

Research Statement

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Dissertation Research

My dissertation is separated into three distinct chapters, each considering the impact of a different financial aid program on university enrollment. In chapters one and two (coauthored with Robert Rosenman) we address topics that have already received considerable attention in the literature: campus visitation programs and institutional merit aid. Using university level data we address old questions in new ways, highlighting potential endogeneity in past studies that has received little or no attention. In chapter 3 (coauthored with Ben Cowan) we investigate the impact of financial aid constraints on student choices of educational investment and school consumption amenities. It is the first study to investigate the link between consumption amenities and student credit constraints.

Additional Research

Aside from my dissertation research, I also have a paper in theoretical IO. A common assumption in Hotelling type models of product differentiation is that demand is perfectly inelastic. Consequently, pure strategies find that firms usually have extreme differentiation structure with differentiation on only one dimension. In this paper we investigate how the equilibrium structure of product differentiation changes in a “Hotelling square” when demand is price sensitive. We find novel results, including equilibria where firms differentiate on both dimensions and that there will never be maximal differentiation on either dimension. We analyze intermediate levels of demand and perform numerical calculations to uncover the possible locations of symmetric Nash equilibria. Partial differentiation on both dimensions approximately satisfies the optimality conditions until transportation costs are sufficiently low. This paper is a work in progress co-authored with Robert Rosenman.

In the summer of 2016 Dr. Rosenman and I wrote a report for Washington State University. We analyzed a series of financial aid programs at WSU, primarily focused on what programs “worked.” Chapters 1 and 2 of my dissertation eventually evolved from parts of this report. We advised the university concerning the impact of various financial aid programs. We provided usable tools for the university employees to “plug in” applications data and calculate individual students likelihood of enrollment. This report was submitted in the fall of 2016.

Future Research

My current research agenda leaves many opportunities for future scholarship. My most defined idea is to implement a product differentiation model in a higher education framework. In my existing product differentiation model, it is easy to show conditions under which firms change their differentiation strategies. Treating academic focus as a product type, I will investigate whether changes in state or federal policies induce increased academic specialization between locally competing universities. Policy changes that could provoke change would be direct funding to institutions or financial aid changes for students.

Aside from this I know that there is considerable “low hanging fruit” from my job market paper. The empirical model that we used in that paper, allowing us to separate undecided students from students who are already decided about enrollment, has never been previously used to study merit aid before. Our results were different enough from conventional methods that I want to revisit many questions in the merit aid literature. How does merit aid affect retention, graduation, or GPA? I can address these topics and compare the results of the new model with the standard RD results. In addition to that, I will consider to what extent I can use larger data sets to compare policy changes between states in this framework. This means that after my current projects, I have clear ideas for 2-4 more papers and additional developing ideas; plenty of work for the next several years.

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