September 16, 2020  
  
  
To the Institutional Review Board (IRB),

Thank you for the opportunity to provide further context per your request. Please find responses entered in order according to the September 15, 2020 request for additional information:

1. I completed the CITI training years ago while enrolled in the GMU Master’s in Public Policy.
   1. I was unaware of the IRB requirement simply due to forgetting over the course of time.
   2. Dr. Hanson and I both had expired CITI Human Subjects training. We have both completed the refresher course along with this submission for review.
   3. Dr. Hanson did remember the IRB requirement, although I did not. He reminded me of the requirement at the time of reviewing a draft of my paper, which lead to this IRB submission.
2. In implementing the survey, Dr. Hanson:
   1. Advised on the paper topic.
   2. Advised on some of the survey content, including skills of interest.
   3. Reviewed and provided feedback on a drafted set of survey questions.
   4. After 2.c, I executed the survey and drafted a paper. On review of the paper draft, Dr. Hanson noted that the project should go through IRB review.
3. I confirm that the data was collected for my dissertation research.
4. Please see page 2 of this memo for an extended description of the aims and purpose of this study.
5. The short paragraph under the "Mechanical Turk Instructions" is the only place where I state that the survey is for research, but the Mechanical Turk site policies include extensive language on consent, and research is one of few permissible uses of the platform.
   1. I have now uploaded a PDF copy of the Amazon Mechanical Turk Participation Agreement to the IRBNet package. For your convenience, I also provide a link here: <https://www.mturk.com/participation-agreement>
   2. Please see page 3 of this memo for two important excerpts from the agreement.

Regards,  
John Vandivier  
  
[CENSORED CONTACT INFO]

Extended Description of the Aims and Purpose of “Conformity and Soft Skills as Determinants of Alternatively Credentialed Non-College Graduate Hireability”

The aims and purpose of this study are to provide crucial evidence that is used to inform solutions for the college affordability and student debt crises in the United States. Interested stakeholders for this research include the academy, consumers, and policymakers. This study also deepens the theoretical understanding of the signaling model of education applied to the labor market.

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?

ACNG labor is unique because students can often obtain an alternatively credentialed education in a way that is fast and cheap compared to traditional higher education. This paper examines the cases in which ACNG labor provides a substitute to traditional labor as decided by employers. Substitutability is identified at the skill level.

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.

This study looks at the hiring process using a cross-sectional questionnaire design. The survey design is necessary to allow the use of hypothetical statements. When we think about job applicant decisions, only a portion of variation is attributable to variation in employer perception. A large amount of variation exists within applicants, even if those applicants are grouped for similar observable characteristics. Hypothetical descriptions of job applicants allow the evaluation of identical, not merely similar, job applicants. Variation in evaluation becomes much more directly attributable to employer perception in this design.

Two Important Excerpts from the [Amazon Mechanical Turk Participation Agreement](https://www.mturk.com/participation-agreement)

There are two excerpts below in block quotes. In these excerpts, the research team is a Requester and those individuals paid for survey response services area called Workers. Outside of the block quote, I provide some context about why I consider the quote important for the purposes of IRB review.

1. Section 3.a.ii

As a Requester, you agree that…you may only use the Site for business, commercial, or research purposes

This excerpt establishes that research is a normal use of the service. A worker will reasonably expect that any survey response they provide will be used for business or research purposes.

1. Section 3.c

Any work product from Tasks you perform as a Worker is a "work made for hire" for the benefit of the Requester, and you (i) agree that all ownership rights, including all intellectual property rights, will vest with that Requester immediately upon your performance of those Tasks, and (ii) waive all moral or other proprietary rights that you may have in that work product. To the extent any ownership rights do not vest in the Requester under applicable law, you hereby assign or exclusively grant (without the right to any compensation) all right, title, and interest, including all intellectual property rights, in that work product to that Requester.

This excerpt establishes that Workers agree and expect that information provided in response to a paid survey task is fully transferred to the Requester.