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2021

Document Version:
Other version

Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):
Mehic, A., & Olofsson, C. (2021). *Get Rich or Fail Your Exam Tryin': Gender, Socioeconomic Status and Spillover Effects of Blended Learning*. (Working Papers; No. 2021:8).

Total number of authors:
2

Working Paper 2021:8

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Get Rich or Fail Your Exam Tryin': Gender, Socioeconomic Status and Spillover Effects of Blended Learning

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May 2021
Revised: October 2022

LUND UNIVERSITY

Gender, Socioeconomic Status, and Student Performance when Education is Partially Online *

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This version: October 16, 2022

Abstract

We evaluate an experiment at a Swedish university, in which students were quasi-randomized to either taking all their courses online, or to have some courses online and some on campus. We show that having some courses in person improved grades only among female students with affluent parents. Detailed individual-level survey data suggests that there was no relationship between socioeconomy and adverse mental health amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, by estimating each student's network position, linked with administrative data on parental income, we show that female students with wealthy parents have significantly less constrained social networks, facilitating communication with peers.

JEL classification codes: I23; I28; J16; Z13

Keywords: online learning; COVID-19; social networks

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I. Introduction

In recent years, online coursework has gained considerable ground in higher education. This trend has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, during which higher education facilities in most nations were temporarily closed, and in-person classes largely replaced by online teaching.

A growing body of literature examines the academic consequences of taking college courses online instead of in the traditional in-person format, with most studies finding a negative relationship between distance education and test scores (Figlio et al. 2013; Alpert et al. 2016; Bettinger et al. 2017). Blended learning, that is, mixing online and in-person teaching, also seems to have adverse effects on academic outcomes (Kozakowski 2019). Others have noted that online education increases college enrollment, particularly among mid-career individuals who would not otherwise have pursued higher education, and that colleges with higher shares of online courses charge lower tuition fees (Deming et al. 2015; Goodman et al. 2019).

In this paper, we evaluate a quasi-natural experiment among a set of second-year engineering students at Lund University, Sweden, during the Fall semester of 2020. Students were quasi-randomly assigned to either taking all of their mandatory courses online, or to have some courses fully online and some fully on campus. This produces two student groups for the mandatory courses taken online: one group having no access to campus teaching whatsoever, and one group having some, albeit unrelated, coursework on campus. We hypothesize that on-campus meetings and informal chats with peers are likely to improve learning outcomes in online courses, even if meetings take place in conjunction with classes in other courses. This hypothesis is consistent with previous studies finding significant pedagogical benefits of peer discussion and small-group learning (Springer et al. 1999; Smith et al. 2009). Communicating with classmates is likely to be facilitated by campus access, especially peers that the student is not very close friends with. In addition, campus access is likely to improve students' mental health, which is beneficial for performance in both the campus and online courses (Eisenberg et al. 2009; Cornaglia et al. 2015). We call these the spillover effects of campus teaching, and would, thus, expect positive spillover effects in online courses for students treated with parallel campus classes.

To explore whether there were any heterogeneous effects on academic outcomes depending on students' socioeconomic status, we link data on grade outcomes with detailed administrative data on parental taxable income for each student, and use this as a proxy for socioeconomic background. We utilize a number of additional individual-level controls to further isolate the effect played by socioeconomic status. Our results show that there were spillover effects of campus education only for female students with affluent parents, with the relationship increasing linearly with income.

This finding raises an important question: Are socioeconomic distortions increasing linearly with time on campus? If this were the case, we would expect that a complete return to full campus education is associated with significant socioeconomic distortions to the benefit of female students with wealthy parents. We show that there were no socioeconomic differences in grade outcomes for the previous cohort, when all education was given on campus. This result suggests that it is the blended learning setting that causes the socioeconomic heterogeneity in grade outcomes.

What can explain this relationship between gender, parents' income and the grade outcomes of blended learning? Several recent papers have highlighted the importance of environmental rather than biological factors in intergenerational transmission, for example with respect to children's entrepreneurial success (Lindquist et al. 2015; Bell et al. 2019; Black et al. 2020). These studies often point to network effects as one of the keys in explaining the relative importance of "nurture" in this context. In our setting, one potential network-related channel is structural embeddedness, which is defined as the degree of overlap between the social networks of two individuals (Granovetter 1985). In essence, the lower the number of mutual friends shared by two people, the more open is the social network around these two individuals. Being connected across groups improves access to novel ideas, reduces information redundancy, and promotes alternative ways of thinking (Burt 2004). Such traits are likely to have a positive impact on academic outcomes. Given previous research, it is plausible that the network status of parents[1] extends to their children (Kohn et al. 1986; Coleman 1988; Conti and Heckman 2010). An alternative explanation to our findings is that female students from wealthy backgrounds are less stressed or anxious about the pandemic, and can make more of the campus experience.

Consequently, the second set of results concerns the mechanisms behind the finding that gender and socioeconomic status are positively correlated with campus spillovers under blended learning. Immediately following the end of the semester, we survey the same set of students. In our survey, we combine a standard questionnaire on studying habits and mental health with questions about students' social networks. We show that students treated with campus classes report lower levels of mental distress vis-à-vis students without in-person classes. These results hold even after controlling for pre-pandemic quality of life. After education for all students moved fully online towards the end of the Fall semester, there was no difference between treated and untreated students with respect to self-reported mental health, suggesting that the difference observed earlier in the semester was indeed due to campus presence. Importantly, however, we find no relationship between mental health and gender or parental stratification status, meaning that our results are unlikely to be explained by differences in anxiety about the pandemic.

[1]Recent research underscores that both parents' stratification status impacts children's social networks, and by extension also the potential for intergenerational mobility, as opposed to previous theories focusing only on the role of fathers (Beller 2009; Mare 2015).

Instead, we turn our attention to the role played by social networks. Using the results from our questionnaire, we graph the classmate social network among students treated with campus education, and use the estimated network positions to compute network constraint for each individual student. By linking estimated network constraint with the same administrative data on parental income, we show that students with affluent parents have more open social networks, suggesting that these students can more efficiently bridge "holes" in the social structure.[2] We additionally show that female students with wealthy parents treated with campus classes spend more of their study time physically meeting peers, compared with other student groups. Consistent with our theory, this result suggests that campus communication acts as a catalyst for students stretching across network clusters, and that female students whose parents are at the highest end of the stratification hierarchy are the most efficient network "brokers". Considering that even treated students had limited access to campus, our results are consistent with recent findings that network brokerage is particularly useful under time constraints, and in our setting, time for socializing with peers is scarcely available (Mullainathan and Shafir 2013; Burt 2017; Opper and Burt 2021). Alternatively stated, limited access to peers in a blended learning setting raises transaction costs for social interactions, making it difficult for less connected students to interact with peers.

This paper makes a number of contributions. First, we add to the growing literature on the heterogeneous effects of the closing of educational facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the United States, the adverse learning outcomes associated with the closing of K-12 schools was disproportionately skewed towards low-income students, whereas internet search frequency for online educational resources was higher in affluent areas (Chetty et al. 2020a; Bacher-Hicks et al. 2021). Similar conclusions can be reached when considering studies from European nations (Cacault et al. 2021; Grewenig et al. 2021). Another strain in the literature focuses on the heterogeneous consequences of lockdown on mental health. Two studies from the U.S., and Greece, respectively, show that self-reported anxiety among university students was higher among females than males (Kecojevic et al. 2020; Patsali et al. 2020). Similarly, students with access to a yard or garden experienced lower levels of anxiety during the lockdown in France (Husky et al. 2020). We add to this literature by showing that having some campus classes is beneficial for mental health compared to full online mode, however, distance education was not associated with an overall deterioration of grade outcomes.

Second, we contribute to the literature on heterogeneity in social networks depending on socioeconomic characteristics. Previous research has shown that having wealthy parents is associated with relatively higher shares of acquaintances in individual social networks, concomitant with a higher rate of socializing with friends, but lower rates of

[2]An absence of a direct tie between two individuals in a social network is referred to as a *structural hole*.

socializing with relatives (Andersson 2018). Among university students, those coming from privileged backgrounds are more likely to communicate and interact with faculty (Kim and Sax 2009). In terms of gender, while it has not been established that women have broader networks overall, being embedded in networks that are diverse, for instance with respect to the gender and socioeconomic status of group members, is more likely to benefit women than men (Lutter 2015; Mengel 2020).

We add to the literature on heterogeneity in social networks in two ways: First, by showing that parental socioeconomic status is one important channel in explaining the heterogeneity in network constraint observed among students, suggesting that there is significant intergenerational transmission of network status. Second, we show that network constraint is an important mechanism behind the observed spillover effects of campus education in a blended learning setting, and that network constraint is lower among females and students with affluent parents.

Finally, we contribute to the broader literature on social networks and their role in shaping economic outcomes. Previous research has shown that network centrality is positively associated with academic performance (Calvó-Armengol et al. 2009; De Paola et al. 2019), that individuals with more open networks have higher savings rates and shorter unemployment spells (Breza and Chandrasekhar 2019; Cingano and Rosolia 2012). In addition, individuals with more open networks are more likely to be elected into political office (Cruz et al. 2017), and CEOs with higher network centrality are more successful in finalizing merger and acquisition deals (El-Khatib et al. 2015). We add to this literature by showing that network structure is an important mechanism in explaining variations in academic outcomes when education is partially online.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. Section II provides additional details on the experiment setting. Section III describes the data. Section IV presents the results, while Section V discusses potential mechanisms. Section VI concludes.

II. Setting

II.A. Background

We study a quasi-natural experiment conducted at the Faculty of Engineering at Lund University, Sweden, during the Fall semester of 2020. Starting March 17, 2020, higher education facilities were ”strongly recommended” by the Public Health Agency of Sweden to switch to online-based teaching in order to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Hence, the reminder of the Spring semester was fully online at all public universities in Sweden, including Lund. The recommendation about online education lapsed on June 15, 2020, but was reinstated in early November.

Since public universities in Sweden are their own government agencies, they have significant leeway in interpreting regulations and recommendations from other government agencies. Following the summer holidays, teachers[3] at the Faculty of Engineering could decide for themselves whether to continue with online-based education, or return to campus. The only prerequisite for in-person teaching was that student groups could not be larger than 50 individuals, and that the number of seats in lecture halls were required to be twice the number of students in class, in order to ensure social distancing. However, as the number of students enrolled in most of the Faculty's undergraduate programs exceeds 50 by some margin, the former requirement meant that the bulk of courses were given online, in order for instructors to avoid the extra teaching burden associated with splitting students into two or more lecture groups.[4] Whether a course was to be held online or at campus was unknown to students until around one week before the start of the Fall semester.

Swedish universities follow the standardized system for comparing academic credits across the European Union, the so-called *European Credit Transfer System* (ECTS). One academic year is equal to 60 ECTS credits, which corresponds to 1600 hours of full-time studies. There are two semesters in an academic year (Fall and Spring), with 30 ECTS worth of coursework in each. In addition, each semester is divided into two terms; for the Fall semester, the terms are September–October, and November–December. Most courses run for one term only, which places a relatively high emphasis on final exams. However, courses running for an entire semester typically have mid-term exams, to avoid examining four months of coursework in a single day.

II.B. The Experiment

We consider the academic results of second-year students enrolled in four separate undergraduate engineering programs: Engineering Mathematics (EM), Engineering Physics (EP), Industrial Engineering (I), and Mechanical Engineering (M).[5] All are five-year degree programs leading to an M.S. in Engineering. All four are among the most competitive engineering programs in Sweden, with most of the students having scored grade A in all of their subjects in high school.[6] During the Fall semester of 2020, students enrolled in EM and I took the same mandatory course in introductory microeconomic theory, which was given in person with students split into two lecture groups based on surnames. Hence,

[3]Throughout this paper, "teacher", or "instructor", refers to the person responsible for giving lectures and planning exercise sessions, regardless of academic rank.

[4]Teaching credits provided to instructors were the same regardless of teaching mode.

[5]Table A.1 of Online Appendix A provides the first-year course structure for each program.

[6]Admission to Swedish universities is based solely on either high school grades or on the standardized entrance exams (equivalent to the SAT in the United States), and not on interviews or covers letters. Around two-thirds of applicants are admitted through high school grades, and the reminder via the standardized admissions test.

students in these two programs constitute the treatment group, as they had at least some campus classes during this time period. Students enrolled in EP and M had no campus classes whatsoever during the Fall semester, meaning that these students constitute the control group.

