

## Abstract

We examine the impact of assignment to STEM v. humanities-focused curricula in Romania's high school system. We apply a regression discontinuity design to administrative and survey data to estimate effects on educational pathways, career plans, and non-cognitive outcomes. An overarching theme of our findings is the malleability of students to what they study. Assignment to STEM increases STEM college enrollment by 23 pp and STEM career intentions by 17pp, with corresponding negative effects on humanities-related enrollment and career plans. Exploring mechanisms, we find that STEM assignment changes students' self-perceived academic abilities and their preferences over academic subjects and job tasks. We find less evidence for stories related to sunk costs, peer and teacher influences, or beliefs about earnings and work conditions.

Importantly, STEM assignment involves a risk: it improves wellbeing, high school satisfaction, and career prospects on average, but reduces performance on a high school exit exam, leading to lower college enrollment and retrospective satisfaction among low-achieving students. Similarly, it makes female students report negative experiences with college professors and peers. A final finding is that male students become more conservative. We provide suggestive explanations for our results on wellbeing and political preferences by measuring effects on time use, friendships, and expectations.