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The Dynamics of Health Insurance Choices and Consumption of Medical Care with Professor Ahmed Khwaja

Description of Project:

The University of Michigan Health and Retirement Study is a longitudinal study that surveys Americans who are around the age of retirement. The questionnaires, administered every two years since 1992, track everything from demographic information to job descriptions, health expenditures, and insurance premiums. Using this data, our research project would like to measure changes in health care consumption as people retire.

My experience:

My job was to take the data from the study, which is available online, and extract the information that was relevant to our research goals. Since the questionnaires were each extremely detailed and consisted of over twenty sections, and data were available for ten different waves of respondents, the original data set was overwhelming in its size and spread across many files. The data was available in SPSS, SAS, and STATA formats. I used STATA to pull out the important information and compile the desired variables.

I learned that finding the appropriate representations of the information we were looking for is a challenging task. Much of the work I did involved creating new data by combining appropriate variables and making imputations. Although the task seemed straightforward, the original data required close interpretation and careful analysis of its meaning. Furthermore I thoroughly documented my own thought process so that those who looked at the data after me would be able to understand it correctly.

The SRO experience allowed me to work closely with a professor in the Yale School of Management. I learned about doing research by seeing how Professor Khwaja thinks about the information, especially when resolving apparent discrepancies in the data set. I would recommend SRO to anyone who wants to familiarize themselves with a statistical programming language and to experience the day to day job of being a researcher.