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

"No Strings Attached: The Distributional Effects of Unraveling in College Admissions" (with Phi Adajar and Nagisa Tadjfar)

Competition for talent can cause labor market unraveling, where institutions create inefficient matches by extending offers before candidate ability is fully revealed. We study the impacts of early offers in the UK college admission system on college sorting and match quality. We build a theoretical model of student and university choices, generating three predictions about the resulting match, which we then validate empirically in this setting. First, universities with lower student quality are more likely to give early offers; we find the universities in the lowest quintile of yield are 9.4pp more likely to use early offers than the highest quintile. Second, early offers divert high-ability students away from the most competitive universities; in our context, students are 9.6pp less likely to attend an elite university. Finally, also consistent with our model, we find that universities preferentially target high-achieving students with early offers. These early offers also benefit students directly: students who accept early offers are 6.2pp more likely to graduate on time, though after three more years, this gap is statistically indistinguishable from zero. Universities collectively banned these offers in 2021; to understand the impact of this ban, we build a structural model to evaluate the effects on student match quality and labor market outcomes, and compare this system to alternative market designs.

"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)

Do different CEOs within the same firm systematically set different markups, or are markups determined solely by firm-level optimization? 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. We address limited mobility bias using the leave-out estimator of Kline et al. (2020). To enable meaningful comparisons across different connected sets of firms and CEOs, we apply the normalization procedure of Best et al. (2023). After applying these corrections, we estimate that CEO effects explain 10-15% of the overall variance in markups.