We proceed by using data on student performance in two courses taken during the same semester as the microeconomics course: a mathematics course for students enrolled in EM and EP, as well as an introductory course in supply chain management for students in I and M. Consequently, this design creates one treated and one untreated student group for each course, where the treatment is access to campus teaching in other courses.[7]

Table 1 describes the course structure used in the experiment in some additional detail. We are interested in grade outcomes for the two online courses ”Complex Analysis” for EM and EP students, and ”Supply Chain Management” for students enrolled in I and M. As the name suggests, the course in complex analysis deals with complex-valued (holomorphic) functions, with first-year courses in calculus and linear algebra being prerequisites. The course in supply chain management builds directly on a course in operations management taken by I and M students during their first year. During the mathematics course, EM students are treated with in-person classes in their parallel microeconomics course, whereas EP students have no access to campus whatsoever in their parallel courses in Dyanamics and Statistical Thermodynamics. Similarly, for the course in supply chain management, students in the I program have the online mathematical statistics course and the on-campus microeconomics course in parallel, whereas M students have no campus access in their parallel courses. If it is the case that there are spillover effects from campus teaching, we would expect the treated students to perform relatively better in the online courses than their non-treated peers.

Our experiment design has numerous advantages. First, there is no selection into courses, since all courses in the first and second years are mandatory. Second, admission to the four engineering programs is almost equally difficult, so there should not be any program fixed effects in terms of academic ability. Finally, the design is not subject to any teacher fixed effects, because the instructor for each of the two spillover courses is the same individual, regardless of student group. Thus, although the decision by individual teachers whether to remain online or to switch to campus teaching is plausibly affected by unobservable teacher characteristics, the quality of the online course will be the same regardless of whether the student group received campus treatment in their parallel course or not. Section IV.B. addresses potential concerns about identification by presenting a number of robustness checks.

[7] Although students without in-person classes were not explicitly banned from university premises, students were advised not to visit campus unless they had scheduled classes.

III. Data

III.A. Data Overview

At the Faculty of Engineering, passing grades are given by 3, 4, and 5, with 5 being the top grade. The grading scale is absolute, meaning that the cutoff level for each grade is determined before the start of the course, and is not affected by the relative performance of students.

In order to isolate the effect of campus access on academic outcomes, we use a set of control variables. Since we are particularly interested in the role played by socioeconomic factors, we use administrative data from the Swedish Tax Authority to calculate the taxable income of each parent for the year 2019.[8] We then calculate the average of each parent's income and use this as a proxy for the student's socioeconomic background. Overall, the parents of our sampled students are considerably wealthier than the median in Sweden, with the median parental income at SEK 567,350.[9] Figure A.1 of Online Appendix A illustrates the box-and-whisker diagrams of average parental income for students in each engineering program, measured in SEK.

We employ a number of additional student-specific controls, namely age and the median income of the student's home municipality. Online Appendix B presents the data sources for all variables used in the empirical analysis, and provides additional definitions.

III.B. Survey Construction

To examine mechanisms and to perform additional robustness checks, we survey students from the four engineering programs immediately after the end of the Fall semester, by constructing an online survey consisting of 21 questions. We emailed an online link to each of the 333 students enrolled in EM, EP, I, and M, followed by two reminder emails after 48 and 96 hours, respectively. Each respondent was awarded a gift card worth SEK 50. In total, we received 151 responses, corresponding to a response rate of 45 percent. The survey questions fall into three categories: socioeconomy, opinions about coursework in the Fall semester, and questions about mental health and social networks.

In the final question, we ask students to name up to five of their closest classmates. On average, students participating in the survey named 4.07 friends. Here, we encounter a frequent problem in social network analysis, namely tie non-response. Be-

[8] Sweden has no joint family taxation.

[9] The median income for individuals aged 20–64 was SEK 337,400 in 2019 (*Data source*: Swedish Statistics Agency.). It is well-known that top-ranked universities tend to disproportionally enroll students from high-income families (Chetty et al. 2020b). However, since there are no tuition fees in Sweden, it is likely that this gap is smaller than for many other universities of similar standing.

cause ties represent social interactions between individuals, estimates of network strength are likely to be biased even with relatively low rates of non-response (Kossinets 2006; Smith and Moody 2013). To correct for non-response, we use that during the microeconomics course for EM and I, students self-selected into groups of 3–4 classmates when writing a mandatory group assignment. Of the 36 groups in total, there were 15 three-person groups and 21 four-person groups. This allows us to impute up to three friends for the non-responding students. A major advantage of this procedure is that it enables us to fully eliminate non-response among the EM and I students, as well as to link students' network positions to parental income. We can also show that the share of non-responding students was random between groups.[10] However, since we are only able to perform the imputation for EM and I, we drop this question for the remaining students.

Table A.2 of Online Appendix A presents a balance test, comparing the universe of students in our dataset with our survey sample with respect to the share of treated (I and EM) students, the share of female students, and the median income of the students' home municipalities. There are no statistically significant differences between the survey sample and the full sample with respect to these student characteristics, suggesting that the survey sample is likely to be a representative cross-section of the student population.

III.C. Operationalization of Parental Stratification Status

One of our research questions is related to whether there is variation in academic and non-academic outcomes depending on parental socioeconomic status. However, it can be difficult for students participating in the survey to precisely estimate their parents' income. To tackle this issue, we construct a socioeconomic status index based on four questions in the survey, each asking the respondent to state, respectively: (i) in which municipality he or she lived just before starting university, (ii) in what type of dwelling he or she mainly lived during childhood, (iii) whether any of their parents has a college or university degree, and whether (iv) anyone of their parents has been the CEO or a board member of a publicly listed company during the lifetime of the respondent.

For each of the above questions, we proceed by assigning a numerical value to each

[10]We construct a contingency table with two frequency columns (the number of group members participating in the survey, and the number of group members for which the friendship connections were imputed), and 36 rows, corresponding to the number of student groups. The test statistic for testing the null hypothesis that non-response is random between groups is $\sum_{i=1}^{r}\sum_{j=1}^{c}\frac{[O_{i,j}-E_{i,j}]^2}{E_{i,j}} \overset{\text{asy.}}{\sim} \chi^2(35)$, where for outcomes i and j, $O_{i,j}$ is the observed frequency, and $E_{i.j}$ is the expected frequency if non-response is random. The observed chi-square score is 33.10, which is equivalent to a p-value of 0.56. A concern would otherwise be that, for instance, female-only groups were more likely to have a larger share of members participating in the survey.

response.[11] Respondents from more affluent municipalities receive a higher score, where the score is proportional to the median disposable income of the municipality. Similarly, respondents who grew up in a house receive a higher score than those living in rental apartments during their childhood, as do respondents for which both parents have a college degree. Finally, respondents where at least one parent has been the CEO or a board member of a publicly listed company receive the score 4, compared to 1 for those without a CEO or board member parent. The latter variable is the one most likely to capture those with the highest-earning parents, as the data presented in Table A.4 of Online Appendix A shows that out of the 20 parents with the highest reported taxable income in our sample, 16 had at least one CEO position or board assignment during the lifetime of their children, and 15 of these had at least one current assignment. Of the top 7 parents, all had at least one CEO or board assignment.

To construct the index, we denote questions by $j = 1, \dots, 4$, and sum the numerical scores obtained in each question to form the *Socioeconomic status index* for student $i = 1, \dots, 151$ as

$$\text{Socioeconomic status index}_i = \sum_{j=1}^{4} \text{Score}_{ij} \tag{1}$$

To facilitate interpretation, we standardize the index so that its sample mean is equal to zero and its sample standard deviation is equal to unity. Hence, the higher the z-score associated with the respondent's socioeconomic status index, the higher is the socioeconomic background of the respondent.

Online Appendix C provides additional details on the structure of the questionnaire, as well as the exact wording of the questions and answers available to respondents. Online Appendix D presents the full results for each question in the survey.

III.D. Summary Statistics

Table A.5 of Online Appendix A presents the summary statistics for the 2020 cohort. We have previously showed that the parents of our sampled students are wealthier than average. The proportion of females is around 28%. There is less variation in age, the average age being around 21. Table A.6 of Online Appendix A gives the same summary statistics for the previous (2019) cohort, the academic outcomes of which are also utilized in the empirical analysis. There are no major differences in any of the variables of interest between the two cohorts.

[11] Table A.3 of Online Appendix A presents the contribution of each question to the total index value.

IV. Spillover Effects of Campus Access on Online Coursework

In this section, we examine the grade outcomes of students depending on campus treatment in parallel courses. As a placebo test, we evaluate the grade effects in the current cohort compared to last year's, when all instruction was in-person, as well as preforming a number of additional robustness tests.

IV.A. Main Results: Blended Learning versus Full Online

1. Estimates for the Current Cohort

Denote by $y_i \in \{3, 4, 5\}$ the grade obtained by student i in either the mathematics course (EM and EP) or supply chain management course (I and M). Both courses build heavily on first-year courses: Complex Analysis on first-year mathematics courses in calculus and linear algebra, and Supply Chain Management on the first-year course in operations management. Consequently, for EM and EP students, we let Δy_i be the difference between the logarithm of y_i and the logarithm of first-year mathematics GPA, and for I and M students, Δy_i is the difference between the logarithm of y_i and the log grade in the first-year operations management course. Finally, we standardize Δy_i so that its mean is equal to zero and its standard deviation is equal to unity.

In this paper, we are particularly interested in the role played by parental position in the stratification hierarchy, and whether the effects were particularly strong for male or female students. Thus, we estimate

$$\begin{aligned}\Delta y_i = \alpha_0 &+ \beta_1 \text{Treated}_i + \beta_2 \text{Inc}_i + \beta_3 \text{Gender}_i + \beta_4 \left(\text{Treated} \times \text{Inc}\right)_i \\ &+ \beta_5 \left(\text{Treated} \times \text{Gender}\right)_i + \beta_6 \left(\text{Gender} \times \text{Inc}\right)_i + \beta_7 \left(\text{Treated} \times \text{Gender} \times \text{Inc}\right)_i \\ &+ \boldsymbol{\gamma}' \boldsymbol{X}_i + \varepsilon_i \end{aligned} \tag{2}$$

where $\text{Treated}_i \in \{0, 1\}$ denotes whether the student was treated with the parallel campus course or not, Inc_i denotes the average annual income of parents, $\text{Gender}_i \in \{0, 1\}$ is zero for males and unity for females, $\boldsymbol{X}_i$ is a vector of student-specific controls (age and median income of home municipality), and ε_i is an error term. Hence, if there are spillover effects of campus education, we would expect the coefficient estimate $\hat{\beta}_1$ of β_1 to be positive.

Table 2 presents the results. Since we cluster standard errors at the program level, using clustered standard errors when the number of clusters is low tends to over-reject the null hypothesis $\beta_j = 0$. In our case, there are only four clusters, so we adjust the standard errors with a wild cluster bootstrap (Cameron et al. 2008) with bootstrap weights drawn from the Webb distribution, which has been shown to work well in settings when the number of clusters is below 10 (Webb 2014; Cameron and Miller 2015). In Table 2, the p-values for the null hypothesis that the parameter corresponding to the coefficient estimate is equal to zero is in square brackets.[12] We see that the coefficient estimate for treatment with campus access in parallel courses, $\hat{\beta}_1$ is positive, although statistically insignificant. When using the full model as described by Equation (2), corresponding to Columns (2)–(3) in Table 2, we see that the only statistically significant coefficient is the triple interaction term $\hat{\beta}_7$ between treatment, female gender and average parental income. The triple interaction coefficient estimate is positive, suggesting that the effect is increasing linearly with income. If average household income increases by SEK 100,000, which is approximately equal to USD 12,000 (so that the average income of each parent increases by SEK 50,000), academic performance of treated female students increases by 0.035 standard deviations.[13] The triple interaction term is significant at the 5% level, whereas the remaining coefficients are all statistically insignificant.

Although the effect is relatively small when parental income is included in the model linearly, the magnitude of the triple interaction term increases when we instead consider a binary variable taking the value unity when parental income is in the highest decile (top 10% of the empirical income distribution), and zero else. The results in Table A.7 of Online Appendix A suggest that for females treated with parallel campus classes, grades are around 0.5 standard deviations higher for those with parents above the top 10% income percentile, compared to those whose parents are at the bottom 90%. Again, the triple interaction term is significant at the 5% level.

