

Three Essays on the Well-Being of Vulnerable Populations

Elton Mykerezi

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Bradford F. Mills, Chair
George W. Norton
Daniel B. Taylor
Chris Parmeter
Jeffrey R. Alwang

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is composed of three essays that measure the impact of social programs and policies on the wellbeing of their target populations. The first essay entitled “The Wage Impact of Historically Black College and University Attendance” examines the impact of attending a Historically Black College or University on the wages of Blacks attending HBCUs versus other four year colleges or universities using a sample of Blacks from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1979). The study finds no initial advantage to HBCU attendance for black men, but a 1.4 to 1.6 percentage point higher growth rate in subsequent wages is associated with the attendance of an HBCU as opposed to other four year colleges. This faster growth rate translates in a net discounted HBCU earnings gain of 8.9 to 9.6 percent over a 16 year period following college attendance. The study finds no advantage or disadvantage to HBCU attendance for Black females.

The second essay entitled “Transient and Chronic Poverty in the US: The Role of the Food Stamp Program” examines the unique and common determinants of short-term intra-annual transient poverty and chronic poverty, as well as the differential response of each state of poverty to Food Stamp Program (FSP) use. The study employs dynamic expenditure-based poverty measures using quarterly data from the Consumer Expenditure Survey (2001-2004). The major finding is that FSP use reduces transient poverty, but the study finds no significant impact of FSP use on chronic poverty. The common causes of both states of poverty are low human capital, minority status and involuntary unemployment of the household head. Changes in family composition during the year is only associated with higher transient poverty.

The third essay entitled “Food Insecurity and the Food Stamp Program” examines the determinants of food insecurity in the US, as well as its response to Food Stamp Program use with data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (1995-1999). The study finds that FSP use reduces household food insecurity, and that the program impact is greater for households that experience more severe insecurity. In addition the study finds that higher risk tolerance as well as a preference for smoking cigarettes increase household food insecurity.

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