

Zachary Bleemer

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EDUCATION

2015-2021 (expected): PhD in Economics, University of California, Berkeley

Dissertation Title: “Essays in Labor Economics, Economic Mobility, and Higher Education”

Fields: Labor Economics, Applied Econometrics, Economic History, Economics of Education

Principal Advisor: Professor David Card

Other References: Professors Jesse Rothstein, Christopher Walters, and Henry Brady

2009-2013: BA, Economics and Mathematics and Philosophy, Amherst College (*magna cum laude* with distinction)

WORKING PAPERS

Top Percent Policies and the Return to Postsecondary Selectivity. [Job Market Paper]

Abstract: I study the efficacy of test-based meritocracy in college admissions by evaluating the impact of a grade-based “top percent” policy implemented by the University of California. Eligibility in the Local Context (ELC) provided large admission advantages to the top four percent of 2001-2011 graduates from each California high school. I construct a novel longitudinal dataset linking the ELC era’s 1.8 million UC applicants to educational and labor market outcomes. I first employ a regression discontinuity design to show that ELC led over 10 percent of barely-eligible applicants from low-opportunity high schools to enroll at selective UC campuses instead of less-selective public colleges and universities. Half of those participants were from underrepresented minority groups, and their average SAT scores were at the 12th percentile of their UC peers. Instrumental variable estimates show that ELC participants’ more-selective university enrollment caused increases in five-year degree attainment by 30 percentage points and annual early-career wages by up to \$25,000. I then analyze ELC’s general equilibrium effects by estimating a structural model of university application, admission, and enrollment with an embedded top percent policy. I find that ELC and counterfactual expansions of ELC substantively increase disadvantaged students’ net enrollment at selective public universities. Reduced-form and structural estimates show that ELC participants derived similar or greater value from more-selective university enrollment when compared to their higher-testing peers. These findings suggest that access-oriented admission policies at selective universities can promote economic mobility without efficiency losses. -*Best Paper Award: 2020 MD4SG Conference. Media: LA Times, Chalkbeat.*

Affirmative Action, Mismatch, and Economic Mobility after California’s Proposition 209.

Abstract: Proposition 209 banned race-based affirmative action at California public universities in 1998. This study analyzes Prop 209’s impact on student outcomes using a difference-in-difference research design and a newly-constructed longitudinal database linking all 1994-2002 University of California applicants to their college enrollment, course performance, major choice, degree attainment, and wages into their mid-30s. Ending affirmative action caused UC’s 10,000 annual underrepresented minority (URM) freshman applicants to cascade into lower-quality public and private universities. URM applicants’ undergraduate and graduate degree attainment declined overall and in STEM fields, especially among lower-testing applicants. As a result, the average URM UC applicant’s wages declined by 5 percent annually between ages 24 and 34, almost wholly driven by declines among Hispanic applicants. By the mid-2010s, Prop 209 had caused a cumulative decline in the number of early-career URM Californians earning over \$100,000 by at least 3 percent. Prop 209 also deterred thousands of qualified URM students from applying to any UC campus. Enrolling at less-selective UC campuses did not improve URM students’ performance or persistence in STEM course sequences. Complementary regression discontinuity and institutional value-added analyses suggest that affirmative action’s net wage benefits for URM applicants exceed its (potentially small) net costs for on-the-margin white and Asian applicants. These findings are inconsistent with the university “Mismatch Hypothesis” at the mean and provide the first causal evidence that banning affirmative action exacerbates socioeconomic inequities. -*Media: New York Times, Los Angeles Times, NPR, USA Today, Bloomberg Businessweek, Vox.*

Will Studying Economics Make You Rich? A Regression Discontinuity Analysis of the Returns to College Major (with Aashish Mehta). Conditionally Accepted, *AEJ: Applied Economics*.

Abstract: We investigate the wage return to studying economics by leveraging a policy that prevented students with low introductory grades from declaring the major. Students who barely met the GPA threshold to major in economics earned \$22,000 (46%) higher annual early-career wages than they would have with their second-choice majors. Access to the economics major shifts students’ preferences toward business/finance careers, and about half of the wage return is explained by economics majors working in higher-paying industries. The causal return to majoring in economics is very similar to observational earnings differences in nationally representative data. -*Media: Forbes.*

PUBLICATIONS

Echoes of Rising Tuition in Students’ Borrowing, Educational Attainment, and Homeownership in Post-Recession America (with Meta Brown, Donghoon Lee, and Wilbert van der Klaauw). Forthcoming, *Journal of Urban Economics*.

