I am an applied microeconomist with research interests in human capital measurement, education, labor, and technological transformation. As of January 2026, my articles have garnered 620 Google Scholar citations (h index=13; ORCID: 0000-0001-7100-0647).

Information Effects in Education

A strand of my research concerns impact of information shocks on education outcomes. Information about relative performance plays an important role in school performance and study choices. In **"Knowing Who You Actually Are: The Effect of Feedback on Short- and Longer-Term Outcomes"** ([1], ***Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization***), Rigissa Megalokonomou (Monash) and I study the impact of providing high school students with feedback on their relative performance on university enrollment and expected future earnings. Using a large-scale natural experiment, we show that high-achieving students improve their final-year performance by 0.15 standard deviations, while low-achieving students' performance declines by 0.3 standard deviations. Females, in particular, are more negatively affected by feedback across all ability levels. In the long term, high-achievers reduce their exam repetition rates, enroll in more selective university programs, and raise their expected earnings, while low-achievers experience negative outcomes. These effects are driven by students' uncertainty about their relative ability.

The macroeconomic context also plays a key role in study decisions. In **"Which Degrees do Students Prefer During Recessions?"** ([2], ***Empirical Economics***), Rigissa Megalokonomou (Monash) and I analyze how shifts in unemployment rates influence the demand for tertiary education, specific fields of study, and admission thresholds in Greece. Using data from seven admission cohorts, we find that job insecurity linked to certain degrees discourages applicants from pursuing fields with poor job prospects. The sharp rise in unemployment after 2009 led to more university applicants, with increased demand for Psychology and Naval, Police, and Military

Academies, but decreased interest in Business and Management. Additionally, the business cycle affects admission thresholds by altering the popularity of degrees.

In a current project titled **"The Impact of Being Recognized as Top Performer on School and Career Outcomes"**, Won Fy Lee (Stanford), Rigissa Megalokonomou (Monash), and I examine the impact of being recognized as the top performer on school, university, and career outcomes. We exploit a quasi-random assignment of high school students to classes in grade 10, followed by exams that determine the top performer. Using a regression discontinuity design, we compare the outcomes of top and second-best performers with similar prior performance in a large, representative sample.

Our findings are threefold: First, female second-best students are more likely to give up when outperformed by male top students, negatively affecting outcomes such as STEM performance, reappointment as top performer, STEM track enrollment, university degree, and wages. Second, these negative effects disappear when females are second to female top students. Third, there are no differences between the outcomes of second and third-best performers, suggesting recognition plays a key role in gender differences in STEM choices and wages. We conduct a survey-based RCT and find that males are more competitive than females, and female top performers are more likely to give up when stakes are high.

Peer Effects in Education

A substantial portion of my research output revolves around peer influences. While traditional peer effects focus on the impact of peers' prior performance on own outcomes, my research has contributed to our understanding of ranking effects and gender homophily. In **"Comparative Advantage and Gender Gap in STEM"** ([3], ***Journal of Human Resources***), Silvia Griselda (e61), Rigissa Megalokonomou (Monash), and I investigate why females often perform

well in STEM subjects but are less likely than males to pursue STEM fields. Using random classroom assignments in Greece, we examine how comparative STEM advantage, measured by ranking STEM performance relative to non-STEM subjects, affects STEM specialization. We find that females with higher comparative STEM advantage are more likely to choose a STEM track and apply for a STEM degree, while this factor does not impact males. Our findings suggest that comparative STEM advantage accounts for at least 12 percent of the underrepresentation of qualified females in early STEM specialization.

