MIT Economics

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DOCTORAL STUDIES

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)
PhD, Economics, Expected completion June 2026
DISSERTATION: "Essays in Behavioral and Labor Economics"

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE AND REFERENCES

Professor Frank Schilbach
MIT Department of Economics
77 Massachusetts Avenue, E52-560
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Professor Daron Acemoglu
MIT Department of Economics
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Professor Parag Pathak
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PRIOR EDUCATION

Trinity College, University of Cambridge — 2018
B. A. Economics *(double first)*

CITIZENSHIP United Kingdom **GENDER:** Male

FIELDS

Primary Field: Labor Economics

Secondary Fields: Behavioral Economics, Economics of Education

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Behavioral Economics (graduate, MIT 14.160) — 2023
Teaching Assistant to Professor Frank Schilbach

Public Finance and Public Policy (undergraduate, MIT 14.41) — 2022
Teaching Assistant to Professor Jonathan Gruber

RELEVANT POSITIONS

Research Assistant to Professors Taha Choukhmane and Lawrence Schmidt — 2023-25

Research Assistant to Professor Daron Acemoglu — 2021

	Research Assistant to Professor Frank Schilbach	2021
	Predoctoral Fellowship, Harvard University	2018-20
	Research Assistant to Professors John Beshears, James Choi, David Laibson, and Brigitte Madrian	
	Summer Student, Institute for Fiscal Studies	2017

FELLOWSHIPS, HONORS, AND AWARDS

J-PAL European Social Inclusion Initiative Grant	2025
NBER Global Math Talent Doctoral Fellowship	2023-24
George and Obie Shultz Fund Grant, MIT	2022-25
Carl (1976) Shapiro Fellowship, MIT	2020-22
Senior Scholarship, Trinity College, University of Cambridge	2017

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

Conference Presentations

LSE Centre for Economic Performance Education Conference	2025
IZA PhD Workshop in Labor and Behavioral Economics	2025

PUBLICATIONS

"The Rise and Rise of Women's Employment in the UK," (with Barra Roantree). IFS Briefing Note BN234, April 2018.

RESEARCH PAPERS

"Friends in Higher Places: Social Fit and University Choice"
(Job Market Paper) (with Nagisa Tadjfar)

Low-income students are less likely to attend elite universities than equally qualified high-income peers, in large part because they apply at lower rates. We study whether this reflects lack of exposure to students who have attended top universities, and how exposure affects students' perceptions. Using UK administrative data, we exploit "breakthrough" events when a school first sends a student to a top university. Applications from that school to that university subsequently rise by 30%. This access promotes upward mobility: marginal entrants graduate at typical rates and earn £4,000 more annually than matched control students, despite coming from relatively poor backgrounds. To understand why students who lack exposure might not apply, we turn to a field experiment in British schools. We find that a primary barrier is students' beliefs about their social fit. At baseline, low-income students are more pessimistic about their social fit at elite universities, but not their chances of receiving an offer or graduating. Students randomly assigned to view short videos of undergraduates discussing their experiences are 6 percentage points more likely to apply to the speaker's university. This treatment makes students more positive about their social fit at that university, with no effect on other beliefs. Finally, when matched with mentors, students primarily seek out information about social life. Our findings highlight perceptions of the social environment at elite universities as a central barrier to applications, and illustrate scalable treatments to promote access and social mobility.

"Prediction or Prejudice? Standardized Testing and University Access" (with Nagisa Tadjfar)

Do high-stakes standardized tests expand or inhibit opportunity for low-SES students? We answer this question in the context of the UK's staggered elimination of pre-university exams in favor of teachers' predicted exam grades. Eliminating testing increases the university enrollment of low-income students by 3 percentage points (7%), while leaving wealthy students' enrollment unchanged. Marginal students induced to enroll in university attain employment at better firms and, in expectation, earn £50,000---£100,000 more over their careers, in net present value. Paradoxically, standardized exams exhibit no calibration bias against marginal low-income students---accurately predicting their university success---whereas teacher-supplied grades are systematically biased in their favor. Despite proper calibration, standardized tests inhibit low-SES students by deterring human capital investment. When tests are eliminated, 5% of low-income students shift into academic tracks. These findings highlight how disparate impacts can arise even when screening algorithms are unbiased. When the measurement of information itself poses a direct disutility, standardized tests generate disparities that commence earlier in the pipeline.

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

"On One Condition: The Welfare Effects of Unraveling in the UK College Admissions System" (with Phi Adajar and Nagisa Tadjfar)

The 2010s saw a rapid proliferation of offers to UK universities in which students were admitted regardless of their end-of-school test results, effectively shifting risk from students to universities. In this paper, we seek to understand the nature of this unraveling, with a focus towards universities' incentives and the effects on students' short- and long-term welfare. We find that these unconditional offers were given by lower-ranked universities and targeted towards higher-achieving students. Students with an unconditional offer are 4 percentage points less likely to attend their top offer. This is consistent with students being shifted into lower-ranking universities and becoming undermatched. Simultaneously, college attendance increases; students with an unconditional offer are 5 percentage points more likely to be matched to a college when compared to students with similar test scores and teacher evaluations. On the university side, these unconditional offers improve university yields and student composition. Descriptive evidence shows that a university's adoption of unconditional offers occurs in response to its competitors doing the same. Our next steps include estimating a structural model of university offers to evaluate the nature of this competitive response and the implications for student welfare.

"Heterogeneity in Intertemporal Substitution: Evidence from $2 Trillion in Retirement Subsidies" (with Taha Choukhmane, Cormac O'Dea, Jonathan Rothbaum, and Lawrence Schmidt)

The elasticity of intertemporal substitution is a key parameter in models in macroeconomics and public finance, but credible estimates of this parameter require exogenous variation in the intertemporal price of consumption. We use variation in the formula by which employers match their employees' retirement savings contributions in the United States to credibly estimate this parameter jointly with inertia in savings contributions. We link administrative data on earnings and retirement plan contributions for the US population with data on the retirement savings policies at over 100,000 firms. We make use of bunching at kink points in the budget set induced by employer matching, employee responses to moves across firms, employee responses to within-firm plan changes, and responses to automatic enrollment policies to separately identify inertia, risk aversion, and the elasticity of intertemporal substitution. We develop a life-cycle model to exploit these different sources of quasi-experimental variation to estimate the level and heterogeneity in the elasticity of intertemporal substitution across the population.

"Disaggregating Organizations: The Effect of CEOs on Firm Markups" (with Aroon Narayanan)

Standard models assume markups are set by firms as unified entities, abstracting from the role of individual executives. Do individual CEOs systematically set different markups, or are markups determined solely by firm-level optimization and market conditions? To answer this question, we estimate a Two-Way Fixed Effects (TWFE) model of firm markups on CEO and firm dummies. We use the De Loecker et al. (2020) framework to estimate firm-year level markups, and use CEO movements between firms to identify CEO effects on markups. After applying state-of-the-art procedures to correct bias and account for multiplicity of connected sets in TWFE estimates, we estimate that CEO effects explain 10-15% of the overall variance in markups.