2013 Vernon Prize

AWARD GIVEN BY VERNON PRIZE COMMITTEE FOR VOLUME 32 OF JPAM

Susan Dynarski, Joshua Hyman, and Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach

“Experimental Evidence on the Effect of Childhood Investments on Postsecondary Degree Attainment and Degree Completion”

There are a number of features that made this article stand out. First, it took advantage of a nearly three-decade-old randomized controlled trial to ask about long-term impacts. Given the large number of studies that have already relied on data from the Project STAR experiment, many researchers and policymakers likely consider the STAR findings to be dated and exhausted. This study demonstrates the insights that can be learned from continued research on policies and experiments from the past and the merging of old data with newer data (in this case, the National Student Clearinghouse). Second, this study includes extensions that enhance our understanding of the effects of early interventions on later outcomes. Namely, the authors provide an informal test of the mechanisms through which reduced class size operates on postsecondary attainment with the important insight that early test scores are extremely strong predictors of adult educational attainment. In addition, the authors provide a thoughtful comparison of the cost benefit ratio of reduced class sizes to other interventions designed to increase educational outcomes. Above all, the article is exceptionally well written, the analysis is well executed, and the subject is of tremendous policy relevance.

Vernon Prize Committee:

Dylan Conger, Chair
Jacob Vigdor
Jason Fletcher
Robert Wood