PhD Summer Funding Award – 2019

John Vandivier

Topic: The Case for Alternative Education

The projected date of completion of my dissertation is the end of the Spring 2020 semester. This dissertation consists of three essays which analyze alternative education, alternative credentials, alternative pathways to traditional and non-traditional achievement, and related topics.

The three essays are currently in a research gathering phase, and all of them may incur costs during research. One study is wholly constituted of panel survey analysis, and each temporal observation has cost around $500 using SurveyMonkey, Mechanical Turk, and other sources. The stipend would feed additional temporal sampling which would improve the ability of the analysis to detect changes over time.

A second study is primarily constituted of scraping open data from the internet. The data scraped includes individual contact information. The stipend would allow scraped data to be enriched through the administration of a survey to those individuals.

The third study is an analysis on the feasibility of alternative learning paths. This is a forward-testing survey which involves significant participant labor. Specifically, I want to predict the likelihood that an individual will pass a CLEP test. Testing for college credit represents an accelerated approach to the traditional degree. This is an alternative pathway to education which could result in large economic gains to a student.

The prediction is based on a model which takes in IQ, personality, and other data. Such a model has significant potential value to a microeconomic actor considering the consumption of higher education. The IQ and personality tests as well as the CLEP test all involve a cost, and I am offering to pay for participants in order to incentivize participation. Each sample costs about $100. The stipend would be used to pay for additional samples. On request, I would be willing to specifically include or exclude the GMU student body from this CLEP scholarship-study. That may result in up to a doubling of the GMU student benefit which results from the $5000 stipend.

If I were awarded, the stipend would be fully consumed on these expenditures, not as a kind of wage which might substitute for normal work. I do not claim the stipend will accelerate my timeline for completion, and I think this is a point in my favor as a recipient. In the spirit of competition, I would point out what GMU knows: GMU stands to lose revenue by granting an award which would accelerate student completion. In contrast, if I were to receive the award it would go purely towards improving quality and the reliability of data.