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You've got mail: The impact of online message-boards on performance in first year undergraduate mathematics and statistical methods units.

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Abstract

As a supplement to face-to-face lectures and classes, message board software was introduced in a first year mathematics and statistical methods unit in a UK Russell Group University. Fifty percent of students signed up to this unit, so when combined with a further first-year mathematics and statistical methods unit, without message board software, this enabled the opportunity to use a difference in difference methodology to find the *causal* impact of message board software on student examination performance. The results suggest that students who actively engage with message boards perform significantly better than students who sign up for the message boards, but neither ask, nor answer, questions. However, the results for the impact compared to non-participants is mixed, and may be related to behavioural change in students.

1. Introduction

In England, the de-regulation of fees and student numbers has meant a growth in cohort sizes for subjects such as economics, with cohort sizes of 600 not uncommon.

These large cohorts bring many opportunities for pedagogical innovation, but also bring in significant costs. Students, on arrival at University, are often very happy to send questions to their lecturers via e-mail, often leading to the same (or at least

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