In a current working paper titled **"Optimal Cohort Partitions"** [4] ***Appeared at the 25th ACM Conference in Economics & Computation***), Faidra Monachou (Yale) and I build on traditional peer effect models to examine the optimal cohort partition problem, which involves the partition of a heterogeneous population of individuals into distinct groups to optimize the objective of a social planner. Unifying results from optimization and majorization theory, we characterize the structure of optimal cohort partitions across various objectives and applications. Our primary focus is on a common educational application: how to optimally partition students into classes in the presence of peer effects. We theoretically characterize the optimal partition for four distinct objectives—*performance*, *welfare*, *diversity*, and *inequality*—and find that, within the same behavioral model, trade-offs are not always inevitable. We derive several policy-relevant insights. First, in both behavioral models, we show that as the planner's highest priority shifts from the top-performing class to the least-performing class, the optimal partition becomes progressively less assortative. Second, we show that, while both behavioral models agree on the optimal partition policy for performance, diversity, and inequality, they disagree on the welfare-optimal policy. Third, we find that the commonly used uniform partition, despite achieving lower inequality than any integral partition, does not achieve perfect equality.

In a current paper titled **"Female Neighbors and Careers in Science"** ([5] ***Research***

Policy), Yi Zhang (Queensland), Rigissa Megalokonomou (Monash), and I explore how neighbors impact test scores and careers. We examine how the gender of same-age neighbors affects high school and university outcomes. Using random variations in gender composition at birth and data from Greek students, we find that a higher share of female neighbors improves outcomes for both male and female students. Female students are also more likely to pursue STEM fields and better-paying careers when surrounded by more female neighbors. Communal spaces, such as churches and parks, amplify these effects among females.

In a current working paper titled **"Top-performing Girls are more Impactful Peer Role Models than Boys, Teachers Say"** ([6] ***Proceeding of the National Academy of Science***), Panos Sotirakopoulos (Curtin), and Rigissa Megalokonomou (Monash) and I examine teachers' perceptions toward top performing students and their role model influence on others in an online survey-based experiment. We randomly expose teachers to profiles of top performing students and inquire whether they consider the profiled top performers to be influential role models. These profiles varied by gender and field of study (STEM or Non-STEM). Our findings show that teachers perceive female top performers as more influential peer role models compared to male top performers. We also investigate the qualities teachers perceive top performers who are successful role models to have. We show that teachers associate a greater sense of learning autonomy and sense of being an example with female top performers compared to their male counterparts. Estimated effects are more pronounced among teachers with children and teachers in urban areas. Administrative data from a representative sample show limited observed differences between top performing males and females' educational outcomes that could justify the differences in teachers' gender perceptions. These findings carry significant implications for education, as teachers play a crucial role in directing attention to potential role models.

In a current working paper titled **"Gender Role Models in Education"** [7], Bhagya Gu-

nawardena (RMIT), Rigissa Megalokonomou (Monash), and Yves Zenou (Monash) and I use our hand-collected data from Greece to examine the impact of being randomly assigned to a same-gender top-performing student on both short- and long-term educational outcomes. These top performers are tasked with keeping classroom attendance records, positioning them as role models. We find that both male and female students are influenced by the performance of a same-gender top performer, experiencing spillover and conformist effects. However, only female students show significant positive effects from the mere *presence* of a same-gender role model. Specifically, female students improved their science test scores by 4 percent of a standard deviation, were 2 percentage points more likely to choose a STEM track, and were more likely to apply for and enroll in a STEM university degree. These effects were most pronounced in lower-income neighborhoods. Our findings suggest that same-gender peer role models could reduce the underrepresentation of qualified females in STEM fields by approximately 3 percent. We validate our findings through a lab-in-the-field experiment, where students rated the perceived influence of randomized hypothetical top-performer profiles. The results suggest that the influence of same-gender top performers is driven primarily by exposure-related factors (increased sense of success feasibility and self-confidence) rather than direct interactions.

