possibilities pretty much. And another area they go in is government work. So the policy and programs that you know, everybody every day experience, a lot of them employ a lot of economists to deal with the not only implementation, but also analysis of these policies and programs.

Kasie Whitener ([05:53](#)):

And this is your area of research. Yeah. This is one of the first conversations you and I had was on our way to and from Art Fields back in May. And listeners of the podcast will know that art, we had a couple of different episodes on art fields, so they'll be familiar with that concept. But you and I were writing out there and back out to Lake City and back and talked about some of the research that you do listening

Orgul Ozturk ([06:10](#)):

Taylor Swift,

Kasie Whitener ([06:11](#)):

I Yeah. Listening to Taylor Swift. That's right. Because Tortured Poets had just come out, so we had to listen to Taylor Swift. You're not the first person to, to call out my Taylor Swiftness on the <laugh> on the podcast. But yeah. So we are on this conversation out to and from Artfields, and you're telling me about your research and your policy research, and so talk about that and then bring it to like how it affects South Carolina as well.

Orgul Ozturk ([06:31](#)):

Sure. so I'm not the only one. And I can tell you that most of my department my faculty is policy researchers. We have a, a big strength in labor health and education economics. I am at the intersection

of all these. And I've been for the last 10, 15 years and working actually with the South Carolina data mostly. I do, especially these days, mostly work on the impact of education policy on short term educational outcomes, as well as long term, more general life outcomes of the students that are affected by these policies and programs. And I mean, it has a lot to do with South Carolina because most of my data is South Carolina data. Most of the programs I analyze are South Carolina programs. For example one of the most recent papers looks at the TAP program.

Orgul Ozturk ([07:34](#)):

This is teacher advancement program. It is an incentive pay program. It has many examples of it across the country. We study, we, me and my co-authors we study the South Carolina version and compare it to as, as much as we can to other programs because a lot of the programs across the country are not very successful. They do not achieve the goal of the program, incentivizing teachers getting better outcomes for their students. But in South Carolina the program that's implemented with all of its components actually is working quite well. And not only it is affecting short term outcomes, graduation rates you know, attendance or the opposite, actually lack of absence from the classroom. But also it has significant impact on long-term outcomes, crime outcomes. For example, we do see less, fewer arrests, less crime among these students that are affected. They had whoever had tap teachers. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative> these incentivized teachers, educational returns in the short round translates into long-term gains as well in terms of lack of dependency on social welfare programs and also reduced crime rate among these students.

Kasie Whitener ([09:06](#)):

So what I'm hearing you say is there is a, the TAP program has a certain number of teachers that are enrolled, they're incentivized in particular ways, and we're measuring their outcomes and their own motivation, their own efficacy, but then also the students that are influenced by these TAP teachers Yeah, exactly. That have them in classrooms. Exactly. And overall, those outcomes are positive

Orgul Ozturk ([09:25](#)):

Outcomes. Very positive outcomes,

Kasie Whitener ([09:26](#)):

Both for the teachers and for the students. Exactly.

Orgul Ozturk ([09:28](#)):

Exactly.

Kasie Whitener ([09:29](#)):

That. That's impressive stuff. So when you are examining these programs, these are legislative programs that have been built, they've been put in place, and you're gathering this data afterwards, w and you write these papers and, and you're creating this kind of information for folks to have, where does it go? What happens? So

Orgul Ozturk ([09:45](#)):

Usually it goes nowhere because I think most academicians think that we are just gonna you know, be discovered. We are doing such great work, somebody's gonna read it, somebody will find me, and

Kasie Whitener ([09:56](#)):

Yes, if I print it, they will

Orgul Ozturk ([09:58](#)):

Come. Yeah. I mean, it is published in a great journal. So yeah,

Kasie Whitener ([10:00](#)):

They should be

Orgul Ozturk ([10:01](#)):

Aware. But unfortunately, even when it's great academic work doesn't translate into policy impact, where even when it is quite impactful, this one was a little bit of an exception, I must say. I, this work was an N-B-N-B-R working paper before it was published which is the National Network of Economists. And we published, it is read, but not peer reviewed, but it was it came out as a working paper and as soon as it came out as a working paper it got attention from national media as well as groups in DC It was used as evidence actually to get more funding for this program. Two of our senators were connected, our state senators. And another thing that came out of this, I actually am doing a program evaluation for education oversight committee because a colleague, I shouldn't say a colleague a friend from ways back when our kids were in daycare she happens to be the kind of data person at EOC Educational Oversight Committee.

