1. What Explains Student Performances in Introductory Economics Subjects in Australian Universities?: A Case Study

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Teaching undergraduate level economics and finance subjects that involve quantitative materials has become more challenging in Australian universities in recent years regardless of entry qualification requirements of students. Prior research identified strong relationships between performances of university students in first year level basic subjects and in overall courses on one hand, and factors like prior knowledge/skill (e.g. in mathematics), class attendance, method of teaching, socio-economic background, gender etc. on the other hand. However, similar studies for Australian universities are extremely limited. This study attempts to identify the factors that influence performance of students in introductory economics classes in universities using data from a regional Australian university. Using OLS and Ordered Probit models it derived clear and significant relationships between higher level of mathematics in schools and better performance in the first year level economics subjects in the university. The findings have strong implications for learning and teaching practices in first year level subjects and on student retention rates for the Australian universities in general.

2. The Impact of Peer Assisted Study Sessions on Academic Performance

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Peer Assisted Study Session (PASS) programs are designed to provide university students with student-to-student interactions to enhance their learning outcomes. However, the extent to which PASS programs influence academic performance is rarely quantified. The purpose of this paper is to provide a detailed examination of the impact of peer assisted study sessions on the academic performance of first-year university students enrolled in core business units. In particular, the paper estimates the determinants of participating in a PASS program and the subsequent impact of this decision on students' marks at university. Using quantile regression techniques, the paper also considers whether the relationship between participation in PASS programs and university marks differs among low performing and high performing university students.

3. Do Foreign Students Perform Worse at University than Domestic Students? New Evidence Using Panel Micro-Data from the Australian Technology Network

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Foreign students make up an increasing share of Australian universities' revenues, particularly in business faculties. June 2008 data from Australian Education International show a 19.3% year-to-date increase in enrolments of full-fee-paying international students in Australia. Furthermore, the majority of growth in higher education from June 2007 to June 2008 occurred in the "Management and Commerce" area, which attracts significant numbers of international students. While they are seen as a revenue boon, international students are at several disadvantages in relation to local students. Language fluency (Lebcir et al., 2008) and differences in social and academic culture may all contribute to worse performance by foreign students (Bradley et al., 2000; Cheng et al. 1993; Stoynoff, 1997; Zhang, 2007). However, foreign students' outside options should they fail at university may not be as attractive as domestic students' outside options, leading foreign students to be more motivated to succeed. Hence, predictions regarding differential probabilities of university success between the two groups are not obvious.

In much prior research on undergraduate performance, final course marks are regressed using OLS on background

data about students. However, the increasing heterogeneity of the Australian undergraduate student body implies that the relationship between students' marks and their status as foreign students (as well as other covariates) may be different at different points on the conditional distribution of performance. We apply quantile regression techniques to a new, developing panel of student-course-level administrative micro-data to examine the performance differentials between international and local students in business-related subjects. Universe administrative data are drawn for the paper from the business faculties of the University of South Australia and the University of Technology Sydney, and performance is measured both as final percentage marks and as proclivity to pass. Our results have strong relevance to the Australian higher education sector and to international education research.

4. Overseas Student Commencements and the Real Exchange Rate

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This study examines the relationship between the real exchange rate and the number of overseas students commencing tertiary education in Australia. There is a segmented demand for tertiary education in countries where English is the language of tuition. Accordingly we use a real exchange rate that is weighted against the U.S. dollar, Canadian dollar, British pound and New Zealand dollar.

5. The Ability of Economic Thinking – the Nature versus Nurture Debate

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In their studies, Eley and Meyer (2004)and Meyer and Cleary (1998) found that there are sources of variation in the affective and process dimensions of learning in mathematics and clinical diagnosis specific to the discipline. Meyer and Shanahan (2002) argue that: General purpose models of student learning that are transportable across different discipline contexts cannot, by definition, be sensitive to sources of variation that may be subject-specific (2002, p. 204).

In other words, to explain the differences in learning approaches and outcomes in a particular discipline, there are discipline-specific factors, which cannot be uncovered in general educational research. Meyer and Shanahan (2002) argue for a need to "seek additional sources of variation that are perhaps conceptually unique … within the discourse of particular disciplines" (p. 204). Interestingly, despite their methodological difference, this position as embraced by Meyer and Shanahan is consistent with that of phenomenography. The research agenda of phenomenography is to investigate the qualitatively different ways people perceive and understand a phenomenon of interest (Marton & Pong, 2005). In arguing for empirical, discipline based research into effective teaching and learning, proponents of phenomenography point out that very few research outcomes based on general educational framework can prescribe specific remedies to problems across contexts since "the pedagogical problems of any one discipline are in certain respects unique" (Hounsell, 1997, p. 240).

