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### **Much-Watched Couple in Economics Lands at U. of Michigan**

*By Peter Monaghan*

Betsey Stevenson and **Justin Wolfers**, a high-profile economist couple, have just chosen to move to the University of Michigan, one of several institutions in the running.

From the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania, they take to Ann Arbor this fall their reputations for using economics and other social sciences to frame insights into many areas of modern life.

"We've been together through our entire academic careers, and both our careers are equally important," Mr. Wolfers says. That he and Ms. Stevenson constantly publish together is so well known in economics circles that few department chairs would have dreamed of getting one and not the other. "We said we'd choose the university where the combination of jobs was best for us jointly," he says.

After all, their most publicly visible specialty is the life of families: marriages, divorce, child-rearing. Some call it "lovenomics."

Mr. Wolfers, 39, has been an associate professor of business and public policy at Wharton, and at Michigan becomes a professor of economics and public policy. Ms. Stevenson, who has just turned 41, becomes an associate professor of public policy.

They leave Philadelphia after four years, although each was often elsewhere. Both, for example, were visiting faculty members at Princeton University in the 2011-12 academic year. Among Mr. Wolfers's many appointments is one as nonresident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution.

From September 2010 to September 2011, Ms. Stevenson worked as chief economist at the Department of Labor.

She became interested in the impact of public policy on the labor market, especially on women and families, while studying economics at Wellesley College. She then completed a doctorate in

economics at Harvard University.

There she met Mr. Wolfers, who was enrolled on a Fulbright scholarship. The former star economics student at the University of Sydney had worked at Australia's central bank. 

From the outset, his interests were varied—he has, for example, long studied racial discrimination and other features of sports, an echo, he says, of his brief adolescent apprenticeship to a Sydney bookie.

Some of the couple's findings are surprising, including that men are growing happier and women unhappier, and that the American divorce rate has been falling for decades.

As it happens, Mr. Wolfers and Ms. Stevenson would not qualify for their own survey sample because they are not married. Their reasons include the "marriage penalty" that the tax code imposes on married couples when both work and the inequity of bars on non-heterosexual marriage. In any case, they say, their 3-year-old daughter binds them more strongly than any marriage license.

After "running regressions" of data and finding that having children lowers couples' contentment, they went ahead anyway. They named their first Matilda, a nod to Mr. Wolfers's homeland, and expect a second child in October.

In economics journals, as in popular venues like Bloomberg News and Freakonomics.com, Stevenson & Wolfers do not shy from holding forth on such controversies as the efficacy of the death penalty—none demonstrated—or the distortion of economic data by almost all political operatives. No surprise, then, that the couple is much courted by the popular press, nor that that attention has provoked collegial chatter, some of it snarky. So, too, did the unexpected news, last year, that Ms. Stevenson's Wharton department had denied her tenure. Michigan assessed her work differently and is hiring her to a tenured position.

Senior colleagues approve their move. "My sense is, it's great for them and for Michigan," says Harvard's **N. Gregory Mankiw**, a leading economist who taught Mr. Wolfers and Ms. Stevenson. "They're very promising young economists, and Michigan is a great department."

Plus, he says, Ann Arbor is a good place to raise children.

Being able to live near campus will, says Ms. Stevenson, free up time for teaching, writing, and public appearances. She and Mr. Wolfers will no longer need a driver. They hired one for their two

hours of daily commuting between Philadelphia to Princeton, having calculated that that would optimize their output and contentment.

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