Charassein 2019- Year in Review

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

The year 2019 has been another great year for Charassein. We continued learning, having fun, and doing great work!

We continued analyzing the potential educational benefits of campus visits by middle school students. We disseminated our first participating cohort effects as a working paper and our results were highlighted in an article at the Education news outlet Chalkbeat. We also published our work in prestigious academic journals and presented our results in multiple conferences. Our work on the role of differential student effort on PISA scores got published at the Journal of Human Capital and our results were recently featured in a Washington Post article. Our collaborative project in Spain “Educar para Ser” continues to spark interest across schools in Spain and abroad, and Jay Greene and his team continue to do interesting work on arts education. You can check out their work here.

I am also very grateful for having the opportunity of discussing my views on the gender confidence gap and how it affects education and career choices at the University of Arkansas Association for Women in Science seminar series. I also enjoyed very much leading an informal session here, at the College of Education and Health Professions, discussing the state of research in the field of Socio-Emotional learning, as part of CLASS-SIG, the new initiative sponsored by College Council. I look forward to future collaborations within the college.

Make sure to visit our webpage or follow us on Twitter and Facebook if you want to keep up with our work. Below you have a brief summary of all this work we have done during this past year. I want to wish you all a happy holiday season and the best for 2020!

Warm regards,

Gema Zamarro

Professor & 21st Century Endowed Chair in Teacher Quality
Director of Charassein: The Character Assessment Initiative
**Charassein Research Progress in 2019**

During 2019 we have circulated 3 new working papers, published 3 articles in prestigious journals, and presented our research in multiple sessions in APPAM, AEFP, AERA, and other relevant conferences:

- **When Students Don’t Care: Reexamining International Differences in Achievement and Non-Cognitive Skills**, Gema Zamarro, Colling Hitt & Ildefonso Mendez, *Journal of Human Capital*.


Selected Ongoing projects

An Evaluation of the Educational Impact of College Campus Visits: A Randomized Experiment

This project studies the degree to which visits to a college campus during middle school could reduce barriers to college access, specifically for disadvantaged students. This study is motivated by the belief that a lack of familiarity with college experiences poses a non-trivial barrier to entry that is often overlooked by previous interventions aimed at improving college access. In particular, we are studying the extent to which campus experiences impact college behaviors, attitudes, academic outcomes, and college attendance; thereby allowing us to determine if this relatively inexpensive and easy to implement intervention can have mean meaningful impacts on college access.

Who Strives when the Test Gets Harder? Disentangling Patterns of Student Effort in PISA

In low-stakes tests, students’ incentives to invest their maximum effort might not be optimal. Thus, differences in test performance may reflect not only differences in student knowledge but also differences in student effort. Research stresses that ignoring effort when interpreting results from low-stakes assessments can lead to biased interpretations. An important related question is to what extent test
structure, in particular, question difficulty order, could affect student performance and effort. In this project, we use data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), a low-stakes test, in which the order of questions and their levels of difficulty vary randomly across test booklets. We study the role that the difficulty of a prior set of questions might have in shaping performance and effort throughout the test, whether this effect differs by subject, and whether it helps explain gender achievement gaps.

Assessing the Impact of Holocaust Education on Adolescents’ Civic Values: Experimental Evidence from Arkansas

In this project, we study the potential benefits of Holocaust education programming on high school students’ civic values. This study is motivated by the belief that studying periods of history in which civic values were tested can help shape or strengthen those values in students, a belief held by many history scholars and teachers. Despite this theory of Holocaust education’s benefits, few states mandate any form of Holocaust education, and a recent survey of Holocaust knowledge and awareness reveals low levels of knowledge of basic facts of the Holocaust among U.S. adults. We evaluate the Arkansas Holocaust Education Conference to understand if such interventions have benefits for adolescents’ civic values.

Welcome and Goodbyes

Molly Beck and Matthew Lee joined our Charassein group as research fellows and are doing relevant and interesting work on the impact of Holocaust education. Charassein research fellow Elise Swanson graduated with her Ph.D. degree last spring and left us to take an exciting position as a postdoctoral research associate in the Pullias Center for Higher Education at the USC Rossier School of Education. We miss Elise a lot but we know she is doing great work at USC!