In this paper, the development of an economics-specific construct (called economic thinking ability) is reported. The construct aims to measure discipline-sited ability of students that has important influence on learning in economics. Using this construct, students' economic thinking abilities were measured at the beginning of the semester. The factors associated with students' pre-course economic thinking ability were investigated. The findings will address the nature versus nurture debate in economics education (Frank, et al. 1993; Frey et al. 1993; Haucap and Tobias 2003).

6. Comparison of Local and Offshore Student Experience in Microeconomic Principles

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Economics is often viewed as one of the 'most difficult' subjects by first year students. In this paper, we explore whether the same attitude is shared by students at an offshore campus. The analysis is based on a survey of local and offshore students in Semester 2, 2007. The focus of the paper is on identifying similarities/differences in student attitudes towards economics, their degree of motivation, satisfaction with the content and the delivery of lectures and tutorials, major challenges, and student profile characteristics. Based on the contingency tables, a non-parametric test indicates significant differences between the two cohorts, in terms of their age, enrolment status, paid-work commitments, prior study of economics, their motivation and approach to studying the unit, and satisfaction with the content and the delivery of the lectures/tutorials. The findings in this study should be helpful in developing strategies for 'internationalising' the curriculum and in improving teaching and learning processes.

7. What Matters Most: Understanding Student Satisfaction with Group Work Assessment

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Universities are increasingly using group based assessment tasks. Such tasks are designed to teach content and group work skills, which employers highly value. However, as with teams in the workplace, group work often elicits a mixed reception from participants, ranging from enjoyment to hostility. This study investigated different factors that may predict student satisfaction with group work at university, including achievement and leadership orientations of students, workload associated with tasks, and outcomes in terms of marks and learning. Final-year business degree students (n = 105) completed a questionnaire addressing experiences of group work. The results from regression analysis suggested that workload was the major barrier to satisfaction with group work among university students. Conversely, perceptions of learning contributed most to satisfaction. The identification of these predictors of satisfaction with group work allows teachers and lecturers to better identify potential problems in groups, and recommendations are offered to improve the quality of the group work experience.

8. An Investigation of the Influences on Course of Study Questionnaires Using Student Record Data

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Australia uses a nationally administered survey of all graduates from tertiary institutions called the Course Evaluation Questionnaire (CEQ) to determine their experiences at different institutions and in taking different courses of study or degree programs. In addition, at the same time they also fill out a second survey of what they are doing since they have finished that degree which is referred to as the Graduate Destination Survey (GDS). The institution level responses for parts of these surveys are now used by the Australian Government to evaluate these institutions for partial funding decisions. The purpose of this analysis is to establish to what degree these responses can be attributed to the

experiences of the students while at the institution and to what extent they can be attributed to characteristics of the students and their subsequent experiences in the job market.

This analysis is conducted using a unique data base that has been constructed by matching the responses on the CEQ and GDS for 5 years to the university records of these students. In this way we may establish which subjects they took as well as how they did in their subjects. In addition, since we are investigating the responses of students that attended the University of Melbourne, we have the results of 10 years of student class surveys that that allow us to measure the perceptions by the students in each class on the quality of that particular class. By matching the average results of the surveys to the particular student's records we can establish the degree to which experiences in the classes they took will influence their responses to the CEQ. Thus, if the responses to the class surveys are important to the student responses then one can determine the degree to which the CEQ is a reflection of the class level quality of teaching. In addition, we also include indications of the grades the students received as well as the responses on the GDS survey that may colour their responses.

The analyses of these data are done primarily using regression based methods with the consideration for the potential of both sample selectivity and response style bias. In addition, we also investigate the use of quantile regression methods in order to establish the degree to which the responses vary by level. Aside from the assumption of the cardinal values in the survey response we also consider the use of ordinal response models for the analysis of the results.

9. Multiple Measures of the Improvement of Research Skills in Business Ethics and Business Law

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Universities offering as a distinguishing learning environment for all students their research-intensive nature are searching for ways in which students and research may actually meet. One way to achieve this is to enable students to develop the skills associated with research in regular curricula. Many studies of initiatives to achieve this utilise student self-reported gains after the effect, a limited data set which gives a possibly biased understanding of outcomes. This paper reports on a study conducted across two research universities which utilised diverse measures of student research outcomes in an undergraduate Business Law course and in a Masters-level Business Ethics course. These measures include lecturer assessment of student research skills, and changes in those skills during a course; and student pre- and post-questionnaires, which require student self-appraisal of research skills and attitudes to research. Benefits have included statistically and educationally significant increases in student research skill according to all measures for both courses. While Business Ethics students had increased regard for outcomes of research, such as application to further study, usefulness, trustworthiness and relevance to employment, Business Law student regard tended to remain about the same. The significance of this result is that Research Universities are able to improve students' discipline-specific research skills in the context of the regular curriculum.