

## Preferences and expectations: Understanding the gender gap in major choice

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### Abstract

With large documented differentials in wages across different undergraduate majors, and large documented differentials across male and female wages, we ask how students make human capital investment decisions in higher education. We combine administrative and survey data on a sample of high-income workers in India who have completed the same elite graduate programme to estimate the return to studying different undergraduate degrees - across science, business and economics, and the humanities. We find evidence of large earnings differentials across the different disciplines as well as differential rates of enrolment into these streams by gender. Next, we model degree selection as a function of major-specific attributes a student's absolute and comparative skills at that subject, whether a student enjoys the subject; job-specific attributes whether they think they can get a job, the wages they expect to earn, the work-life balance they anticipate they will get; and social approval whether they think their parents and peers will approve of their decision. We collect data on subjective expectations conditional on graduating in a given major from a sample of undergraduate students who are in the process of deciding what to study and we estimate a model of major choice, identifying gender differences in the preferences for education as well as in the expectations of future outcomes.

### Speaker Profile

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