

Student: Bennett Stulting Chiles  
Program: UCLA Anderson School of Management, Strategy Department  
Email: [bennett.chiles.1@anderson.ucla.edu](mailto:bennett.chiles.1@anderson.ucla.edu)  
Phone: 864-346-1645

Please accept my application to attend the NBER's tutorial on the economics of digitization in March 2015. I am currently a third-year Strategy student at UCLA's Anderson School, working towards advancement to candidacy. Phil Leslie encouraged me to apply to attend this meeting. At the intersection of policy, firm strategy, and important new behavioral questions, this exciting field holds great potential for fresh research. In particular, I am interested in exploring firm obfuscation behavior in various online settings in my dissertation work. This NBER tutorial would be a tremendous opportunity to gain exposure to related research currently underway in this field.

My coursework to date has spanned multiple departments and includes a strong foundation in economic theory as well as several courses in methodology (including courses focused on the fundamentals of establishing empirical causality as well as those addressing more modern inference and data collection techniques – demand estimation, estimation of static games, Bayesian modeling, web scraping, etc.). Outside of my program's core curriculum requirements, I have focused on courses in firm strategy, industrial organization, decision-making under bounded rationality, and pharmaceutical economics. Relevant courses include:

*Core Economics Courses:*

Microeconomics Sequence (ECON 201A, 201B, 201C)  
Econometrics Sequence (ECON 203A, 203B, 203C)  
History of Economic Thought (ECON 207)

*Empirical Techniques / Methodology:*

Regression Analysis: Model Building, Fitting, and Criticism (STAT 201B)  
Intro to Multivariate Analysis (MGMT 213C)  
Empirical Industrial Organization (ECON 271B)  
Empirical Methods in Strategic Management (MGMT 298D)  
Bayesian Statistical Methods (MGMT 298Y)  
Data Acquisition for Economic Research, i.e., Web Scraping (Summer Seminar Series)

*Courses Specific to My Research Focus:*

Business Strategy (MGMT 420)  
Contract Theory (ECON 271A)  
Current Issues in Decision Theory (MGMT 245)  
Research and Development Policy (MGMT 292A)  
Seminar in Pharmaceutical Economics and Policy (HLT POL 204A)

*Cumulative GPA:* 3.8 / 4.0

I have completed all required coursework as well as all required exams. I received a Ph.D.-level pass on the Economics department's microeconomics comprehensive exam in July 2013, and a grade of "Excellent" on the Strategy department's major field exam in July 2014. I expect to advance to candidacy in March 2015.

In my dissertation, I hope to study firm obfuscation behavior in online settings. I initially became interested in issues of disclosure/obfuscation during my first year of the program while working with Professor Jason Snyder on a paper exploring organ transplant center reactions to mandated performance ratings. I have since begun to focus my own research efforts on understanding the incentives for (and implications of) strategies of disclosure vs. obfuscation when assumptions of rationality are relaxed. (Under perfect rationality, firms would, of course, have no incentive to obfuscate or shroud information on price/quality, and full disclosure would occur naturally – the so-called “unraveling” phenomenon.)

In online settings, the incentive for firms to obfuscate information (as well as their ability to do so) is shifted and, in some ways, magnified. On the one hand, the Internet reduces search costs, allowing consumers to gather information more easily, which might arguably make markets and prices more competitive. As several authors have noted, however, firms often resort to obfuscation tactics in online environments in an effort to mitigate these effects. My current research efforts are focused around pricing obfuscation strategies that involve partitioning the total price of a good (or bundle of goods) into multiple parts so that comparisons across competing products are more difficult and time consuming to make.

At present I am focused on collecting data on shrouded/partitioned prices in various online settings, including the online market for hotel rooms. I hope to explore the conditions under which firms employ these sorts of strategies, as well as whether or not these tactics are executed optimally in practice. The hotel space is somewhat distinctive in that firms employ various combinations of *mandatory* surcharges (e.g., resort fees) and *avoidable* surcharges (e.g., parking fees, wi-fi fees, etc.). This may allow for a better understanding of the extent to which partitioned pricing strategies are actually obfuscation strategies (driven by consumer inattentiveness/irrationality) vs. price discrimination strategies – a distinction which has been difficult to make in the empirical literature. I have relied primarily upon Phil Leslie and Jason Snyder as informal advisors in my preliminary work.

In addition to my dissertation work, I am interested in the pharmaceutical industry and have two papers in progress in this area. One paper (for which I received an Easton Technology Leadership Program Research Grant) investigates firm appetite for risk in pharmaceutical R&D; a second paper (joint with Professor Marvin Lieberman) studies product exit in the generic drug industry. Digitization is, of course, playing an important role in the pharmaceutical industry (and in the healthcare space more generally), and this is something that I hope to explore more in future work.

Please feel free to contact me by email or phone if any additional information is needed. Attending this conference would be an incredibly valuable opportunity to learn from fellow researchers as my own work takes shape. I look forward to your decision!