Abstract: Black primary-school students matched to a same-race teacher perform better on standardized tests and face more favorable teacher perceptions, yet little is known about the long-run impacts of student-teacher demographic match. Leveraging random student-teacher pairings in the Tennessee STAR experiment, we show that black students assigned to a black teacher in grades K-3 are about 3 percentage points (6.7%) less likely to drop out of high school and about 4 percentage points (15%) more likely to take a college entrance exam than their same-school peers who are not assigned a black teacher. We document similar patterns in administrative data from North Carolina. Regarding mechanisms, we find suggestive evidence that such effects operated through increased student effort, intellectual curiosity, and trust in teachers. Quantile regression estimates also show medium-run effects on the bottom half of the middle school test score distribution. Finally, we find no evidence of dosage effects, suggesting that the results are due to role model effects.

Bio: Seth Gershenson’s research interests are in the economics of education, labor economics, time use, and education policy. In addition to his faculty position at American University’s School of Education, he is a Research Fellow at The Institute of Labor Economics (IZA). Gershenson holds a PhD from Michigan State University in Economics with a primary focus on education policy. While at Michigan State, he taught several courses and received an Outstanding Teaching award. Professor Gershenson has also been honored with the New Scholar Award by the American Education Finance Association. His approach to teaching and scholarship is to apply economic approaches to practical, policy-driven questions in public education, specifically teacher behavior. Professor Gershenson teaches Quantitative Methods, Managerial Economics, and Economics for Policy Analysis to MPA and MPP students.