It can be challenging to interpret the coefficients when there are three-way interactions. To facilitate interpretation, we plot the estimated coefficients from the above regression models for each of the four subgroups, varying average parental income between 0 and $3,000,000$.[14] Figure 1 presents this plot, with the standardized grade change between years 1 and 2 on the vertical axis. For for females in the blended learning group, grades improved with the average income of parents. Both for males, and for women in the online group, parental income had relatively minor effects on grades. Section V explores various potential mechanisms behind these findings.

2. Estimates for the Previous Cohort

It is important to establish that there were no spillover effects the last time the courses were given, namely during the Fall semester of 2019, when all instruction was on campus.

[12] Note that inference in the wild cluster bootstrap is based on p-values only, with the bootstrap p-value being the share of the bootstrap statistics that are more extreme than the one from the original sample. Hence, the algorithm does not produce any standard errors.

[13] We use the standardized values from Column (3), and since parental income is measured in tens of thousands of SEK, $0.007 \times 5 = 0.035$.

[14] Note that SEK 3,500,000 is slightly above the sample maximum for average parental income.

We thus re-estimate (2) using the values for the previous cohort of students. Since it did not exist any "treated" or "untreated" students in 2019, we check whether females from affluent backgrounds benefited from full campus education before the pandemic. Figure A.2 of Online Appendix A plots the estimated coefficients. There are no indications that socioeconomy impacted the grade change between years 1 and 2 when education was fully on-campus.

Hence, we may summarize our main results as follows. Female students with affluent parents benefited from campus access in 2020, when EM and I students were treated with hybrid education and EP and M students had online teaching only. However, there was no socioeconomic heterogeneity with respect to grade outcomes in the 2019 cohort, when all education was given on campus. This result implies that it is the hybrid setting under blended learning that causes the socioeconomic distortions, not campus education per se.

IV.B. Robustness Checks

In this subsection, we run a number of robustness checks to address possible concerns with our identification strategy.

1. Balance Tests for Treated and Untreated Students

One drawback of our approach is that, while it is random which engineering programs had parallel online courses, students do not randomly select into programs. Thus, it would be problematic if treated and untreated students differed with respect to certain traits of interest for our analysis, for instance gender and socioeconomic background. Table A.8 of Online Appendix A provides the results of the balance test comparing treated and non-treated students with respect to gender, socioeconomic status of parents, age, and the grade for the first mathematics course (Calculus in One Variable), which is mandatory for all engineering students regardless of track. We note that there are no statistically significant differences between these characteristics between treated and untreated students. Consequently, the non-random selection into engineering programs does not pose a threat to the causal interpretation of our results.

2. Heterogeneous Effects by Initial Achievement

Another concern related to our identification strategy is the possibility of high socioeconomic-status females having had higher test scores at baseline. To exclude this possibility, we re-estimate equation (2) replacing the left-hand side with the standardized log grades in the first-year courses in mathematics and operations management, respectively. The results in Table A.9 of Online Appendix A show that all coefficients are statistically insignificant. Additionally, it is reassuring that the treatment variable is insignificant, considering that these first-year courses took place before the pandemic, and hence, there could not have been any ”treated” and ”untreated” students at that time.

3. Difficulty of Parallel Courses

Another concern of our study relates to how students allocate time between courses. A feature of the design is that students take up to three courses in parallel, and parallel courses differ between programs, and hence, between treated and untreated students. Although students take 30 ECTS credits per semester regardless of program, it could be the case that some course for one of the student groups is significantly more time-consuming than it ”should” be. To pass the more difficult course, students would likely allocate time away from the spillover course, the grade outcomes of which are of interest in our study. In order to check whether this was the case, we use a question of our survey asking students to estimate the share of their total study time allocated to each course. For our courses of interest, it suffices that there is no significant difference in study times between students in different programs.

Table A.10 of Online Appendix A presents the results. The p-values for the difference in mean allocated time was 0.46 for Complex Analysis (that is, between EM and EP students), and 0.64 for Supply Chain Management (I and M). Hence, we find no evidence to suggest that some of the student groups found their parallel courses disproportionally time-consuming. Although we do not explicitly ask students how many hours per week they spend studying, several university-run surveys have shown that a vast majority of students at the Faculty spend the recommended 40 hours per week, regardless of program (Lund University 2005; Holmström 2018).

4. Additional Robustness Checks

Besides time spent studying, it is important to ensure that both the treated and untreated students have similar opinions about how interesting their coursework is, since any heterogeneity could affect grades as well as non-grade outcomes. In our survey, we ask students to quantify on a scale from 1 to 5 how interesting each course is. By calculating the average score over treated and untreated students, with courses weighted by the number of ECTS credits, we find no difference between student groups in terms of how interesting students found their coursework.[15]

Although we have shown that there were no spillover effects for the 2019 students, it is possible that the 2019 course offerings of Complex Analysis and Supply Chain Management were an exception, and that EM and I students have higher rates of grade progression between basic and more advanced courses. This could be a concern for the causal interpretation of our findings, since it would be difficult to disentangle the effect

[15]The average score was 3.52 for treated students with a sample standard deviation of 2.24 (53 observations), and 3.35 for untreated students with a sample standard deviation of 2.20 (96 observations). With $N = 149$, we have $t_{147} = 0.45$, which is equivalent to a p-value of mean differences equal to 0.65.

of treatment with parallel hybrid classes during Fall 2020 from a general trend were EM and I students perform better at more advanced courses.

To exclude this possibility, we again estimate a model similar to (2), with the left-hand side replaced by the grade difference between two freshman mathematics courses for the 2019 and 2020 cohorts, with both cohorts taking the courses before the pandemic. The results of this regression are presented in Table A.11 of Online Appendix A. The coefficient for EM and I, that is, the student groups treated with hybrid classes during Fall 2020, is close to zero in magnitude and statistically insignificant. Moreover, none of the interaction terms with second-year treatment are significant.[16] Hence, there are no signs of a general grade progression trend favoring EM and I students at the Faculty of Engineering.

Finally, since we are interested in non-grade outcomes related to campus treatment, it could be problematic if students in either the treated or untreated group had higher reported quality of life before the pandemic. Question 15 of the survey asks students to rate their pre-pandemic quality of life between 1 and 5. We regress the results on the treatment variable and its interactions with gender and the socioeconomic status index. Table A.12 of Online Appendix A presents the results. We find no indication that treated students reported higher levels of pre-pandemic satisfaction. After including the control variable for self-estimated popularity, as well as the interactions with gender and parental socioeconomy, we find that the coefficient for treatment is close to zero, and that there is no heterogeneity with respect to gender and parental socioeconomic status.

V. Evidence on Mechanisms

So far, we have established that female students with affluent parents were significantly more likely to benefit from treatment with blended learning. We now consider the role played by network constraint in explaining this finding. We are also able to exclude other potential mechanisms, such as students with parents at the higher end of the stratification hierarchy being less affected by the pandemic.

V.A. Social Networks

1. Theoretical Framework

We first examine the role played by social networks and its relationship to socioeconomic status. We start by defining network constraint, which is our primary measure of network status. The idea is straightforward. If Alice spends all of her time with her friend Bob, a person meeting Alice also meets Bob. In this social network, the same information is

[16] Adding cohort fixed effects has only minor effects on the magnitude of the estimated coefficients, and is available on request.

shared across all members of the clique, and the network is said to suffer from a high level of network constraint. Alternatively, if Alice's friends do not know each other very well (even if they are classmates), she is more likely to access novel information when interacting with friends. This is because the first of Alice's friends gets her input from clique A, the second from clique B, and so on. Hence, Alice acts as a "broker" between networks. People linked to multiple social clusters have less information redundancy, and access to broader information, which should positively impact course performance.

We may formalize this line of thinking slightly. Let $\boldsymbol{A}$ be the square adjacency matrix associated with the social network. The elements $\{a_{ij}\}$ of $\boldsymbol{A}$ are equal to unity if individuals (vertices) i and j are connected, and zero otherwise. Here, "connected" means that there is an edge from vertex i to vertex j. Note that an individual cannot be connected to herself, implying that the graph associated with the adjacency matrix is loop-free, and $\mathrm{tr}(\boldsymbol{A}) = 0$. Denoting i's ego network by V_i, define the tie strength p_{ij} between i and j as

$$p_{ij} = \frac{a_{ij} + a_{ji}}{\sum_{k \in V_i \setminus \{i\}} (a_{ik} + a_{ki})}$$

We then calculate the network constraint (Burt 1992) associated with vertex i as

$$C_i = \sum_{k \in V_i \setminus \{i\}} \left(p_{ij} + \sum_{k \in V_i \setminus \{i,j\}} p_{iq} p_{qj} \right)^2 \tag{3}$$

Note that network constraint is undefined for isolated vertices, that is, if the vertex is not an endpoint of any edge. In our case, this would arise if the respondent did not have any friends at all. The higher the value of C_i, the higher is the constraint on i's social network. That is, an individual with a low value of C_i has a relatively low level of network constraint, and thus a more open social network, allowing the person to access different network clusters. If female students from affluent backgrounds have lower levels of network constraint, it could explain our findings on the role played by socioeconomic status for grade spillovers.[17]

2. Network Constraint and Social Stratification

Using the up to five connections named by students in Question 21 of our survey, we construct two separate adjacency matrices: one for students in EM, and one for stu-

[17]We use second-year students, and previous research has shown that in 4-year degree programs, there are only minor changes in network centrality after nine months (Overgoor et al. 2020). Additionally, almost all students participate in the Faculty's orientation weeks, and peer groups formed during orientation weeks tend to be strong predictors of friendship over time (Thiemann 2021). Given this, it is unlikely that the timing between the courses of interest and our survey had any impact on the friendship networks among our sampled students.

dents in I. This allows us to estimate network constraint for each of the 112 students in EM and I.[18] Figure 2 shows a detail of the social network for the I students.[19] As an example of heterogeneity in network constraint, individual 86 (in the top right corner) has a relatively closed network, whereas individual 73 (in the bottom of the figure) has a considerably more open network. Using our previous notation for network constraint, $C_{73} < C_{86}$. Proceeding from here, we calculate the network constraint multiplied by 100 for each student, and estimate

$$100 \times C_i = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 \text{Inc}_i + \beta_2 \text{Gender}_i + \beta_3 \left(\text{Gender} \times \text{Inc}\right)_i + \boldsymbol{\gamma}' \boldsymbol{X}_i + \varepsilon_i \tag{4}$$

In this specification, we divide annual parental income by 10,000 to avoid extremely small numbers for the coefficient estimates. Thus, the coefficient estimate $\hat{\beta}_1$ can be interpreted as the change in network constraint associated with a SEK 10,000 increase in average annual income of parents, keeping other variables constant. Figure A.3 of Online Appendix A illustrates visually the relationship between network constraint and average parental income, indicating that students with high-earning parents have lower values of network constraint, and thus, more open networks.

Table 3 presents the results when estimating (4). The results confirm that both higher parental income, as well as female gender, are significantly associated with lower network constraint. Similarly, the interaction between these two variables is also statistically significant. The latter finding suggest that high socioeconomic status females indeed have less constrained networks than females with less affluent parents. Augmenting the model to include controls in Column (6) of Table 3 barely changes the magnitude of the coefficient estimates.

3. Alternative Channels

In this subsection, we exclude two potential alternative reasons for the variation in network constraint among students. First, students hailing from affluent municipalities may be influenced by their surroundings rather than their own, or their parents' social status. It could also be the case that network constraint is lower for students from larger cities, as these typically have more sports clubs, religious organizations, and so on, thus contributing to network openness. Table A.13 of Online Appendix A regresses, in turn, network constraint on the median income of the home municipality of each student, and the population of the home municipality. Neither the coefficient for municipality income, nor the coefficient for municipality population, are statistically significant. In addition, the

[18] We drop a total of 15 students who transferred to Lund from other universities after the first year, or who did not actively participate in the first year.

[19] This is a so-called *directed graph*, because A naming B as one of her top 5 friends need not imply that B will name A as a top 5 friend. Consequently, there are friendship "directions".

explanatory power is near-zero for both specifications, further suggesting that parental income is likely to be a more plausible channel behind our findings.

