

## **DIW Applied Micro Seminar**

### **Gender, Competition and Choices in Higher Education**

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*Abstract:*

We examine the choices of male and female students in higher education, holding fixed the field of study and accounting for individuals' underlying academic ability. Examining undergraduate students' choices in a yearlong, mandatory international exchange program, we find that average- and high-ability female students systematically choose less ambitious paths. On average, male students request universities that are better-ranked than what their true academic standing would suggest, whereas female students request universities that are worse than their academic standing. Using simple simulations, we consider the impact of other allocation rules on students' assignments for the international exchange year. We find that both male and female students would be better-off on average if female students adopted more competitive behavior. We discuss how students' experiences in higher education are likely to affect their academic trajectories, career opportunities and future earnings. We also discuss potential explanations for male and female students' different behaviors, mainly: do preferences or subjective expectations explain gender differences in students' choices?