Connections Matter: How Interactive Peers Affect Students in Online College Courses

Eric Bettinger, Jing Liu, and Susanna Loeb

- Peer interactions are an integral part of higher education.
- The explosion of college online courses have dramatically changed how peers interact.
- In place of traditional face-to-face interactions, online discussion boards are now primary arenas for peer interaction.

Contem	np Issues	Responses		
y 💙	Professor	🖂 Response 🔺	Author	Date/Time*
		🖻 📄 Civic Virtue	Professor Nagel	2/22/2015 2:46:26 PM
	\ Ø	🏵 🖂 RE: Civic Virtue	Kylee Francis	3/16/2015 6:32:09 AM
		🗈 🖂 RE: Civic Virtue	Tiffany Franks	3/16/2015 11:37:44 AM
Topics		🗈 🖂 Kylee	Professor Nagel	3/16/2015 2:06:01 PM
> Civic Virtue (graded)	45 respon: unread)	🗈 🖂 RE: Civic Virtue	Stephanie Otte	3/18/2015 11:01:40 AM
		🗈 🖂 RE: Civic Virtue	Suada Selmanovic	3/18/2015 2:10:09 PM
Global Competition (graded)	43 respons unread)	🖻 🖂 RE: Civic Virtue	Sheree Hairston	3/18/2015 8:12:59 PM
Q & A Forum (not graded)	13 respons unread)	🗈 🖂 RE: Civic Virtue	Suada Selmanovic	3/19/2015 9:08:44 AM
		🕞 🖂 Responsibility	Professor Nagel	3/19/2015 3:27:15 PM
		🕑 🖂 RE: Civic Virtue	Ronetra Smoot	3/16/2015 10:49:35 PM
Civic Virtue (graded)		🕑 🖂 RE: Civic Virtue	Suada Selmanovic	3/17/2015 1:56:18 PM
Contemporary trends in education include character education and requirin students to engage in community service projects. Should schools be invol fostering the qualities of civic virtue? Why or why not?		🕑 🖂 RE: Civic Virtue	Suada Selmanovic	3/17/2015 2:05:56 PM
		🏵 🖂 RE: Civic Virtue	Latasha Parchman	3/18/2015 11:22:16 PM
		🕑 🖂 Building Character	Professor Nagel	3/19/2015 3:25:44 PM
		🗈 🖂 Research Challenge	Professor Nagel	3/15/2015 4:59:29 AM

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Data: Full transcripts from two online courses delivered in 2010 by DeVry University. (> 2 million posts)

Measurement of peer interaction: Peer's outreach to classmates.

—Without information on the hierarchy of posts, we identify whether a post has a peer's name embedded.

Method:

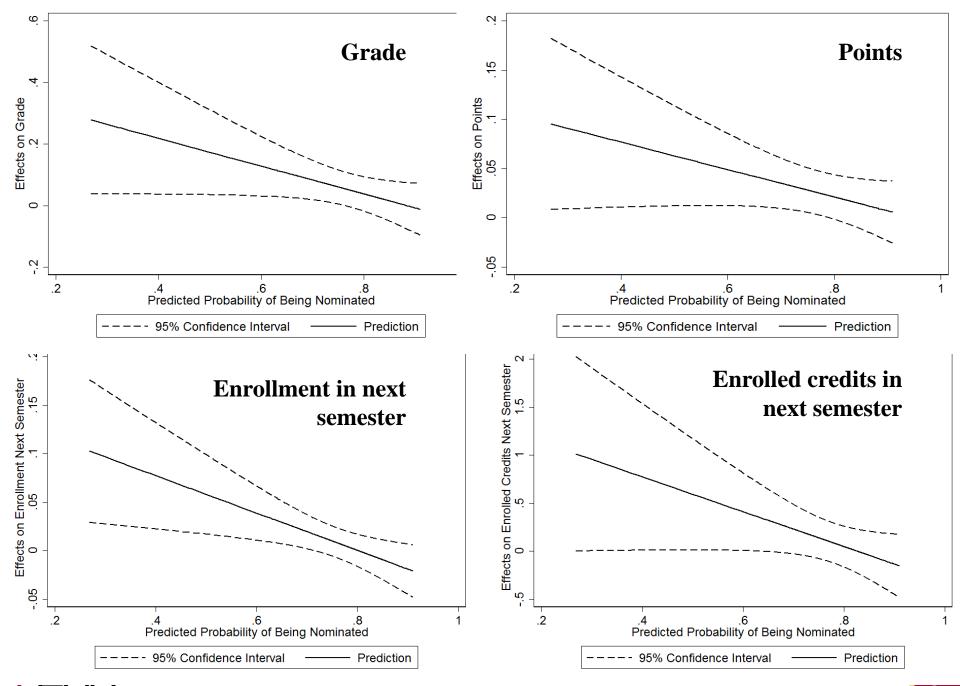
- (1) Leveraging the timing of course registration to solve students' non-random sorting into classrooms.
- (2) instrumental variable approach to overcome the simultaneous nature of peer interactions, which is the so-called "reflection" issue.

RQ 1: How do interpersonal interactions in college online courses differ across students with different background characteristics and different levels of engagement in the course.

RQ 2: How do peer's interpersonal interactions affect student course performance, especially for those who are less likely to be engaged in classroom interactions?

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