

The Path to a Bachelor's Degree: The Effect of Starting at a Community College

(Paper by Jessica Scheld)

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Summary of the paper

- Community colleges are considered to be a step to earn bachelor's degree.
 - Better job market outcomes for college graduates.
 - Lower costs (tuition rates).
- Then the motivation is to test whether community colleges serve as an effective intermediate step for students who seek for a bachelor's degree.
- The contribution of the study is to analyze bachelor's degree attainment by distinguishing between different characteristics of students.
- Findings: fewer credits, fewer year of schooling, and less like to attain a bachelor's degree.

Comments

- The data supports the hypothesized question well.
- Strong on internal validity, albeit there are some concerns on external validity.
 - ↔ There are strong first-stage instruments.
- The findings have policy implications specifically for disadvantaged groups.

Comments

- Bachelor's degree is associated with higher earnings but this might be highly driven from the graduates of four-year colleges (Ability vs. value-added from college).
↔ Actually, Gardecki and Neumark (1998), showed that community colleges do not necessarily boost earnings (relatively) for females.
- For the part on returns to education, the discussion can be supported further with recent studies that use Mincer-type earnings function.
- Nothing about the field of study.
 - Are there any certain majors that has higher drop-out rates?
 - Does this vary by gender or other subgroups?

Comments

- Elaborate more on the expectations discussion. Does desire to earn a bachelor's degree change over time?
- In terms of the peer effect, the current cohort is analyzed. Did you check the effect of the previous cohort on the graduating cohort? (The previous cohort in high school might have a higher rate of admission to community colleges and this might spillover to the current cohort.)
- The choice of s should be clarified more. What is your justification for the functional form of s when you adjust for heteroskedasticity?
- After accounting for selection bias, there is an evidence of lower baccalaureate. How close is your estimate to the one found in literature that account for selection? (For example, Long and Kurlaender 2009).

About the structure

- We do not learn about how the complexity of the survey design is accounted in the paper until the very end (p. 16). This can be introduced in the data part.
 - ↔ For example, the use of “svy” commands, clustering the standard error, and pweights.
 - ↔ How many clusters do you have? Were you able to compute the joint hypothesis for the model coefficients?
- It may be more informative to interpret the probit estimates in terms of percentages (not percentage points) by using the baseline probability.