Abstract:

Early warning systems are a class of risk prediction tools that have recently become part of the de facto approach towards improving high school graduation rates in the United States. These systems aim to help schools efficiently target resources to students by predicting which individuals are least likely to graduate, and hence need the most help. In this talk, I will present the results of a collaboration with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction in which we conducted the first large-scale evaluation of the long-term impacts of early warning systems on high school graduation rates. Using a decade’s worth of data and models, we find that risk assessments made by the system have been highly accurate at predicting student dropout, yet ineffective in improving outcomes. We will see how both of these findings can be simultaneously explained by the influence of structural, social factors. We will close with broader discussion regarding the broader policy implications of our work.