Orgul Ozturk ([11:16](#)):

She heard about this work through a newsletter that was distributed from dc Right. And she's like, oh, I know her. Our son went to daycare together, right. Contacted me, asked me to do this work. And then we've been presented at Department of Education here. Again, a lot of efforts out there to retain teachers and increase our educational standing in the nation. And these kind of programs are quite important. And I mean, it was very, I must say, emotional for me. I really enjoyed seeing my work being used by non academicians. Yeah. It's wanting to hear praise from your economist friends, wanting to see, you know, someone who is not an economist, say, Hey, I love that work. It was great. Right. Thank you for writing it. I mean, that's the type of thing that one wishes to, to have all the time. It doesn't happen. And we will talk about it more. We are hoping that it will happen more with a little bit of extra effort on our part. Yeah. We are really hoping more of these kind of studies are translated to policy impact. So

Kasie Whitener ([12:26](#)):

This is the conversation that Jason DeBacker and I had when he was here, because he does a lot of research on tax policy and tax incentives and whether or not compliance plays a role in all these sort of tax rules and that, and he's got a nonprofit side that he does just like I gotta tease him about. I was like, like a big academic nerd, you know, <laugh>, like in your non-work time, you're also <laugh>, you know, over here working on this nonprofit. If you haven't heard the episode with Jason De Backer, go and check it out. But as he and I were talking about it, we were getting to this place that you and I are leading to, which is how do we take that research that academics are doing where we're really investigating the legislative efforts and determining are they effective? Are these policies, in fact getting the results you're looking for?

Kasie Whitener ([13:14](#)):

And then once you find out that no, they're not, or yes they are, how do you translate that to our politicians, to our lawmakers, to our voters, and have give them visibility to this so that they know, Hey, don't go out there talking about this policy <laugh>. It's a failed policy and it's, and it's trash. Don't do it. And so as Jason and I were having that conversation, he mentioned EPIC. And so this is a new center at the University of South Carolina at the Darla Moore School of Business. You're leading this center, and it's for the purpose of this exact thing. Right. Tell us about

Orgul Ozturk ([13:47](#)):

Epic. Yeah, yeah. I mean, Jason is great and I, I am thankful that he brought it up and he's doing great work all over the world. He just actually came back from a four country, five country, you know, tour where he was implementing this, his non-profits work. That's great. Yeah, it is awesome. And he is also my biggest collaborator in the efforts to establish this center. And it's out of a lot of conversations we had, how can we be more impactful? How can we actually reach out, do more? I mean, research can be a very tankless job if you didn't love what you were doing. It is not very rewarding. You don't, you work on something four years with no end, and then finally it comes out in print maybe four years, five years after you start working on it.

Orgul Ozturk ([14:36](#)):

Right? So it is not something also we can separate. There is no you know, time after work or non-work time for an academician. It's always in our minds, right? So we basically see the need in the state and for this kind of policy work to be translated in some ways to the policymakers. So nobody's going to read our 80 page papers with 10 appendices, right? So we basically said, Hey, why don't we put together we have an expertise. Why don't we put together this center and then run events, run a working paper series, run a white paper series and in newsletter where we constantly communicate our research to the decision makers across the state. And since we mostly work with South Carolina questions and data you know, it is I think quite natural.

Orgul Ozturk ([15:44](#)):

We have the capacity, we have the expertise, and also, you know, we have endless desire to talk about our research <laugh>. So it's just adding one more venue to, it was the main motivator. And so we are going to basically be the instate go to place whenever somebody is trying to decide between two policies or whenever they're trying to understand pros and cons of a program that they saw some other state implement. And they're trying to understand how it will vary in South Carolina. We are hopefully going to be the place that they're gonna come and say, Hey, would you please take a look at this, analyze it for us, see you know, do a returns to dollar impact analysis for us, or when it, this doesn't only have to be state and agencies, either. Any business that is trying to implement new workplace policy, we'll be there for them as well.

Orgul Ozturk ([16:45](#)):

We've been doing it with in smaller scales with our students. We have a econ scholars program. We worked with a lot of agencies, we've worked with US Department of Forestry is, saw the Columbia Mayor's Office this year working with you know, animal Rescue Center. And hopefully we, I haven't had the final conversations yet, but a Lexington Medical Center. And these are going to be our attempt slowly to kind of link to expertise in school with the needs of the Columbia and this South Carolina state in general. Like, everybody, I think needs a little bit of economics in their lives. We are just gonna make it so that they can actually understand Right, what economics is.

Kasie Whitener ([17:32](#)):

So this sounds a little bit too, like Joel Wooten talking about in management science and his innovation approach and, and the way they have companies come in and say, Hey, we have this problem, and he and his students do these investigations and they're helping these companies out. So it seems like the center's also well positioned to go, Hey, what's, what's the challenge? And then let's put our students and our faculty on these topics and like, get them to understand and research and, and analyze this stuff. Yeah, exactly. The idea of taking academic research and repackaging it into white papers or podcasts, I don't know, just for example,

Orgul Ozturk ([18:08](#)):

Something you should make one for us

Kasie Whitener ([18:09](#)):

Too, <laugh> <laugh>. I mean, when we think about ways that we can help policymakers get a better understanding of really what does the research actually say and who did we investigate and, and why did it go that way? I think all of that is really valuable, especially for our lawmakers. I'm really excited about that. Excellent. I don't know if I can tell you how excited I am about Epic <laugh>. You know, I'm like, first it's gonna be epic. I'm the first volunteer to be like, I would love to read your paper and write a white paper out of it. That would be wonderful.

