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Please accept my application to attend the NBER's graduate student tutorial on the Economics of Digitization in March 2016.

I am currently a doctoral candidate in Strategy in my fourth year at UCLA's Anderson School. Phil Leslie encouraged me to apply to this meeting last year, and I was very grateful to be able to attend. The discourse, ideas, and people I was exposed to at this session have had a tremendously beneficial influence on my research. I very much hope to have the opportunity to continue to learn and participate in the exciting research conversations of this field at this coming year's meeting.

My coursework at UCLA 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

Empirical Techniques / Methodology:

Regression Analysis: Model Building, Fitting, and Criticism

Multivariate Analysis

Empirical Industrial Organization

Empirical Methods in Strategic Management

Bayesian Statistical Methods

Data Acquisition for Economic Research, i.e., Web Scraping

Courses Specific to My Research Focus:

Business Strategy

Contract Theory

Current Issues in Decision Theory

Research and Development Policy

Seminar in Pharmaceutical Economics and Policy

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. In addition, I completed my oral qualifying exam and successfully advanced to candidacy in September 2015. My dissertation committee includes:

Marvin Lieberman (*chair*)
John Asker
Mariko Sakakibara
Ian Larkin

I anticipate entering the academic job market in the Fall 2016 / Winter 2017 cycle, and filing my dissertation in Spring 2017.

My dissertation focuses on price obfuscation, most notably in online settings. Recent theoretical contributions have suggested that firms may often have an incentive to obfuscate, and existing empirical evidence seems to confirm that price obfuscation strategies are, indeed, highly effective at raising revenue and markups, at least in one-shot transactions. Yet while the prevalence of obfuscation seems to have increased some in recent years (particularly online), by no means have these tactics been universally adopted by firms. This, then, begs the question: *why aren't more firms engaging in these practices?*

The essays in my dissertation attempt to shed light on this issue by exploring the potential longer-term tradeoffs of obfuscation and the ways in which both firm and market characteristics may affect a firm’s incentives and propensity to obfuscate. Specifically, my job market paper focuses on the potential impact of price obfuscation on firm reputation. I utilize a difference-in-differences framework applied to data from the online market for hotel rooms in the U.S. to study the effect of a firm’s adoption of hidden “resort fees” on subsequent online traveler ratings. Variation in the way in which Expedia displays these fees to consumers allows for the identification of a causal relationship. While I am continuing to build my panel of data each month, I have, to date, found that the adoption of a resort fee decreases subsequent ratings by between 0.1 and 0.2 points (on a rating scale that ranges from 1 to 5). While this effect is modest in magnitude, the actual impact of such a decrease may be substantial if consumers tend to order search results by average rating or if average ratings are rounded and displayed to consumers in discrete increments (e.g., in half-point increments as they are on many online platforms).

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 continues to take shape. I look forward to your decision!