In another current working paper titled **"Disruptive Peers and Academic Performance: Short- and Long-Term Educational Outcomes"** [8], Silvia Griselda (e61), Rigissa Megalokonomou (Monash), and Yves Zenou (Monash) and I exploit our hand-collected data from Greece and a lab-in-the-field experiment to answer the following research question: How do disruptive peers influence our academic and career choices? We leverage the random assignment of students to classrooms in Greece, aiming to identify the effects of peer disruptiveness on academic performance and career specialization. We employ two measures of classroom disruptiveness. First, we use a novel approach that tracks the total hours of suspension students accumulate. We then

classify disruptive students based on their hours of suspension. Our analysis shows that students randomly assigned to more disruptive classrooms experience lower academic achievement, face an increased risk of failing a grade, dropping out, or requiring supplementary exams, and are less likely to pursue competitive STEM fields. Moreover, students in such classrooms are less likely to enroll in postsecondary education or selective degree programs. The negative impact of disruptive peers is further exacerbated by classroom dynamics and socioeconomic conditions—students from low-income neighborhoods, assigned to larger classrooms, or in classrooms with a lower proportion of female students suffer the most pronounced effects. The lab-in-the-field experiment indicates that physical proximity to disruptive peers in the classroom amplifies their negative influence.

In another current project, titled **"With a Little Help from My (Girl) Friends: An Experimental Test of Gender Homophily on a Major Online Career Training Platform"** (***R&R Organization Science***) [9], Julia Melin (Dartmouth), Tiantian Yang (U Penn) and I investigate how peer group gender composition influences professional outcomes for women pursuing upward mobility. Conducting a randomized field experiment with over 2,000 women on a leading online career training platform in the US, we assigned trainees to either gender-homophilous (same-sex) or mixed-sex groups across various certification programs. Women in same-sex groups were significantly more likely to earn certifications and secure in-field employment within one year, particularly in suburban areas. Our findings suggest social support as a key mechanism, providing insights for organizations leveraging online training to address skilled labor shortages.

Learning Autonomy

Another strand of my research has studied the impact of learning autonomy on student outcomes. In **"Compulsory Class Attendance versus Autonomy"** ([10], ***Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization***), Silvia Griselda (e61), Rigissa Megalokonomou (Monash),

and I examine the impact of increased autonomy for higher-achieving students on their short- and long-term school outcomes. Using a nationwide natural experiment where high-performing students were allowed to miss 44 percent more classes with parental approval, we find that this autonomy improves their performance in key subjects for university admission and leads to enrollment in higher-quality college degrees. Top-performing students and those in academically diverse classrooms show a higher demand for autonomy when offered.

Pandemics, including COVID-19, create exogenous shocks to learning autonomy. My research has exploited such shocks to study the use of learning autonomy during a pandemic. In **"School Attendance during a Pandemic"** ([11], ***Economics Letters***), Rigissa Megalokonomou (Monash) and I show that when officials relax school attendance requirements as a preventive measure against a pandemic, students with higher prior performance take more absences, while students with lower prior performance continue attending school.

Many learners experienced significant learning losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For surgeons-in-training, these losses may have long-term implications for the capacity of healthcare systems worldwide to perform delicate procedures. In **"The Perceived Impact of COVID-19 on Graduate Medical Education and Recommendations for Bridging the Educational Gap"** ([12], ***Journal of Surgical Research***), George Karamitros (Maryland) and I use a differences-in-differences approach to capture the impact of COVID-19 on training inputs (e.g., surgeries and seminars attended by residents) before and during the pandemic. We also evaluate residents' expected learning outcomes, career prospects, and suggested remedial measures for addressing learning losses. The perceived decline in competence, surgical skills, and scientific knowledge among future surgeons indicates that healthcare systems globally may face limitations in performing specialized and costly procedures in 67 countries. A country-specific analysis of the learning losses among plastic surgery residents appeared in ***Aesthetic Plastic Surgery*** [13].