Long-Run Net Distributionary Effects of Federal Disaster Insurance: The Case of Hurricane Katrina (with Wilbert van der Klaauw). 2019. *Journal of Urban Economics* 110: 70-88.

Intended College Attendance: Evidence from an Experiment on College Returns and Costs (with Basit Zafar). 2018. *Journal of Public Economics* 157: 184-211.

Metrics that Matter: Navigating the Quantified University (with Mukul Kumar, Aashish Mehta, Christopher Muellerleile, and Christopher Newfield). Forthcoming, **Johns Hopkins University Press**.

OTHER WORKING PAPERS

Human Capital Formation and Regional Recovery from the Great Depression (with Sarah Quincy).

Gender Stereotypes in Professor-Student Interactions.

Diversity in Admissions: Affirmative Action, Top Percent Policies, and Holistic Review. -*Media: WaPo, CalMatters.*

Debt, Jobs, or Housing: What's Keeping Millennials at Home? (with Meta Brown, Donghoon Lee, and Wilbert van der Klaauw). -*Media: NYT, WSJ, WaPo, CBS News, Bloomberg, Vox.*

WORK IN PROGRESS

College Major Restrictions and Student Stratification (with Aashish Mehta).

Role Model Effects of Female STEM Teachers and Doctors on Early 20th Century University Enrollment in California.

Precautionary Student Borrowing: Hometown Unemployment and Student Loans (with Andrew Schwartz).

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

RESEARCH:

- 2016-2017 Research Assistant to David Card ('16) and Henry Brady ('16-17)
- 2016-2017 Visiting Scholar, Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco
- 2013-2015 Senior Research Analyst, Federal Reserve Bank of New York

TEACHING:

- 2016-2020 Supervisor, Independent Study in Research, ECON 199 (28 students, avg. 2.5 semesters each)
- Fall 2016 Graduate Student Instructor, ECON 100A (Intermediate Microeconomics)

AWARDS, GRANTS, AND FELLOWSHIPS

2020 Best Paper Award, 2020 MD4SG Conference; Emerging Scholar Award for Excellence in Research and Public Policy, UC Center Sacramento; Center for Equitable Growth Dissertation Fellowship; IRLE Dissertation Fellowship

2019 National Academy of Education / Spencer Dissertation Fellowship

2018 UCHRI Residential Research Fellowship (Spring 2018 at UC Irvine)

2017 All-UC Group in Economic History Dissertation Grant; David P. Gardner Fellowship

2016 INET Prize for Best First-Year Paper in Economics (UC Berkeley)

BA James Nelson Award in Economics; Gail Kennedy Award in Philosophy; Walker Competition Prize in Mathematics; Consulate General Prize for Academic Achievement in German; Schupf Scholarship

PRESENTATIONS

2020 Seminars: UC Berkeley, UC Davis, UC Santa Barbara, UC Santa Cruz. Conferences: NBER Study Group on Economic Mobility, MD4SG, EMCON (Chicago), EGSC (Wash. U.), AERA, AEF, NAEd. Invited Presentations: Amherst College, UC Center Sacramento, UC BOARS, UC VPDUE.

2019 Seminars: Georgia State, San Francisco State, UC Berkeley, UC Davis, U. of Georgia. Conferences: WEAI, TextXD (UC Berkeley), SSHA, Higher Ed. in the Age of Metrics (UC Santa Barbara).

2018 Seminars: UC Berkeley, UC Irvine, UC Riverside. Conferences: Spatial Economics Research Centre (LSE), Limits of the Numerical (UCI), HathiTrust UnCamp. Invited Presentations: UC Regents (UCLA), Berkeley AEPE, Berkeley Foundation.

2015-2017 Seminars: Federal Reserve Bank of New York, UC Berkeley, UC San Francisco, US Housing and Urban Development. Conferences: All-UC Group in Econ. History, DH Summer Colloquium (U. of Victoria).

SELECTED POLICY REPORTS

Relationship of the SAT/ACT to College Performance at the University of California (with coauthors; unsigned). 2020.

Approaching a Tipping Point? A History and Prospectus of Funding for the University of California (with J. Douglass). 2018.

The UC Cliometric History Project and Formatted Optical Character Recognition. 2018.

REFEREE

AEJ: Applied Economics, AEJ: Economic Policy, American Economic Review, American Sociological Review, Contemporary Economic Policy, Economic Journal, Economica, Economics of Education Review, Journal of Human Resources, Journal of Labor Economics, Journal of Public Economics, MIT Press, Review of Economic Studies, Sociology of Education.