

Lucky or Not? The Effects of Getting Your First Choice in Higher Education

Georgia Thébault and Nagui Bechichi

Abstract :

Using rich administrative data on the French centralized higher education admission system from the Admission Post Bac (APB) platform paired with university enrollment data, this article provides new evidence on the impact of satisfying students' stated preferences on their future performance in higher education. To do so, we exploit lotteries embedded in APB to prioritize applicants in oversubscribed university programs as an instrument for admission. Focusing on cohorts from 2013-2017, we show that admission into first-choice programs has a large impact on the pursuit of post-secondary education: on average, the rate of students' chances of enrollment into higher education programs increases from baseline by 10%. It also affects other aspects of students' educational pathways such as persistence in higher education, choice of major and degree completion. The treatment effects are heterogeneous, both by programs' field of study and applicants' profiles. Less-advantaged students, however, are more likely to be impacted by capacity constraints in their first-choice higher education program.