

# Opponent's Report on Dissertation Thesis

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Title of the Thesis:	Three Essays on the Economics of Education
Type of Defense:	<b>DEFENSE</b>
Opponent:	Nikolai Cook PhD (Wilfrid Laurier University, Canada)

Address the following questions in your report, please:

- a) Can you recognize an original contribution of the author?
- b) Is the thesis based on relevant references?
- c) Is the thesis defensible at your home institution or another respected institution where you gave lectures?
- d) Do the results of the thesis allow their publication in a respected economic journal?
- e) Are there any additional major comments on what should be improved?
- f) What is your overall assessment of the thesis? (a) I recommend the thesis for defense without substantial changes, (b) the thesis can be defended after revision indicated in my comments, (c) not-defensible in this form.

*(Note: The report should be at least 2 pages long.)*

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Date:	2023-05-01
Opponent's Signature:	
Opponent's Affiliation:	Nikolai Cook PhD (Wilfrid Laurier University, Canada)

This document contains a referee report for a dissertation defense by Nikolai M Cook PhD, an Assistant Professor of Economics at the Lazaridis School of Business and Economics of Wilfrid Laurier University in Canada, for the dissertation "Three Essays on the Economics of Education" written by Olesia Zeynalova, a doctoral student of Economics from Charles University in Czech Republic.

There are three chapters to this dissertation with a prefacing summary. The chapters contain three original research manuscripts authored by Olesia Zeynalova and co-authors. The first is "Tuition Fees and University Enrolment: A Meta-Regression Analysis" written by Olesia Zeynalova, Tomas Havranek, and Zuzana Irsova. It was published in Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics in 2018, which carries an ABDC ranking of A and a Combes-Linnemer rank of 55. The second is "Publication and Attenuation Biases in Measuring Skill Substitution" written by Olesia Zeynalova, Tomas Havranek, Zuzana Irsova, and Lubica Laslopova. It was published in The Review of Economics and Statistics in 2022, which carries an ABDC ranking of A\* and a Combes-Linnemer rank of 8. The third is "Expected Returns to Higher Education in Russia after USE Reform" written by Olesia Zeynalova. This manuscript is not currently published to this referee's knowledge.

a) Can you recognize an original contribution of the author?

There is strong evidence that this dissertation contains an original contribution to scientific knowledge. The data from McFall (2015), which uses a survey conducted during the 2007-2008 through 2009-2010 job markets, indicates that only 11.1% of job market candidates have 2 or more publications. This would place this dissertation solidly in the middle of the best quintile. I suspect this share of candidates with publications has increased during the decade since the data was collected, however this dissertation's quantity and quality of publications are enough to provide me with little doubt of their strong evidence supporting the claim of author's original contribution. I highlight the second of the chapters which – although coauthored with supervision – is published in one of the top outlets of the profession and the first chapter which – while again coauthored – is published in a respectable economic journal.

The final chapter estimates the effect of an intervention (the Unified State Exam) on later earnings depending on which cohort a student ultimately graduated in. I consider this analysis to be well done and requiring only typo checking. It is a good example of economics of education and labor economics research.

b) Is the thesis based on relevant references?

In the third chapter, the analysis restructures the model introduced by Francesconi et al. (2019) to determine the effect of a Unified State Exam implementation in Russia on education returns. The focus is on how the USE reduced the cost of application therefore increasing the quantity and quality of potential matches between students and universities. As a result of better matches, the observed later earnings of graduates should increase.

This chapter uses more data than the reference article; the chapter uses 25 annual rounds (1994-2020) of the Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey (RLMS) whereas the reference article uses 19 rounds (1994-2014). I highlight this fact as it demonstrates one of the often-

overlooked skills in producing applied empirical work – the ability to procure and prepare data for econometric analysis.

The resulting difference-in-difference analysis is well done and nuanced – it is at first curious why the overall *post x treatment* coefficient is negative, but the subsample analyses aid in this regard. It makes intuitive sense that, following a relaxation of which or how many universities a potential student can apply to, those best students are more likely admitted to those Universities in Moscow (presumably the most prestigious) and having increased earnings as a result.

It is not clear a priori whether this should be the case for other universities – the sign of the result would be pulled in the positive direction by an increasing quality of matches, and in the negative direction by a sort of “brain drain” towards Moscow. Ultimately, the resulting sign would depend on the relative size of these two effects, which is an empirical question – the sort this paper is exactly.

c) Is the thesis defensible at your home institution?

I would consider this thesis to be readily defensible at my current institution of Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Canada. I suspect that it would also be readily defensible at my PhD-granting institution of University of Ottawa, Canada as well.

d) Do the results of the thesis allow their publication in a respected economic journal?

As previously noted, two of the three chapters are already published in respected economic journals. After reading them, I have confidence that the third, which is applied rather than a meta-analysis, will also publish well. I appreciated the revisions applied to the third study, particularly the clarification of the research design section.

e) Are there any additional major comments on what should be improved?

I have no remaining major comments for this dissertation.

As a minor comment page 150 contains an errant bit of punctuation "." after "reform".

f) What is your overall assessment of the thesis?

I recommend this version of the thesis for defense without substantial changes.