Orgul Ozturk ([18:38](#)):

All right. You're volunteering. Yeah,

Kasie Whitener ([18:39](#)):

A hundred percent <laugh>. Excellent. I like nothing else to do. I would a hundred percent wanna do this. When you think of EPIC as a center, right? So one of the things that happens at the Darla Moore School, people hear the word center and they think there's like a room with couches and you know, you're gonna walk in and like sit down. You're like, oh, I'm in the center. But that's not really how they work at the Moore School. The, the idea is it's a collaborative effort amongst your colleagues that all attach themselves to this word center without there being a physical location for it. And then you all are operating in a, in a collaborative way. So as you and Jason and everybody else is organizing this center, what, what's the first thing? Like what's the very first thing you guys are gonna do as the, as fall kicks off?

Orgul Ozturk ([19:24](#)):

So as fall kicks off we are working on our depository of repository of all the things that are to be out there for us, kind of showing all of our great work. We have a website under construction, and we are gonna have a big launch event early November where it's going to be, you know, officially established

Kasie Whitener ([19:49](#)):

The launch event. Yes. When is that?

Orgul Ozturk ([19:51](#)):

Uh we are planning on November, the first week of November right now. So not yet to be determined. All right.

Kasie Whitener ([19:58](#)):

Well tune into all of our social channels so you can see when that event's actually gonna be and what it's gonna look like. Yes. Sounds cool. So a launch event coming up a repository of the existing research, and then how are you going to prioritize which of these pieces gets that, that treatment? I mean,

Orgul Ozturk ([20:14](#)):

We are going to adopt ourselves to legislative priorities of the state. I mean, we are here to address the need, so needs of the state, needs of the policymakers is gonna be our guiding force. And I think we are currently main focus of the state legislators is you know, developing more reliable, most sustainable, more flexible labor force. So most of our research is also on workforce development related, it may be health education or labor policy itself and or more of the surrounding, you know, the occupational rules and regulations. So identifying the priorities of the states and kind of developing materials to address those is going to be our guiding principle. But of course we are going to be approached by departments and agencies. We have already been approached and whatever they need as our time and expertise allows, we are going to you know, help them as these requests come. And we are part of a network of similar centers across the nation. If that's something that we don't have the expertise in, we are hoping to be the connector to others with you know, the relevant expertise.

Kasie Whitener ([21:32](#)):

So those folks that are going to inquire, Hey, I'm curious about this, or I'm curious about that, or, have you seen any working models of a program like this? Yes. And you guys can go and connect them to the Hey, actually, yes. At one of our connected network centers, they have this research based on, you know, a similar

Orgul Ozturk ([21:51](#)):

Yeah. Demographic. Exactly. Exactly. I mean this actually so I have a former student, a fellow economist directing one of these centers in West Virginia. And she used to be called by the state here because he's from, she's from South Carolina quite often to provide expert testimony in Department of Commerce you know issues. Yeah. So why go all the way to West Virginia when we have the same expertise here? That's her words, right? So you know, when something like that comes to them, they're going to refer to us and we are going to return the favor. I mean, it's all about, again, every one of us wants our research to be more relatable and reach to a wider audience. And it doesn't matter where we are. We are well aware of each other's work and hoping to connect Yeah. Across borders.

Kasie Whitener ([22:46](#)):

I'm so excited about this. Like I said, I've already been your first volunteer <laugh>. Like I'll read the papers and, and write the white papers for you. I'm excited to see how you're able to get them out in front of policy makers, in front of lawmakers in front of decision makers, voters Exactly. And that sort of thing. Exactly. So I think epic is gonna be epic.

Orgul Ozturk ([23:03](#)):

I know, I know.

Kasie Whitener ([23:04](#)):

Will you come back a year from now and talk about your first year Epic? That will



Orgul Ozturk ([23:07](#)):

Be, if it is an epic year, I'll come back. <Laugh>

Kasie Whitener ([23:10](#)):

Epic is an

Orgul Ozturk ([23:10](#)):

Epic failure. I'm not coming.

Kasie Whitener ([23:12](#)):

It will not be a failure.

Orgul Ozturk ([23:13](#)):

I know, I know.

Kasie Whitener ([23:14](#)):

Extraordinarily accomplished person, and I know this is gonna fly. Excellent. This is gonna be amazing. Thank you. Thank you so much for being here.

Orgul Ozturk ([23:20](#)):

Thank you. It was great. Pleasure.

Kasie Whitener ([23:22](#)):

I appreciate that you've been listening to Moore Impact. When you learn more, you know more, and when you know more, you do more. Thanks for listening.