

# KATY E. ROUSE

## Research Abstract

### **Dissertation: High School Leadership, Educational Attainment and Post-Schooling Wages**

Many employers and academic institutions rank “soft-skills” such as communication, motivation and leadership higher on their list of desirable employee/student attributes than traditional academic skills as demonstrated through a high grade point average or class rank. One skill on which these institutions have placed particular emphasis is that of leadership. Surprisingly, despite a growing emphasis on leadership skill in the labor market and higher education, few economists have studied the development of and return to leadership skill. My dissertation research seeks to fill this gap by examining the impact of high school leadership on subsequent educational attainment and post-schooling wages. The work contributes to a small, but growing, literature on the importance of non-cognitive skills in the labor market. Additionally, the research contributes to education policy debates surrounding the potentially detrimental consequences of financial cutbacks on school sponsored extracurricular activities.

In my job market paper, I estimate the impact of leadership experience in high school on subsequent educational attainment. The most conservative estimates I find suggest that students who are leaders in high school complete 0.35 more years of education than their non-leader peers. High school leadership is also predicted to increase the probability of attending a post-secondary institution by a minimum of 5 percent and to increase the probability of holding a college degree by at least 9.5 percent. I also find evidence of a differential impact of leadership for students from low versus high income households. In terms of total years of education and post-secondary attendance, high school leadership appears to disproportionately benefit students from lower income households, while with respect to college graduation, leaders from high income households seem to derive at least as great or greater benefit from their leadership experience than their low-income peers. In a second paper, I examine the impact of high school leadership on post-schooling wages. I also analyze gender differences in the return to leadership skill. Preliminary results suggest that high school leadership leads to a wage premium of three to five percent and that, in terms of their future wages, high school leadership is more important for women than for men. Whereas the wage premium for men is estimated to be roughly 3.6 percent, the corresponding premium for females is over 6 percent. A copy of my job market paper can be downloaded at <http://www.unc.edu/~felter/research.html>.

### **Other Research**

In a working paper, I revisit and extend Gruber’s (2004) paper on the later-life consequences of growing up in a unilateral divorce regime. I find many of the updated results using the 1960-2000 timeframe to be smaller in magnitude and, in many instances, much less precise than those estimated with the original sample (1960-1990). The updated results still provide evidence of a positive, albeit smaller, effect of current unilateral divorce exposure on divorce probabilities. However, contrary to Gruber’s findings, I find little evidence of strong negative effects of youth exposure to unilateral divorce on later life outcomes once the 2000 data are included. A copy of this paper is available at <http://www.unc.edu/~felter/research.html>.

In addition, during my time as a research assistant for Dr. Tom Mroz at the Carolina Population Center, I contributed to an on-going project that uses a sequential dynamic empirical model to study the longer term impacts of a young child’s height on subsequent illnesses, entry into school, and height and weight in Cebu, Philippines. The results of the study suggest that better nutrition and health behaviors before age two that result in taller children could have important impacts on a child’s subsequent early intellectual development by reducing the child’s susceptibility to diseases after age two and before entering school. A complete abstract is available at <http://www.unc.edu/~felter/research.html>.

### **Future Research Agenda**

My broad research interests include areas such as leadership skill and entrepreneurship, education and health policy, and the impact of different family structures on child outcomes. A description of some possible future research projects can be downloaded at <http://www.unc.edu/~felter/research.html>.