V.B. Non-Grade Outcomes and Details About Channels

In this section, we use the results from our survey to examine non-grade outcomes of treatment with campus classes. These results help us exclude the possibility of our findings being driven by heterogeneity in attitudes towards the pandemic. Finally, we use the results of the survey to further investigate the mechanisms relating network constraint to realized peer interactions.

1. Non-Grade Outcomes

We use the survey results to examine whether there is heterogeneity in non-grade outcome responses depending on campus treatment. First, we ask the respondent to quantify, from 1 to 5, how negatively he or she was affected by the pandemic. The latter question focuses on the non-medical consequences of the pandemic, for instance increased boredom due to lack of social gatherings. Since education was fully online from November onward (including for treated students), we use subquestions for September–October, and November–December.

Columns (1)–(3) of Table 4 present the results for September–October. Column (2) includes controls for pre-pandemic life satisfaction and self-estimated popularity, and Column (3) adds interactions with the standardized socioeconomic status index and female gender. Not surprisingly, students treated with campus education report lower levels of adverse mental effects amid the pandemic; around 0.35 units lower on the 1–5 scale. There was no heterogeneity with respect to gender or socioeconomic status. Columns (1)–(3) of Table A.14 of Online Appendix A show the results when the values for the second half of the semester are regressed on the same set of variables. Here, the coefficient for treatment is statistically insignificant and close to zero in magnitude. This suggests that there was no difference in self-reported mental health between student groups in the period November–December, when education for all four programs was online. This finding strongly suggests that the observed differences in self-reported mental health between treated and untreated students was indeed due to campus presence.

Columns (4)–(6) of Table 4 present the results when asking students to quantify on a scale from 1 to 5 whether he or she was worried about getting infected with the coronavirus during the first half of the semester, when some education was on campus for EM and I. The coefficient for treatment is positive and statistically significant when controlling for pre-pandemic life satisfaction and popularity in Column (5), however, it is insignificant in the full model as specified in (6). The interaction between campus treatment, female gender and the socioeconomic status index is significant and positive. This provides some support to our theory about network constraint: female students with wealthy parents seem to be aware that they are indirectly exposed to more virus transmission chains, because the openness of their social networks implies that their on-campus contacts are more likely to come from different social cliques. Finally, Columns (4)–(6) of Table A.14 of Online Appendix A shows that there was no variation in fear of being infected in the second half of the semester, when all education was online.

2. Time Spent on Campus Outside Classes

So far, we have concluded that differences in non-grade outcomes surrounding the pandemic cannot explain why female students with affluent parents benefited from campus access in parallel courses. Instead, this group of students has lower network constraint, which should reduce information redundancy and facilitate communication across social clusters during in-person classes. With this said, it remains a mystery why there was no income or gender effects in grade spillovers in 2019, when all education was on campus. It seems unlikely that female students with affluent parents in the previous cohort had more closed networks than students in the current cohort. An alternative explanation relates to time scarcity: a sizable proportion of learning takes place outside lectures, and if students with high levels of social capital are better at utilizing limited campus time to plan group learning activities with peers, it would benefit their grade performance. Previous research has failed to find an association between socioeconomic status and study behaviors when education is fully on campus (Delaney et al. 2013). However, given that access to peers is limited under blended learning, these results may need to be reconsidered.

Elaborating, we ask respondents to quantify from 1 to 5 how often they studied together with their classmates for the spillover course, and whether those meetings took place in-person or online. Here, 1 means that the respondent never studied together with classmates in-person, whereas 5 means that all study sessions were in person. Since we believe that campus study time may vary both with respect to treatment, gender and socioeconomic characteristics, we interact treatment both with the indicator for female gender, as well as with the standardized socioeconomic status index. The results reported in Table 5 show that the triple interaction coefficient between treatment, female gender, and socioeconomic status is statistically significant with a p-value of 0.056. Additionally, both the main effect coefficient of the socioeconomic status index and the interaction coefficient between treatment and female gender are significant, the latter being negative but smaller in magnitude than the triple interaction coefficient. Hence, treated females with wealthy parents spend a relatively larger share of their study time meeting classmates in-person compared to treated females with less affluent parents.

We may also choose to vary only treatment status: Comparing two female students with relatively wealthy parents (say, a z-score of 2), who differ only in terms of treatment, the student treated with with blended learning will spend around 0.4 units more time studying on campus for the spillover course, based on the estimated coefficients in Table 5. Similarly, untreated male students with relatively poor parents are the group spending the least time studying with classmates on campus, which is consistent with our results on network constraint.

Finally, circumstances surrounding the pandemic may have influenced the decision to study with friends. Although Sweden did not impose a full lockdown during the pandemic, there were limited opening hours in coffee shops and restaurants, and student life was largely restricted. Since physical lectures provided one of few opportunities to meet with friends, students may have studied more in groups than they would have done otherwise. Again, since students with high level of social capital are the ones with the greatest preferences for socializing with peers, it is plausible that members of this group substituted student activities with group study sessions to a large extent. This may have influenced the grades of female students with wealthy parents through the significant benefits of small-group learning.

VI. Concluding Remarks

It remains to be seen whether the pandemic will profoundly change academic education. Globally, the supply of online courses has been increasing for several years, and multiple universities have played with the idea of replacing on-campus teaching with at least some degree of blended education, or to completely outsource courses to other universities through Massive Open Online Courses (Styles 2020).

In this paper, we show that grade outcomes under blended learning are heavily dependent both on gender and socioeconomic characteristics. In particular, partial access to campus under blended learning leads to positive grade spillovers for the online courses taken in parallel, but only for female students. The effect is increasing linearly with parental income. Conversely, both the traditional in-person setting as well as full online classes, do not cause socioeconomic distortions. We show that the relative winners of blended learning, namely female students with affluent parents, have broader social networks enabling them to take advantage of scarcely available campus time to interact with peers. However, in terms of mental health, blended learning is still preferred to full online teaching. We show that partial campus access mitigates the pandemic-related adverse effects on mental health for all students, regardless of gender or socioeconomic background.

Our findings have broader implications. For decades, intergenerational mobility has been higher for individuals with college education, suggesting that the relative benefits of higher education are skewed towards those least likely to attend college (Torche 2011). All of these studies have assumed that access to peers is fully available, with students being on campus virtually around-the-clock. If face-to-face meetings with peers become scarcely available under blended learning, these results may need to be reconsidered.

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Table 1
Course structure, fall semester, second year

Course name	Subject classification	Sep–Oct	Nov–Dec
Microeconomic Theory (C, 6)	Economics	EM, I	
Complex Analysis (O, 7)	Mathematics	EM, EP	
Supply Chain Management (O, 5)	Operations Management	I	M
Mathematical Statistics (O, 9)	Mathematics	EM, I	EM, I
Systems and Transforms (O, 7)	Mathematics		EM, EP
Dynamics (O, 6)	Physics	EP	
Mechanics (O, 15)	Physics	M	M
Solid Mechanics (O, 4.5)	Physics		EP
Statistical Thermodynamics (O, 6)	Physics	EP	EP
Thermodynamics and Fluid Mechanics (O, 11)	Physics	M	M
Marketing and Globalization (O, 4.5)	Business Administration		I
Programming (O, 4.5)	Computer Science		I

Note. Mandatory courses during the Fall semester for second-year students enrolled in Engineering Mathematics (EM), Engineering Physics (EP), Industrial Engineering (I), and Mechanical Engineering (M). Spillover courses underlined. In brackets: ”C” and ”O” denote campus and online courses, respectively, whereas the number refers to number of ECTS credits awarded for passing the course in question.

Table 2
Main results

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Treated	0.223	0.189	0.159
	[0.552]	[0.752]	[0.768]
Average parental income (SEK, 10,000s)		−0.001	−0.001
		[0.756]	[0.232]
Female gender		−0.109	−0.101
		[0.776]	[0.742]
Treated × Average parental income		0.000	0.000
		[0.946]	[0.682]
Treated × Female gender		−0.383	−0.383
		[0.510]	[0.410]
Average parental income × Female gender		−0.001	−0.001
		[0.728]	[0.702]
Treated × Female gender × Average parental income		0.007**	0.007**
		[0.040]	[0.036]
Student characteristic controls	No	No	Yes
Observations	321	321	319
Mean dep. var.	0.000	0.000	0.000
R^2	0.012	0.028	0.035

Note. Dependent variable: Change in achieved grade between spillover course and equivalent first-year course. A constant is included in all regressions. Columns (1), (2), (4), and (5): No controls. Columns (3) and (6): Controls for age and median income of home municipality. Standard errors clustered by program in brackets, with Columns (4)–(6) reporting wild cluster bootstrap-adjusted p-values in square brackets, computed using 500 replications and bootstrap weights drawn from the Webb distribution. ** denotes significance at the 5% level.

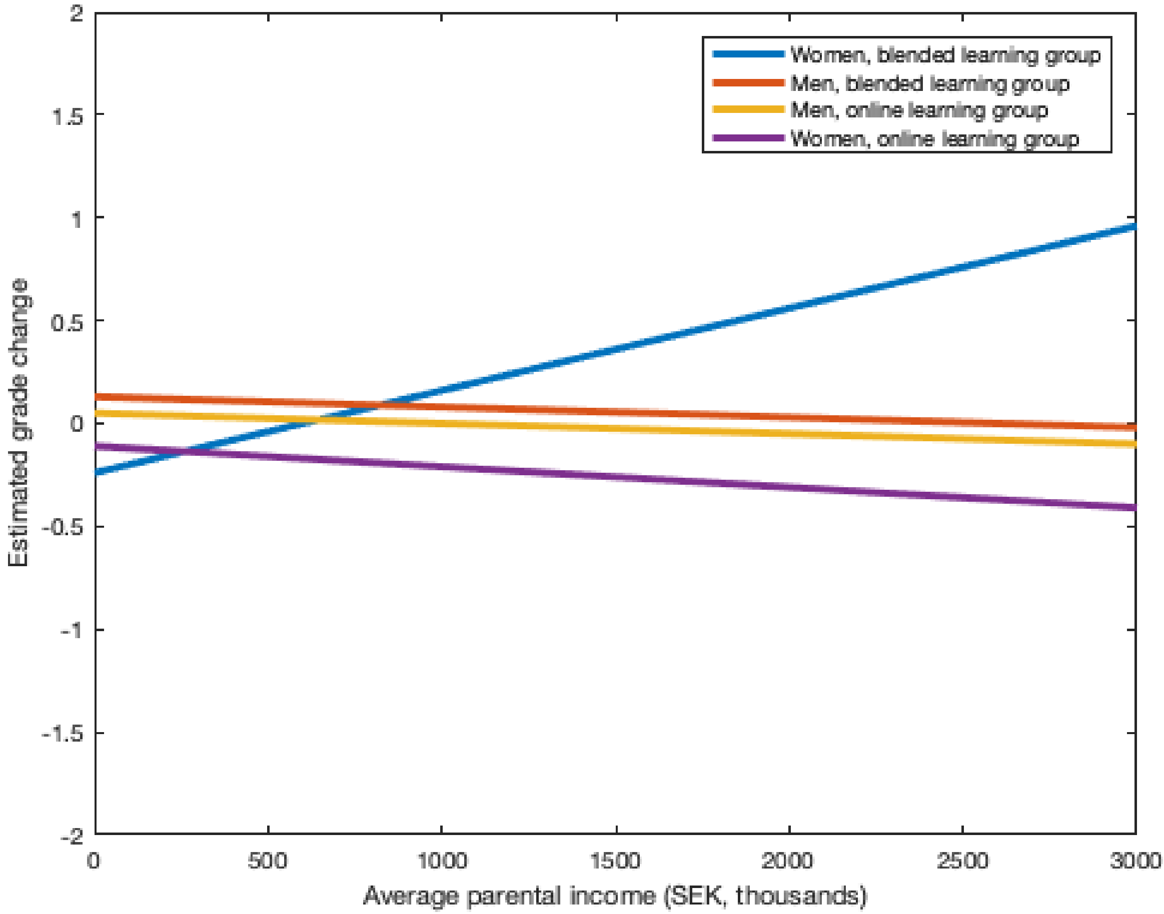


Figure 1: Plot of the estimated regression coefficients from the main specification. The estimated grade change on the vertical axis refers to the difference (in standard deviations) between the second year course and the corresponding first year course.

