

MAIL DELIVERY AND ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION: EVIDENCE FROM THE FIRST U.S. CORRESPONDENCE PROGRAM*

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Abstract

This paper studies how an exogenous shock to the cost of accumulating human capital facilitated access to higher education to larger segments of the U.S. population. The setting is the University of Chicago at the turn of the 20th century. I leverage plausibly exogenous variation in access to mail delivery services to estimate its effects on students' access to higher education using a generalized difference-in-differences design. Establishing home mail delivery increases enrollment in correspondence courses and hence in higher education, with effects more pronounced for women, a historically disadvantaged group. I then study the medium-term effects of correspondence education and I find that correspondent students display higher occupational scores than similar individuals in counties not benefitting from improved mail delivery services.

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