SUMMARY

Mansur Tokmouline, Class of 2011

The Affects of Academic Probation on College Success
Professor Jason Fletcher

Dr. Jason Fletcher of the Yale School of Public Health and I collaborated on research this summer studying the effects of academic probation on success in a college setting. We utilized a regression discontinuity (RD) design in order to find the causal effect of academic probation on several outcomes, including GPA in the semester following probation, persistence in college, and graduation rates. Our data comes from a sample of colleges in Texas also being used by other researchers to study the "top 10%" admissions program in Texas. We limit our analysis to students in their first semester for whom the relevant statistics are available. Similar research was undertaken by Lindo (2008) on universities in Canada.

The gold standard in econometric research has always been the truly randomized experiment, in which individuals are assigned to treatment or control groups through a truly random process. In this setting, any disparities in outcome variables can be directly attributed to the treatment itself. Academic probation, however, is not assigned randomly, but according to students' grade point averages (GPA), a variable which the students themselves are able to influence. Nevertheless, if individuals around the cutoff score are not *precisely* able to control their GPA, then we can claim those individuals were in fact almost randomly assigned to the treatment or control group (put on or not put on probation). This is the central assumption of any RD design, and our tests indicate that the data in our sample satisfies it.

Satisfied of the validity of RD in this setting, we moved onto estimating the effects of probation on college success. Our results support the conclusions found in Lindo (2008), that probationary policies in general discourage students from returning but boost academic performance for those that stay. The magnitudes of these results are widely heterogeneous amongst the schools in the sample. The boost in second semester GPA varies from a low of .108 points at UT Austin to .230 points at Texas Tech. Probationary policies reduce the probability of students returning by between 3 and 10 percent, again depending on the campus. We also attempted to stratify the results by various descriptive variables, such as income, SAT score, the number of high school classmates a student has at their college, and others. We do find disparate results, but few of them are precise (not statistically different from zero).

For this project, I was responsible for producing all of the statistical analyses, including all tables and charts. Dr. Fletcher was responsible for reviewing my work and ensuring its theoretical validity. Ultimately, I hope he will use these results in an upcoming academic

paper. Because Dr. Fletcher assigned me such a tremendous amount of responsibility, essentially gathering and reporting all of the results, I feel very confident that I can carry out my own research in the future. Since I plan to write a senior essay based on empirical research, this summer has been a very valuable learning experience toward that end. Hence, the overall SRO experience was very fulfilling. The one thing that I would like to see happen in the future is an event or two for all SRO students and professors. I think that would take away some of the feelings of isolation that come with working on a project alone. However, this is a wonderful program on the whole and I hope the Economics Department continues to sponsor it in the years to come.