Public Policy

Throughout my career, I have conducted research to guide policy decisions in multiple state and local education agencies. In particular, I have been the lead researcher on impact evaluations of school choice and school improvement policies at the state and federal level in the US. For example, I have been the project lead for my group's impact evaluation of the 28 million dollar "Investing in Innovation" (i3) grant awarded to Louisiana and Tennessee to turnaround underachieving schools [14]. My policy research has repeatedly received wide media attention from both sides of the Atlantic and has moved the needle of policy across the nation. During the pandemic, my policy research was presented at the Council of Economic Advisers of the White House. The topics I have explored in my policy work include charter school effectiveness and race inequalities in education [15, 16, 17, 18], pandemic-related learning losses [19, 20, 21], pandemic-related enrollment school declines [22, 23, 24, 25, 26], pandemic-impacted household finances [27], housing market challenges [28], and broad education policy challenges [29].

My recent work on declining enrollment in traditional public schools and the implications for a crisis of confidence in public schools on behalf of their local communities has received extensive media coverage. My next steps in this line of research include the investigation of the evolving demographics of students in as well as outside public schools in collaboration with Faidra Monachou (Yale). Using data from state and federal sources, we will characterize the distribution of changes in enrollment and the effects of declining enrollments on racial and socioeconomic representation in schools and districts. In addition, we will augment our data findings with structured interviews with district superintendents to gain insights into the challenges they face due to enrollment declines and their strategies for stabilizing enrollment and explore how their challenges and plans correlate with the enrollment trends in their district. This project has received $25,000 in funding from the Broad Center at Yale University.

I have also had an opportunity to produce concrete policy proposals. In **"Alabama Broadband for Education"** ([30], Hoover Institution, Stanford University), Chunping Han, Macke Raymond, and I develop a proposal—backed up by a cost-benefit analysis—to expand the broadband internet infrastructure in Alabama to improve education outcomes. An approach to student-centered learning from instruction provided by teachers, backed by high-quality course materials and lessons, can only occur at scale if we can ensure that teachers have the proper access to instructional resources and the support to guarantee that they deliver high-quality instruction. With a few marginal adjustments in an already strong start, the state can realize dramatic growth in its human capital and economic health.

I have also produced academic publications on the evaluation of specific policies. For example, in **"Marathon, Hurdling, or Sprint? The Effects of Exam Scheduling on Academic Performance"** ([31], ***The B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy***), Rigissa Megalokonomou (Monash) and I explore how exam schedules impact student performance. Using quasi-random variations in exam timing, we analyze the effects of exam order, days between exams, and days since the first exam. We find that these scheduling effects are stronger for STEM subjects. In STEM, exam order (warm-up) positively impacts scores, while more days since the first exam (fatigue) negatively affects them, with warm-up effects outweighing fatigue. Boys' exam productivity increases faster than girls', and higher-performing students show stronger warm-up and lower fatigue effects. Optimizing exam schedules could boost overall performance by up to 0.02 standard deviations.

In a current solo-authored project, **"Reforms and Protests,"** I investigate the impact of fiscal reforms on strikes and riots. I construct a novel dataset with high-frequency observations on new legislation passed in the Hellenic Parliament and the daily incidence of strikes and riots during a period of drastic fiscal adjustment. By leveraging day-to-day variation in legislative

reform efforts and protest activity, I identify the impact of reforms on protests. The findings show that strikes and riots increase sharply in the days leading up to a parliamentary vote on a reform bill, then gradually decrease in the days following the vote. The results suggest that a significant portion of protest activity is driven by expressive rather than instrumental motivations. Reforms with fiscal implications are associated with higher protest incidence and longer durations. Additionally, the results reveal a strong positive correlation between the pervasiveness of a reform bill—measured by its length in pages—and the occurrence of riots on the day before and the day after the parliamentary vote.

