

Mark Taylor, PhD
Editor
Applied Economics
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Dear Dr. Taylor and Applied Economics Editorial Board,

I am writing to submit “Conformity and Soft Skills as Determinants of Alternatively Credentialed Non-College Graduate Hireability.” This study leverages original cross-sectional data and a signaling model of labor to test a hypothesis regarding alternatively credentialed non-college graduate (ACNG) labor:

1. If vocational schooling instills valuable skills and undergraduate education does not, why does ACNG labor realize lower wages and other outcomes?
2. Does ACNG labor provide a signal of low conscientiousness and conformity that explains comparatively weak labor outcomes?

Given the college affordability crisis, this research provides critical evidence that should inform the academy, consumers, and policymakers. I argue that employers and the U.S. population systematically undervalue alternative education. A sample of results includes:

1. ACNG labor does signal nonconformity, but this is not an important differentiator against college graduate labor. Employers demand nonconformity on average.
2. Employers preferentially value soft skills. ACNG soft skills are generally low, and these skills explain about one-third of job candidate hireability.

This paper builds on an established but current literature on the signaling model of education and skill gap analysis. Two related works of note include:

Caplan, Bryan. The case against education: Why the education system is a waste of time and money. Princeton University Press, 2018.

Palmer, Kelly, and David Blake. The Expertise Economy: How the smartest companies use learning to engage, compete, and succeed. Nicholas Brealey, 2018.

I, the sole author, confirm that this manuscript has not been previously published and is not currently under consideration by any other journal. I approve of the contents of this paper and have agreed to the submission policies of Applied Economics. I confirm that I have received no funding of any kind for this research and that I have no conflict of interest, financial or otherwise.

Sincerely,
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