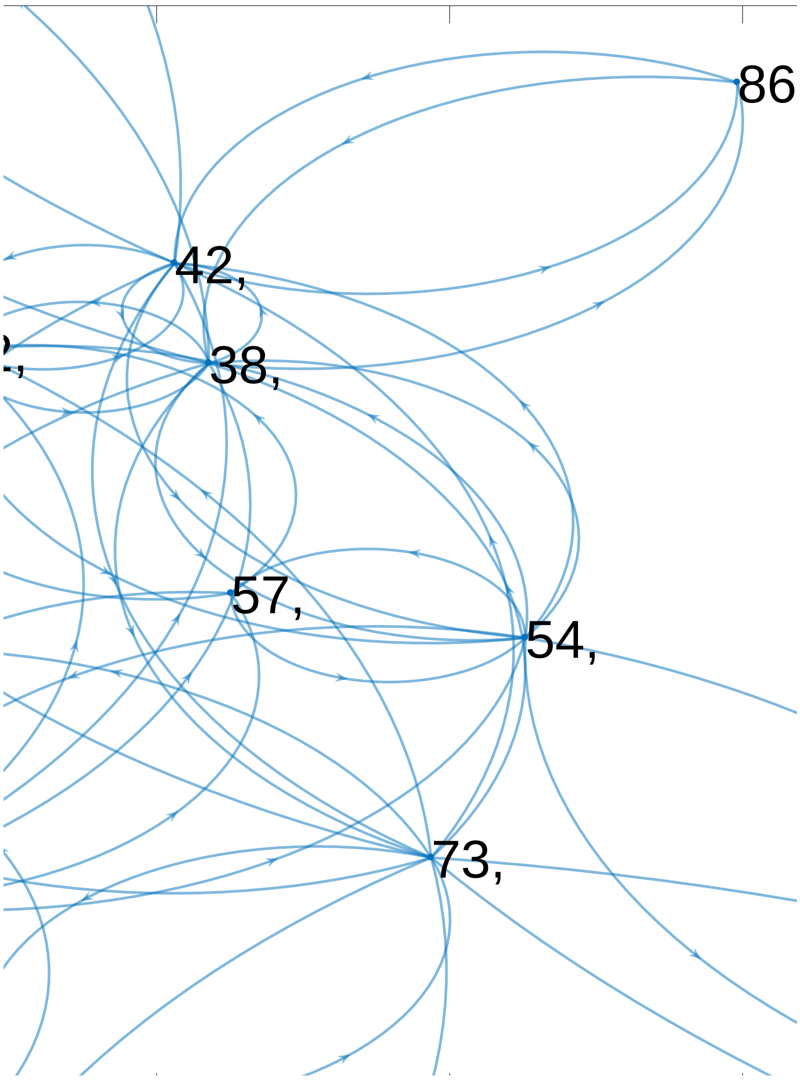


Figure 2: Detail of the estimated social network for the I students.

Table 3

Network constraint, gender, and parental income

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Average parental income (SEK, 10,000s)	-0.098^{***}		-0.100^{***}		-0.073^{*}	-0.094^{**}
	(0.037)		(0.029)		(0.042)	(0.047)
Female gender		-11.551^{***}	-11.171^{***}		-12.073^{***}	-12.660^{***}
		(4.061)	(3.894)		(3.784)	(4.016)
Average parental income (SEK, 10,000s) $\times$ Female gender				-0.265^{***}	-0.207^{**}	-0.224^{**}
				(0.077)	(0.087)	(0.089)
Student characteristic controls	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Observations	112	112	112	112	112	112
Mean dep. var.	58.81	58.81	58.81	58.81	58.81	58.81
R^2	0.045	0.061	0.109	0.048	0.132	0.145

Note. Dependent variable: Network constraint ($\times$100). A constant is included in all regressions. Columns (1)–(5): No controls. Column (6): Controls for age and median income of home municipality. Heteroscedasticity-robust standard errors in brackets. *, ** and *** denote significance at the 10%, 5% and 1% level, respectively.

Table 4
Non-grade outcomes, Sep–Oct

	Adverse mental effects			Afraid of contracting virus		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Treated	−0.353**	−0.471**	−0.526**	−0.026	0.125**	−0.019
	[0.050]	[0.048]	[0.050]	[0.698]	[0.048]	[0.902]
Socioeconomic status index			−0.004			−0.027
			[0.938]			[0.670]
Female gender			0.361			−0.321
			[0.154]			[0.298]
Treated			0.096			0.128
× Socioeconomic status index			[0.670]			[0.730]
Treated			−0.091			0.147
× Female gender			[0.726]			[0.350]
Socioeconomic status index			−0.294			−0.141
× Female gender			[0.698]			[0.766]
Treated × Female gender			0.344			0.537*
× Socioeconomic status index			[0.598]			[0.070]
Student characteristic controls	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Observations	150	135	135	150	135	135
Mean dep. var.	2.81	2.81	2.81	1.96	1.96	1.96
R^2	0.024	0.045	0.083	0.000	0.058	0.100

Note. Dependent variable: ”How was your mental health affected by the pandemic?”, and ”How worried were you about contracting COVID-19?”, respectively. Both variables are measured on a scale from 1 to 5, for the period September–October. A constant is included in all regressions. Columns (1) and (4): No controls. Columns (2)–(3) and (5)–(6): Controls for pre-pandemic life satisfaction and self-estimated popularity. P-values are in square brackets and computed using wild cluster bootstrap with 500 replications, with bootstrap weights drawn from the Webb distribution. * and ** denote significance at the 10% and 5% level, respectively.

Table 5
Self-estimated study time on campus

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Treated	0.068	−0.127	−0.006
	[0.772]	[0.668]	[0.970]
Socioeconomic status index			0.309*
			[0.072]
Female gender			0.793
			[0.276]
Treated × Socioeconomic status index			−0.435
			[0.196]
Treated × Female gender			−0.600*
			[0.098]
Socioeconomic status index × Female gender			−0.834
			[0.330]
Treated × Female gender × Socioeconomic status index			0.927*
			[0.056]
Student characteristic controls	No	Yes	Yes
Observations	151	135	135
Mean dep. var.	2.18	2.18	2.18
R^2	0.001	0.122	0.229

Note. Dependent variable: "On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is almost never, and 5 is daily, how often did you study together with your classmates when studying Complex Analysis or Supply Chain Management? Now, we mean physical meetings only." A constant is included in all regressions. Column (1): No controls. Columns (2)–(3): Controls for pre-pandemic life satisfaction, self-estimated popularity and estimated interest in the spillover course on a scale from 1 to 5. *P*-values are in square brackets and computed using wild cluster bootstrap with 500 replications, with bootstrap weights drawn from the Webb distribution. * denotes significance at the 10% level.

Online Appendix [Not for Publication]

A. Additional Empirical Results

TABLE A.1
COURSE STRUCTURE, FIRST YEAR

Subject classification	EM	EP	I	M	Comments
Mathematics	28.5	28.5	27	27	Divided into 15 credits single variable calculus, 6 linear algebra, 6 multivariable calculus. An additional 1.5 credits multivariable calculus is added for EM and EP students.
Physics	13.5	22.5	18	6	
Programming	18	9	–	12	
Operations Management	–	–	9	9	
Business Administration	–	–	6	–	
Mechanical Engineering	–	–	–	6	
Overall first year	60	60	60	60	

Note. First-year course structure for the four engineering programs evaluated in the experiment. The numbers refer to ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) credits. Note that 1.5 ECTS credits is equal to one week (40 hours) of full-time studies. Overall, 60 ECTS corresponds to a total workload of 1600 hours per annum. All courses are mandatory for students in each program.

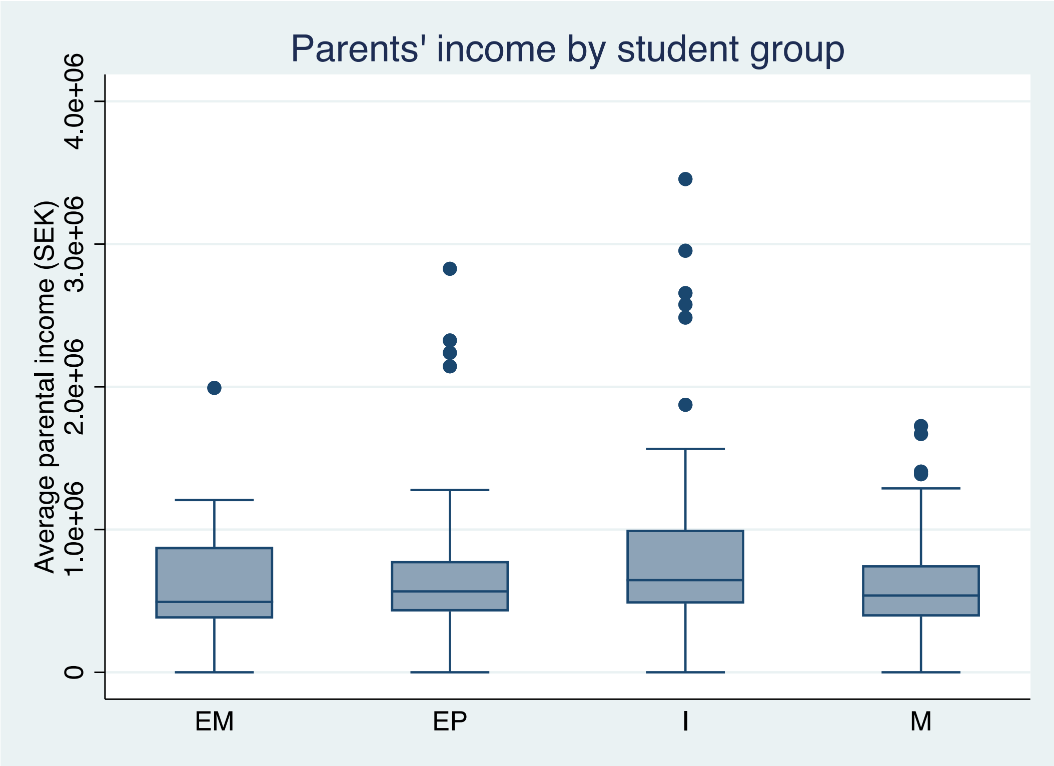


Figure A.1: Box-and-whisker diagram of average annual parental income in 2019 measured in millions of SEK for each of the four student groups: Engineering Mathematics (EM), Engineering Physics (EP), Industrial Engineering (I), and Mechanical Engineering (M).

Table A.2
Balance tests

Student characteristic	Full sample	Survey sample	p-value for equality of proportions/means
Treated (%)	39.0	35.8	[0.50]
Female (%)	27.6	32.4	[0.28]
Median income of home municip. (SEK, thousands)	337.29	334.48	[0.49]

Note. Balance test comparing the full sample ($N = 333$) and the survey sample ($N = 151$) with respect to the share of treated students (EM and I), the share of females, as well as the median income of the student's home municipality.

Table A.3

Construction of the socioeconomic status index

Question number	Statement	Alternative	Score
2	In which municipality did you live at the time of your graduation from high school?	290 municipalities	Range: [2.78, 4.43] (the variable Median income of home municipality divided by 100)
3	When growing up, in what type of dwelling did you mainly live?	House	4
		Townhouse	3
		Housing cooperative	2
		Rental apartment	1
4	Does anyone of your parents have a college or university degree?	Yes, both	3
		Yes, but only one parent.	2
		No	1
5	Has anyone of your parents been the CEO or a board member of a publicly listed company?	Yes	4
		No	1
		Don't know	1

Note. The table shows, for each question, the contribution of each response to the socioeconomic status index for student i.