Human Capital and Artificial Intelligence

In another line of research, I use AI techniques such as web-scraping and text analysis to measure inequalities in access to surgical care and in gender representation in male-dominated fields such as surgery. In **"Association between Surgical Disease Burden and Research Productivity in Surgery across the Globe: A Big Data Comparative Analysis Using Artificial Intelligence"** ([32], ***British Journal of Surgery***), George Karamitros (Maryland), and I measure research productivity and human capital in surgery across nations and investigate associations with the shares of global population and surgical burden of disease. Understanding country differences in human capital and innovation in surgery is crucial in quantifying access to surgeons and quality of surgical care across the world. Our analysis shows that the preponderance of the world's population and surgical disease burden are not reflected on the research map, pointing to limited access to surgical care in developing countries. We provide benchmarks for human capital and innovation in surgery in relation to trans-border health disparities. In **"Human Capital and Productivity in Surgery Research during a Pandemic: An Artificial Intelligence Approach"** ([33], ***British Journal of Surgery***), George Karamitros (Maryland),

and I investigate each country's representation in the volume and the authors of COVID-related surgery publications. Gauging each country's surgical personnel's agility to re-deploy resources during a crisis, we are able to infer the level of system and community preparedness to manage crises. George Karamitros (Maryland), and I have published similar investigations in specific surgical specialties and wide-reaching methodological guides [34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39].

Future of Work

In a current solo-authored project, **"The Value of Remote Work: A Correspondence Experiment on Tutors,"** I examine tutors' preferences for remote versus in-person work by combining detailed tutor résumé data, wage information from a Greek online board, and a correspondence experiment. In July and August 2024, thousands of messages were randomly assigned to inquire about either in-person or online lessons and sent to tutors across Greece. This study contributes to the literature on work flexibility, gender differences in remote work preferences, and the evolving landscape of remote work post-COVID-19. Findings reveal that requests for online lessons are approximately 50 percent more likely to receive a callback than those for in-person lessons (10.7 percent vs. 7.3 percent), even after controlling for tutor characteristics, subject type, location, and timing. Preference for remote work is especially strong among females, STEM tutors, and those facing higher local labor market competition. Tutors cite motivations such as avoiding commuting, managing time constraints, and confidence in remote tutoring's effectiveness, supported by technology tools. Survey results further associate online tutoring with higher job satisfaction, expanded employment opportunities, improved instructional effectiveness, and greater tutoring hours. This study positions remote tutoring as a scalable, cost-effective solution for enhancing education, addressing teacher motivation and retention, and filling subject-specific shortages in an increasingly digital world.

Integration of Artificial Intelligence in Education

In another line of research, I conduct survey-based and field experiment to investigate the effectiveness and successful integration of Artificial Intelligence tools in the education practice. In a recent project, titled "Why do Experts Miss AI's Errors? Evidence from a Randomized Labeling Experiment," (***R&R PNAS Nexus***) [40] Rigissa Megalokonomou (Monash) and Panos Sotirakopoulos (Curtin), and I conduct a survey experiment, in which we test how educators revise grades labeled as AI- or human-generated. Every teacher saw the same student work and an erroneous 5/10 mark; we varied (i) whether the correct answers caused the score to be harsh or lenient and (ii) the stated source of the mark. The outcome, the grading fairness gap, is the distance between teachers' revised marks and the objective grade. Under a harsh recommendation, the gap was 22% larger with an AI label; in the lenient case, the fairness gap under AI and human labels was statistically indistinguishable. Mediation analysis shows that, in the harsh case, higher attributions of ability and responsibility to the algorithm transmit no less than half of the effect, whereas weaker attributions in the lenient case trigger stricter corrections. Thus, acceptance of algorithmic advice hinges on error direction and inferred credibility, rather than on artificial intelligence alone.

In another paper, titled "Students Reject AI for Human Counselors in College Applications: A Field Experiment," [41] Hemanshu Das (Yale), Faidra Monachou (Yale) and I examine student preferences for human versus algorithmic recommendations in STEM college applications. The lab-in-the-field experiment reveals consistent aversion to algorithmic recommendations, driven by perceptions of intent, ability, and alignment with personal goals. Findings show substantial heterogeneity across gender, academic performance, and compliance with the norm of "prestige chasing." Using an optimization approach, we demonstrate how to prioritize the assignment of human versus algorithmic recommenders to students to boost STEM study enrollment.

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