



# The Structure of Higher Education from a Global Perspective

Ofer Malamud



# Economics of Higher Education

- What do we know?
  - Returns to higher education
  - Determinants of access to higher education
  - Impact of financial aid on enrollment
- What don't we know?
  - Mechanisms by which education affects outcomes
  - Presence of externalities in higher education
  - Impact of the structure of higher education



# Structure of Higher Education

## ■ Curriculum

- Types of degrees
- Organization of courses

## ■ Governance

- Private/public sector
- Institutional autonomy

## ■ Production

- Importance of peers vs. professors
- Complementarities between teaching and research



# Structure of Curriculum in Higher Education

## ■ In the US

- Standardized degree structure (BA, MA, PhD)
- Credit system at the undergraduate level

## ■ In Europe (pre-Bologna Reforms)

- Substantial variation in degree types
- Lengthy first degree in many countries
- Few instances of (national) credit systems



# The Bologna Process

- Bologna Declaration, June 1999
  - 29 European countries initially signed on
  - by 2008, 45 signatories across Europe
- Aim: “Increase the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education”
- Main features
  - Adoption of undergrad & graduate degrees
  - Introduction of a European credit system
  - Encourage cooperation, mobility, etc.



# Impact of Bologna on Flexibility

- Reducing costs associated with choosing a wrong course of study/institution
  - short first degrees: opportunity to switch fields and change universities after initial degree
  - transferable credits: allow students to switch fields/change universities during their degree
- Ability to combine different fields of study with modular credit systems



# Impact of Bologna on Competition

- Standardization of degree structures
  - help students compare across institutions
  - may lead to increased student mobility
  - encourage institutions to improve their quality
- Need to be combined with additional reforms: to provide institutions with *autonomy* and *incentives* to attract students and faculty



# Timing of Academic Specialization

- Compare England and Scotland
  - English choose a field while still in secondary school
  - Scottish choose a field after entering university
- Tradeoff between accumulating skills and learning about one's match quality
- Students in England more likely to switch fields upon entering the labor market
  - such switching associated with 6% lower wages
  - though students do make up difference over time





# Concluding Thoughts

- Structure of higher education differs widely across countries (e.g. structure of curriculum)
- The structure of higher education can have important effects of flexibility, competition, labor market outcomes
- Much more research needed on curriculum and other aspects of structure of higher education