Table A.4
CEO position or board assignment of parents, 2019

Id	Gender	Taxable income (SEK, 2019)	Current assignments (2019)
1	M	5,654,100	1×CEO, 1×board member
2	W	5,241,400	4×CEO, 7×board member
3	M	4,982,400	4×board member
4	M	4,906,000	3×board member
5	M	4,432,000	2×CEO, 3×board member
6	M	3,987,700	1×CEO, 3×board member
7	M	3,857,500	1×board member
8	M	3,602,600	*no current or previous assignments in Sweden*
9	M	3,445,200	*no current or previous assignments in Sweden*
10	W	3,063,200	1×CEO, 2×board member
11	M	3,047,500	1×CEO, 15×board member
12	M	2,839,700	1×board member
13	M	2,652,000	*no current assignment*; until 2003: 1×board member
14	W	2,484,600	1×board member
15	M	2,453,100	7×board member
16	M	2,316,300	*no current or previous assignments in Sweden*
17	W	2,253,800	3×board member
18	M	2,231,500	*no current or previous assignments in Sweden*
19	M	2,022,500	2×board member
20	M	1,937,200	2×CEO, 2×board member

Note. The table shows, for the 20 highest earning parents, whether the individual is a CEO, or has any current (2019) board assignments. If the person had no CEO position or board assignments in 2019, the table shows the year of the last registered CEO position or board assignment.

Table A.5
Summary statistics

Main outcome variable	Mean	Std.dev.	Min	Max
Grade difference (Δy_i)	-0.043	0.689	-1.792	1.609
Second-year grade variables				
Grade, Supply Chain Management	3.989	0.588	3	5
Grade, Complex Analysis	3.989	0.796	3	5
First-year grade variables				
Grade, Operations Management	3.800	0.801	3	5
First-year mathematics GPA	4.002	0.707	3	5
Student-specific variables				
Average parental income (SEK)	687,007.6	465,717.6	0	3,455,200
Female gender	0.281	0.450	0	1
Age	21.059	1.096	19	28
Median income of home municip. (SEK) (thousands, SEK)	337.83	41.51	278.1	443.1

Note. The variable Grade difference is the difference between the second-year grade in Supply Chain Management and first-year grade in Operations Management for I and M students, and the difference between the grade in Complex Analysis and first-year mathematics GPA for EM and EP students.

Table A.6
Summary statistics: 2019 cohort

Main outcome variable	Mean	Std.dev.	Min	Max
Grade difference (Δy_i)	0.164	0.844	-5	2
Second-year grade variables				
Grade, Supply Chain Management	4.317	0.778	3	5
Grade, Complex Analysis	3.958	0.815	3	5
First-year grade variables				
Grade, Operations Management	3.963	0.795	3	5
First-year mathematics GPA	4.013	0.698	3	5
Student-specific variables				
Average parental income (SEK)	693,571.1	502,553.0	0	4,040,300
Female gender	0.374	0.485	0	1
Age	21.164	1.262	19	29
Median income of home municip. (thousands, SEK)	339.585	41.035	278.1	443.4

Note. The variable Grade difference is the difference between the second-year grade in Supply Chain Management and first-year grade in Operations Management for I and M students, and the difference between the grade in Complex Analysis and first-year mathematics GPA for EM and EP students.

Table A.7
Main results with high income dummy

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Treated	0.223	0.170	0.159
	[0.552]	[0.676]	[0.716]
High parental income		-0.263	-0.248
		[0.772]	[0.586]
Female gender		-0.193	-0.186
		[0.730]	[0.574]
Treated		0.158	0.167
× High parental income		[0.606]	[0.574]
Treated		0.045	0.040
× Female gender		[0.836]	[0.824]
High parental income		0.377	0.311
× Female gender		[0.218]	[0.206]
Treated × Female gender		0.454**	0.505**
× High parental income		[0.032]	[0.040]
Student characteristic controls	No	No	Yes
Observations	321	321	319
Mean dep. var.	0.000	0.000	0.000
R^2	0.001	0.012	0.035

Note. Dependent variable: Change in achieved grade between spillover course and equivalent first-year course, 2019 cohort. "High income" referents to students with parents above the top 10% income percentile. A constant is included in all regressions. Columns (1) and (2): No controls. Column (3): Controls for age and median income of home municipality. *P*-values are in square brackets and computed using wild cluster bootstrap with 500 replications, with bootstrap weights drawn from the Webb distribution.

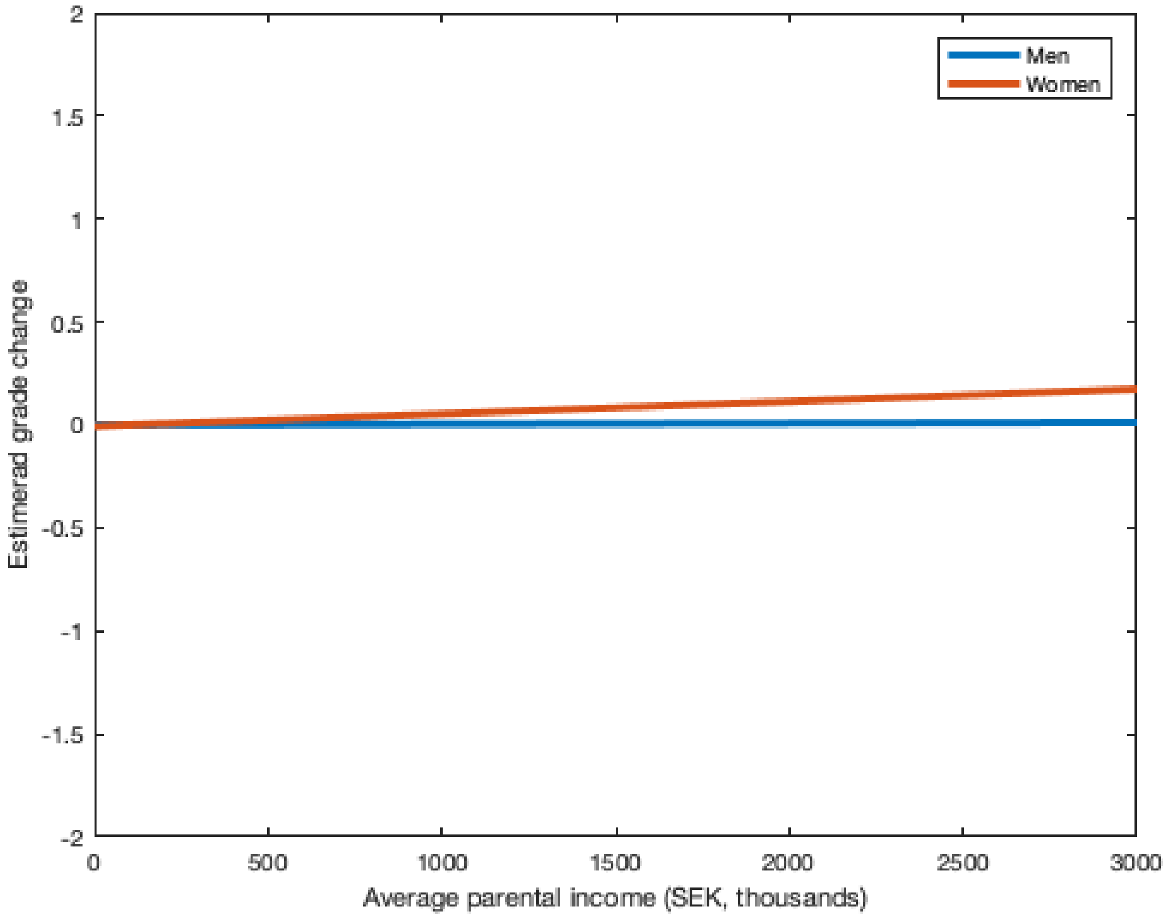


Figure A.2: Plot of the estimated regression coefficients from the main specification for the 2018 cohort, which took both their first and second year courses before the pandemic. The estimated grade change on the vertical axis refers to the difference (in standard deviations) between the second year course and the corresponding first year course.

Table A.8
Balance tests

Student characteristic	Untreated students	Treated students	p-value for equality of proportions/means
Female (%)	25.6	30.8	[0.31]
Median income of home municip. (SEK, thousands)	334.46	341.79	[0.12]
Average age	21.10	20.95	[0.22]
Average parental income (SEK, thousands)	550.40	629.85	[0.12]
Grade, first mathematics course	3.79	3.73	[0.53]

Note. Balance test comparing the full sample ($N = 333$) and the survey sample ($N = 151$) with respect to the share of treated students (EM and I), the share of females, as well as the median income of the student's home municipality.

Table A.9
Baseline grades

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Treated	0.585	0.548	0.598
	[0.346]	[0.340]	[0.306]
Average parental income		0.000	0.000
(SEK, 10,000s)		[0.298]	[0.184]
Female gender		−0.377	−0.087
		[0.152]	[0.610]
Treated		0.000	0.000
× Average parental income		[0.540]	[0.414]
Treated		0.603	0.335
× Female gender		[0.112]	[0.374]
Average parental income		0.00	0.000
× Female gender		[0.602]	[0.260]
Treated × Female gender		0.000	0.008
× Average parental income		[0.232]	[0.302]
Student characteristic controls	No	No	Yes
Observations	321	321	319
Mean dep. var.	0.000	0.000	0.000
R^2	0.080	0.095	0.133

Note. Dependent variable: Change in achieved grade between spillover course and equivalent first-year course, 2019 cohort. A constant is included in all regressions. Columns (1) and (2): No controls. Column (3): Controls for age and median income of home municipality. P-values are in square brackets and computed using wild cluster bootstrap with 500 replications, with bootstrap weights drawn from the Webb distribution.

Table A.10
Share of study time allocated to courses

Course	Treated groups	Untreated groups	F-stat.	N
Complex Analysis	50.417	54.400	–0.55	53
	(5.092)	(1.769)	[0.46]	
Supply Chain Management	23.048	22.018	0.22	98
	(1.465)	(1.511)	[0.64]	
N	54	97		

Note. Self-estimated study time (in percent) allocated to Complex Analysis (for EM and EM), and Supply Chain Management (for I and M) with standard errors in brackets. The column entitled "F-stat" refers to the F-statistic for the difference in means between the treated and untreated student groups, with p-values in square brackets.

Table A.11
Spillover effects, first year

	(1)	(2)
Treated	0.060	0.158
	[0.710]	[0.664]
Average parental income		0.004
(SEK, 10,000s)		[0.298]
Female gender		−0.018
		[0.824]
Treated		−0.002
× Average parental income		[0.418]
Treated		0.166
× Female gender		[0.584]
Average parental income		−0.001
× Female gender		[0.886]
Treated × Female gender		−0.001
× Average parental income		[0.584]
Student characteristic controls	No	Yes
Observations	464	462
Mean dep. var.	0.000	0.000
R^2	0.001	0.024

Note. Dependent variable: Change in achieved grade between second semester and first semester mathematics courses for both the 2019 and 2020 cohorts. A constant is included in all regressions. Column (1): No controls. Column (2): Controls for age and median income of home municipality. P-values are in square brackets and computed using wild cluster bootstrap with 500 replications, with bootstrap weights drawn from the Webb distribution.

Table A.12
Pre-pandemic satisfaction

	(1)	(2)
Treated	0.133	0.036
	[0.132]	[0.794]
Socioeconomic status index		−0.036
		[0.358]
Female gender		0.018
		[0.690]
Treated		−0.056
× Socioeconomic status index		[0.788]
Treated		−0.007
× Female gender		[0.946]
Socioeconomic status index		−0.002
× Female gender		[0.934]
Treated × Female gender		−0.130
× Socioeconomic status index		[0.688]
Student characteristic controls	No	Yes
Observations	149	135
Mean dep. var.	4.07	4.07
R^2	0.006	0.053

Note. Dependent variable: "On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is very dissatisfied, and 5 is very satisfied, how satisfied were you with the quality of your life during the period immediately before the onset of the pandemic (February/March 2020)? Here, we mean well-being broadly speaking, joy of life, view of the future, and so on." A constant is included in all regressions. Column (1): No controls. Column (2): Control for self-estimated popularity. P-values are in square brackets and computed using wild cluster bootstrap with 500 replications, with bootstrap weights drawn from the Webb distribution.

Table A.13
Network constraint: Alternative channels

	(1)	(2)
Panel A:		
Median income of home municipality (SEK, thousands)	−0.010	−0.006
	(0.044)	(0.046)
R^2	0.000	0.002
Panel B:		
Population of home municipality (thousands)	−0.001	−0.001
	(0.008)	(0.008)
R^2	0.000	0.002
Student characteristic controls	No	Yes
Observations	112	112
Mean dep. var.	58.81	58.81

Note. Dependent variable: Network constraint (×100). A constant is included in all regressions. Column (1): No controls. Column (2), Panel A: Controls for age. Column (2), Panel B: Controls for age and median income of home municipality. Heteroscedasticity-robust standard errors in brackets.

