

Pre-Analysis Plan: MajorChoice

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1 Introduction

The aim of the study is to investigate the impact of the choice of major on the job prospects of law students in Belgium. The study is designed as a field experiments. Fake CVs and cover letters are randomly sent to a sample of Belgian law firms. Response rates are compared both within and between units.

1.1 Motivation

The legal curriculum in Belgian and at many European law schools mandates students to choose among several majors and minors. Students typically expect and many law professors argue that law firms will favour candidates who opted for commercial and corporate law over candidates who plumped for a public law or an international law major. However, law firm recruiters have good reasons to disregard choice of major as a reliable signal of substantive area expertise.

To our knowledge, there is little literature on the subject and no empirical (whether observational or experimental) study has ever been conducted.

1.2 Research Question

We aim to answer the following research question:

Does the choice of major affect the job prospects of law graduates?

1.3 Hypotheses

The conventional wisdom assumes that the choice of major has significant impact on employability. Accordingly, students who have opted for corporate/commercial/economic law major are more likely to be invited for a job interview than students who have opted for public or international law.

Hypothesis 1: Candidates with a commercial/economic/corporate law major are more likely to be successful applicants.

2 Study Design

2.1 Treatments

There are four sets of applications:

1. Public Law major with student name: Arne Peteers
2. Economic Law major with student name: Arne Peteers
3. Public Law major with student name: David Maes
4. Economic Law major with student name: David Maes

Application packages have been prepared in both Dutch and French the two main languages in Belgium.

The experiments is designed to allow both within and between-subject comparisons. Applications are sent in two waves, separated by two weeks.

2.2 Sampling

A sample of 131 law firms was assembled from Legal 500, lexgo (lexgo.be) and other websites.

All law firms were potentially eligible. However, law firms vary widely in size, reputation and economic prominence. Most Belgian law firms are small and many of those are unlikely to recruit fresh law graduates. For this reason, larger, Tier 1 and Tier 2, firms were oversampled, as these are the biggest recruiters.

In order to be eligible for the study, a firm needed to indicate an email address for application.

Based on lexgo, the number of law firms in Belgium is estimated to be around 600. So our sample represents about 15/20 per cent of this population.

2.2.1 Sampling Frame

Applications were sent over the period starting on 24 November 2022 and ending on 16 December 2022.

Law firm responses were collected starting on 24 November.

2.2.2 Statistical Power

With a sample size of 132, between-subject analysis has power to detect a moderately large effect size: risk ratio = 3.19 (assuming $\beta = 0.2$, $\alpha = 0.05$). As a within-subject design our is powered to detect effect size: OR = 2.4 (assuming proportion discordant pair = 0.3).

2.2.3 Assignment to Treatment

Each firm is treated with both the Public Law and Economic Law application package. The order in which the application package is sent is randomised.

2.2.4 Data Collection

Emails are sent to law firms from fake email addresses in November and December 2022. Replies will be collected and encoded until August 2023.

3 Empirical Analysis

3.1 Variables

Our outcome variable is the law firm’s response to the application. It is operationalised as any offer to further proceed with the application (including invitation for interview or request to submit additional material). Alternatively, it is operationalised as the occurrence of a response to the application (whether favourable or not).

3.2 Balancing Checks

Prior to model estimations, balance across treatment arms will be assessed for the following variables:

- Major treatment (separately for first and second wave).
- Geographic location of law firm (Brussels, Wallonia, Flanders).
- Law firm tier
- Student name

3.3 Estimation

Our main model will be estimated using logistic regression with law firm as random effect and, depending on the results of our balance checks, geographic location, student name and law firm tier as fixed effects.

Separate models will also be estimated for between-subject effects in each wave.

Additionally, the aforementioned models will be estimated using direct probability models with all variables as fixed effects.