Table A.14

Non-grade outcomes, Nov–Dec

	Adverse mental effects			Afraid of contracting virus		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Treated	−0.179	−0.086*	−0.296	−0.026	0.125**	0.223
	[0.468]	[0.086]	[0.440]	[0.698]	[0.048]	[0.464]
Socioeconomic status index			−0.183			0.092
			[0.188]			[0.782]
Female gender			0.534			0.622
			[0.204]			[0.214]
Treated			−0.184			−0.314
× Socioeconomic status index			[0.428]			[0.286]
Treated			−0.083			−0.205
× Female gender			[0.654]			[0.774]
Socioeconomic status index			−0.411			−0.090*
× Female gender			[0.756]			[0.100]
Treated × Female gender			0.035			0.745
× Socioeconomic status index			[0.876]			[0.464]
Student characteristic controls	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Observations	149	134	134	150	135	135
Mean dep. var.	3.53	3.53	3.53	2.63	2.63	2.63
R^2	0.006	0.034	0.093	0.000	0.058	0.126

Note. Dependent variable: ”How was your mental health affected by the pandemic”, and ”How worried were you about contracting COVID-19”, respectively. Both variables are measured on a scale from 1 to 5, for the period November–December. A constant is included in all regressions. Columns (1) and (4): No controls. Columns (2)–(3) and (5)–(6): Controls for pre-pandemic life satisfaction and self-estimated popularity. *P*-values are in square brackets and computed using wild cluster bootstrap with 500 replications, with bootstrap weights drawn from the Webb distribution. * and ** denote significance at the 10% and 5% level, respectively.

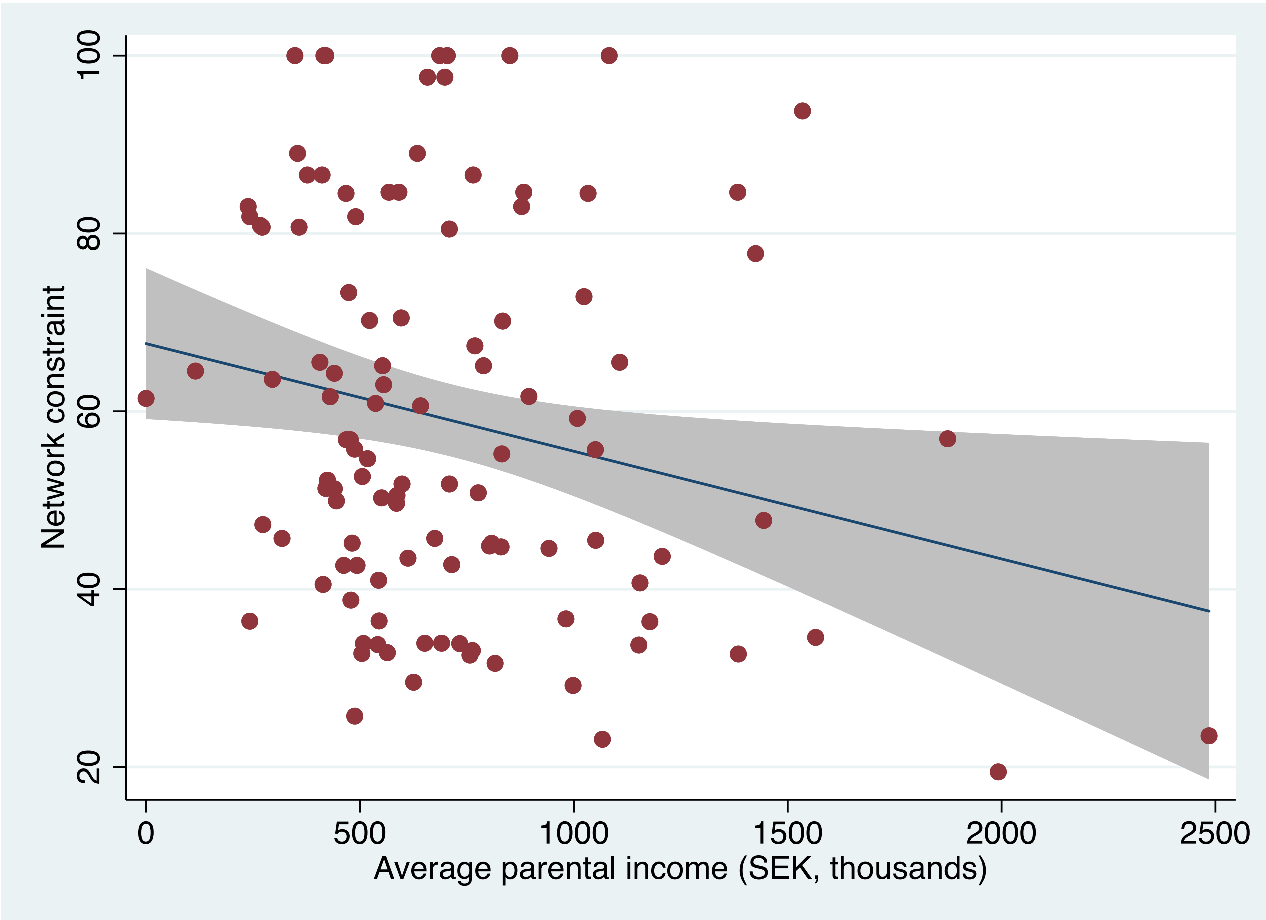


Figure A.3: Scatter plot of the relationship between average parental income on the horizontal axis and network constraint ($\times$ 100) on the vertical axis, with 95% confidence bands around the estimated regression line. *Note.* Three observations, each with average parental income above SEK 2,500,000, were omitted from the figure for reasons of visual clarity.

B. Data Description and Data Sources

This subsection describes the construction of the variables used in the empirical analysis in additional detail.

Academic outcomes. All grade data comes from LADOK, which is the student administration system used at Lund University.

Parental income. To obtain the data on parents' income, we first retrieved the personal identity numbers (social security numbers) of both parents using the population registry. Then, we proceeded by using the Tax Agency's data on taxable income for the latest available year, 2019.[20] This figure includes earned income, but excludes capital gains. In accordance with the Swedish Constitution, both the personal identity numbers and the tax records are publicly available information.

Additional personal data. Using the population registry, it is straightforward to retrieve additional demographic characteristics for our sampled students. In this paper, we use gender, as well as the name of the municipality where students resided before starting university. The penultimate digit in the 12-digit personal identity number gives the gender at birth, being odd for men and even for women.

Municipality median income and population. As a control variable in our regressions in Section IV, we use the median disposable income for each municipality for the latest available year, 2018, and for individuals aged 20–64. In Section V.B, we additionally utilize data on the population of students' home municipalities for robustness checks. The data source for both of these variables is the Swedish Statistics Agency.

Parental CEO and/or board assignments. The robustness check presented in Table A.4 of Online Appendix A confirms that most of the wealthiest parents had either a CEO position or board assignment in 2019. This data comes from the Swedish Companies Registration Office, a government agency.

[20] In the robustness checks for the previous cohort, we used tax records from 2018.

C. Survey Construction

The following section describes each question used in our survey in additional detail.

1. What is your gender?

- [ ] Male
- [ ] Female
- [ ] Prefer not to specify.

2. In which municipality did you live at the time of your graduation from high school?

____

3. When growing up, in what type of dwelling did you mainly live?

- [ ] House
- [ ] Housing cooperative
- [ ] Rental apartment
- [ ] Townhouse

4. Does anyone of your parents have a college or university degree?

- [ ] Yes, both.
- [ ] Yes, but only one parent.
- [ ] No

5. Has anyone of your parents been the CEO or a board member of a publicly listed company?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
- [ ] Don't know.

6. Much of last semester[21] was online. Did you at any point during the semester move back to live with your parents because of this?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
- [ ] I already live with my parents.

7. During the period September–October[22] last semester, how large a share (in %) of your total time spent studying, did you spend on each of the following courses? By

[21] Refers to Fall 2020.

[22] Since M students took the course in supply chain management in the second half of the semester, this changes to November–December M students.

”time spent studying”, we mean the sum of lectures, exercise sessions, self-study, exam cramming, and so on. It should sum to 100.

[insert course 1][23]
[insert course 2]
[insert course 3]

8. On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is very uninteresting, and 5 is super-interesting, how would you rate each of the following courses?

[insert course 1]
[insert course 2]
[insert course 3]

9. On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is almost never, and 5 is daily, how often did you study together with your classmates when studying the following courses? Here, we mean both physical meetings, as well as group chats through Messenger, Zoom, and so on.

[insert course 1]
[insert course 2]
[insert course 3]

10. On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is almost never, and 5 is daily, how often did you study together with your classmates when studying the following courses? Now, we mean physical meetings only.

[insert course 1]
[insert course 2]
[insert course 3]

11. On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is not worried at all, and 5 is very worried, how worried were you about contracting COVID-19?

During September–October.
During November–December. 12. On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is not negatively at all, and 5 is very negatively, how was your mental health affected by the pandemic? Here, we refer to the lack of social contacts, fewer in-person lectures, boredom, and so on.

During September–October.

[23] This differs between programs as follows:

EM: Complex Analysis, Mathematical Statistics, Microeconomic Theory

EP: Complex Analysis, Dynamics, Statistical Thermodynamics

I: Mathematical Statistics, Microeconomic Theory, Supply Chain Management

M: Mechanics, Supply Chain Management, Thermodynamics and Fluid Mechanics

During November–December.

13. On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is not motivated at all, and 5 is extremely motivated, how motivated were you in your studies last semester, generally speaking?

During September–October.
During November–December.

14. On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is very dissatisfied, and 5 is very satisfied, how satisfied were you with the quality of your life last semester? Here, we mean well-being broadly speaking, joy of life, view of the future, and so on.

During September–October.
During November–December.

15. Same question as above, only referring to the period immediately before the onset of the pandemic (February/March 2020).

16. Immediately before the pandemic, how active were you in student life? Here, 1 means not active at all, and 5 means very active.

17. What is your view on the restrictions imposed in Sweden in response to the spread of the virus?

☐ Well-balanced[24]
☐ Too harsh.
☐ Too lenient.

18. A question regarding people you know (friends and acquaintances). On a scale from 1 to 5, how many of them know each other? Here, 1 means that none of my friends and acquaintances know each other, and 5 means that almost all of my friends and acquaintances know each other.

19. How large a share (in %) of your classmates are in each of the following categories? It should sum to 100.

[24] The Swedish adverb used here, *lagom*, has no one-word translation into English. Other suggestions include ”about right”, or ”just enough”.

 They are my close friends, and we can talk about anything!

 They are my friends, but I do not know them well enough to talk about deeper stuff.

 I know them, and maybe talk to them when I meet them, but I would never use social media to communicate with them.

 I do not know them, and I never communicate with them.

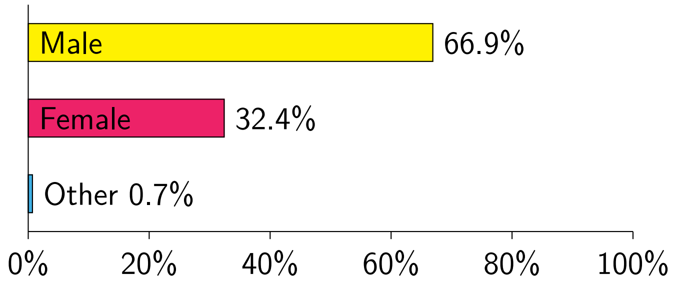
20. On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is not popular at all, and 5 is extremely popular, how do you think your classmates view you?

21. Write down the initials of your five closest classmates.[25]

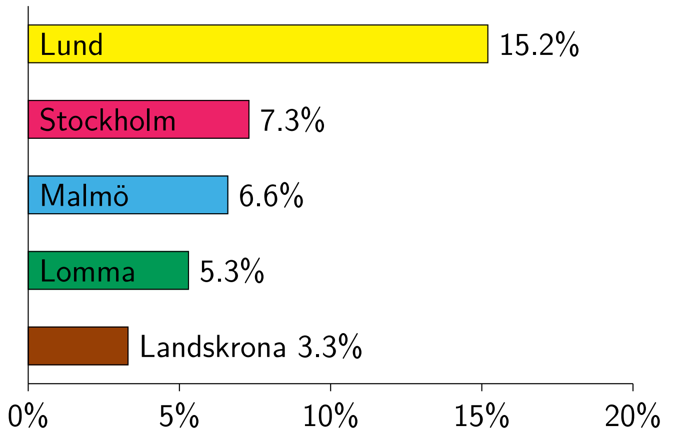
[25] We drop this question for the non-treated students.

D. Survey Results

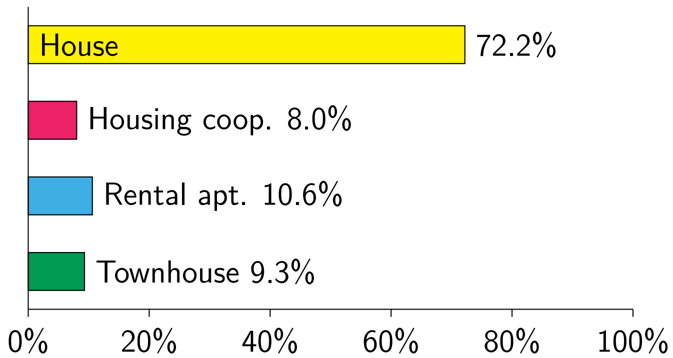
1. What is your gender?



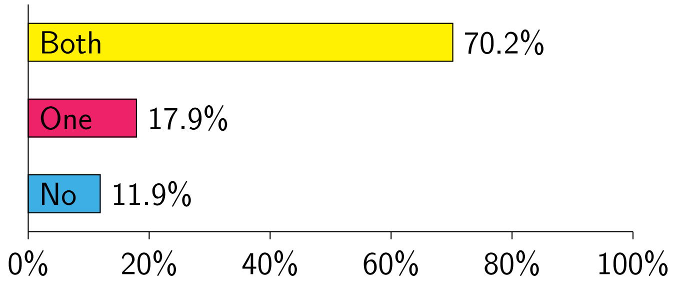
2. In which municipality did you live at the time of your graduation from high school?
   Five most prevalent municipalities:



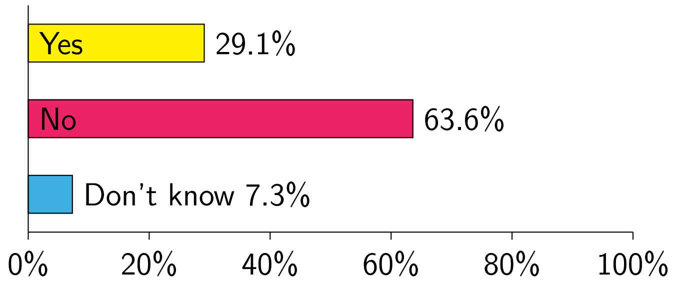
3. When growing up, in what type of dwelling did you mainly live?



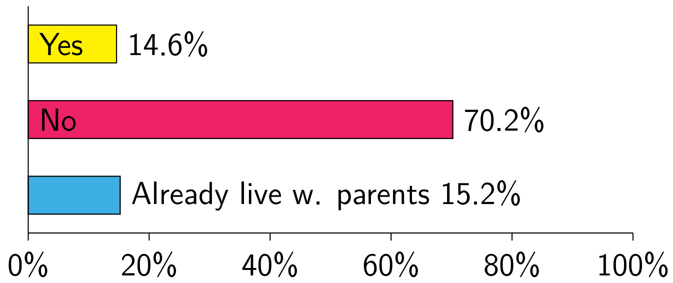
4. Does anyone of your parents have a college or university degree?



5. Has anyone of your parents been the CEO or a board member of a publicly listed company?

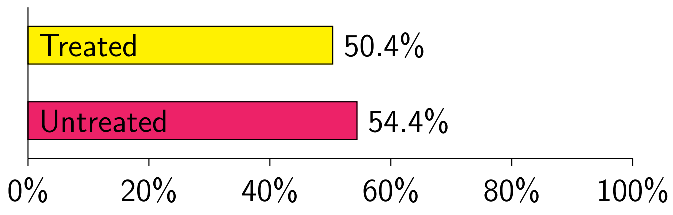


6. Much of last semester was online. Did you at any point during the semester move back to live with your parents because of this?

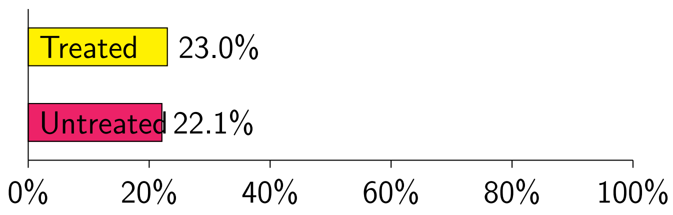


7. During the period September–October last semester, how large a share (in %) of your total time spent studying, did you spend on each of the following courses? By "time spent studying", we mean the sum of lectures, exercise sessions, self-study, exam cramming, and so on. It should sum to 100. *Note.* Only the results for the spillover courses (Complex Analysis and Supply Chain Management) are presented.

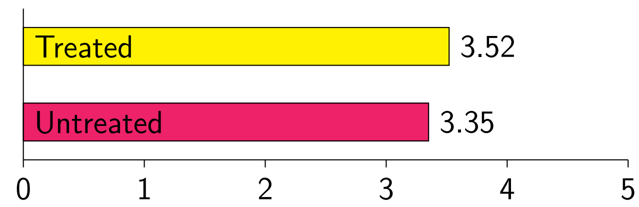
Complex Analysis:



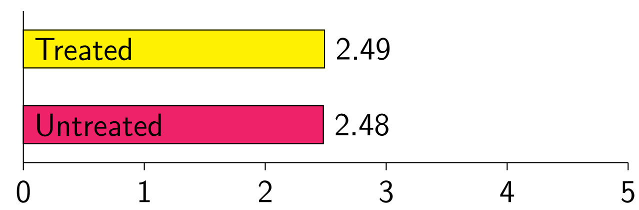
Supply Chain Management:



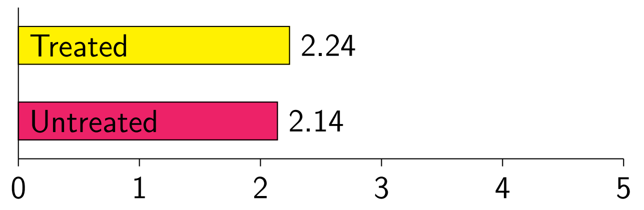
8. On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is very uninteresting, and 5 is super-interesting, how would you rate each of the following courses? *Note.* The table averages over all three courses weighted by ECTS credits, for treated and untreated students.



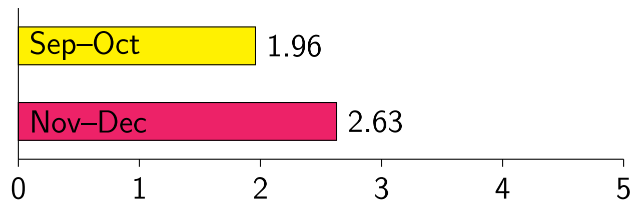
9. On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is almost never, and 5 is daily, how often did you study together with your classmates when studying the following courses? Here, we mean both physical meetings, as well as group chats through Messenger, Zoom, and so on. *Note.* Only the results for the spillover courses (Complex Analysis and Supply Chain Management) are presented.



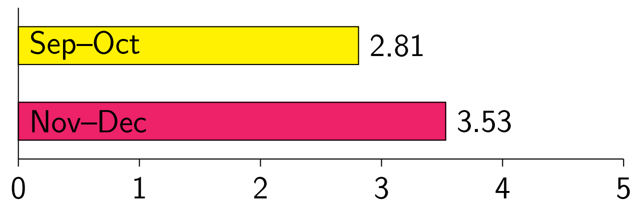
10. On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is almost never, and 5 is daily, how often did you study together with your classmates when studying the following courses? Now, we mean physical meetings only. *Note.* Only the spillover courses (Complex Analysis and Supply Chain Management) are presented.



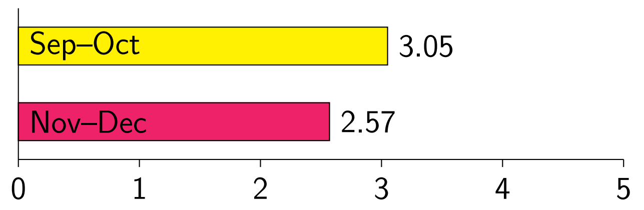
11. On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is not worried at all, and 5 is very worried, how worried were you about contracting COVID-19?



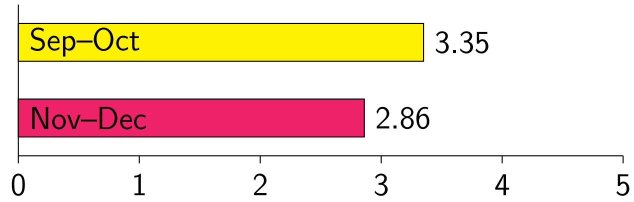
12. On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is not negatively at all, and 5 is very negatively, how was your mental health affected by the pandemic? Here, we refer to the lack of social contacts, fewer in-person lectures, boredom, and so on.



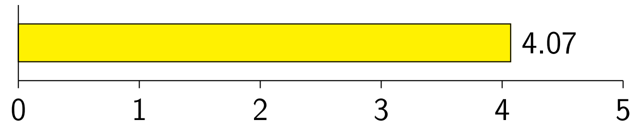
13. On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is not motivated at all, and 5 is extremely motivated, how motivated were you in your studies last semester, generally speaking?



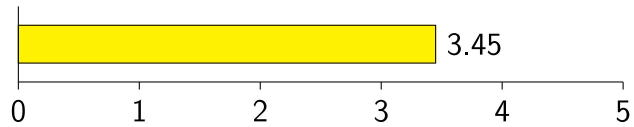
14. On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is very dissatisfied, and 5 is very satisfied, how satisfied were you with the quality of your life last semester? Here, we mean well-being broadly speaking, joy of life, view of the future, and so on.



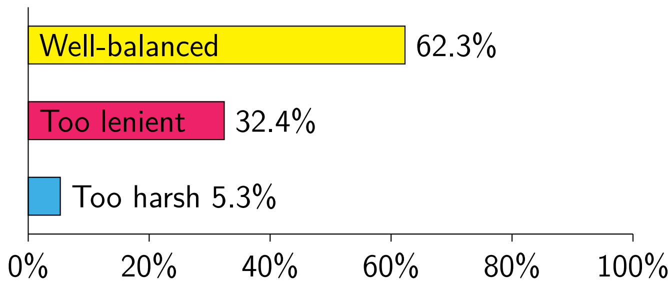
15. Same question as above, only referring to the period immediately before the onset of the pandemic (February/March 2020).



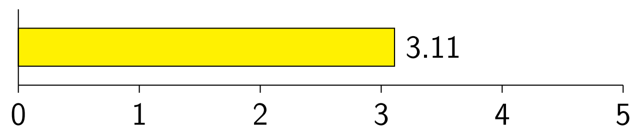
16. Immediately before the pandemic, how active were you in student life? Here, 1 means not active at all, and 5 means very active.



17. What is your view on the restrictions imposed in Sweden in response to the spread of the virus?

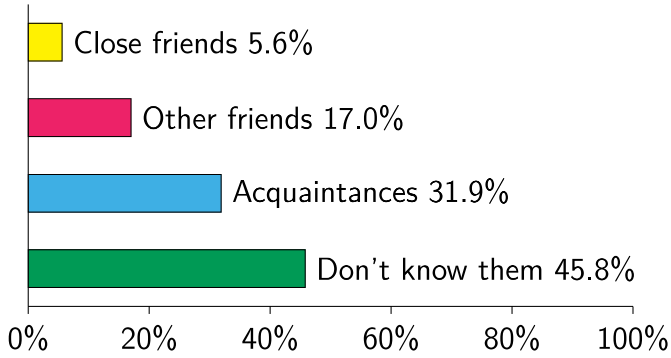


18. A question regarding people you know (friends and acquaintances). On a scale from 1 to 5, how many of them know each other? Here, 1 means that none of my friends and acquaintances know each other, and 5 means that almost all of my friends and acquaintances know each other.



19. How large a share (in %) of your classmates are in each of the following categories?

It should sum to 100.



20. On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is not popular at all, and 5 is extremely popular, how do you think your classmates view you?