Application to NBER Health Economics Boot Camp 2019

Dear Madam, Dear Sir,

I would like to apply for the NBER Health Economics Boot Camp 2019.

I am Rossi ABI RAFEH, a fourth-year PhD student at Toulouse School of Economics. I am visiting Professor Pierre Dubois at the economics department at Harvard University for the fall term.

If accepted, I will not be needing a travel or accommodation expenses and will benefit greatly from the seminars and interactions with the seminar participants. I heard about your Boot Camp through Scott Cunningham's twitter feed.

I am including in my application an essay summarizing my research agenda and an updated resume including the list of PhD courses I have attended at Toulouse and Harvard.

Kindest regards,
Rossi

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Pierre Dubois
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Visiting Professor of Economics, Harvard University (2019-2020)
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PhD Advisor

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PhD CANDIDATE, TOULOUSE SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

Advisor Pierre Dubois
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Graduate Studies:

Toulouse School of Economics, 2016 to present
Ph.D. Candidate in Economics

Visiting Positions:

Fall, 2019	Associate at the Department of Economics, Harvard University

Previous Studies:

MPhil, Economics and Econometrics, TSE, with distinction, 2016
MSc, Economics, London School of Economics, 2014
MSc, Statistics and Econometrics, ENSAE, 2014

Teaching and Research Fields:

Primary fields: Industrial organization, Applied Econometrics
Secondary fields: Health economics, Digital economy

Teaching Experience:

Fall, 2017/8	R programming for Econometrics - graduate, TSE
Spring, 2017	Econometrics of Program Evaluation - graduate, TSE, TA for Professors Isis Durrmeyer, Thierry Magnac and Nour Meddahi
Fall, 2016	Intermediate Econometrics, TSE, TA for Professor Catherine Cazals

Research Experience and Other Employment:

2018 - 2019	TSE, Research assistant for Professor Christina Gualdani
2014 - 2015	CNRS (National Center for Scientific Research), Research scientist (PI : Gael Giraud)
2014	Grantham Institute LSE, Research assistant for Professor Declan Conway

Honors, Scholarships, and Fellowships:

2019	GEMCLIME - Marie Curie Fellowship

2019	Winner of the competition of the *"Shaping competition policy in the digital age"* conference organized by Commissioner Margrethe Vestager
2016-19	Toulouse School of Economics Graduate fellowship
2015-16	Jean-Jacques Laffont scholarship
2014	FII Data Challenge Grand Prize (5000 USD)
2008	Ranked 2nd in Lebanon's National Baccalaureate exam (senior year of high school)

Graduate courses attended

At TSE:

Economic Theory (Johannes Horner and Jean Tirole)
Econometrics (Thierry Magnac and Pascal Lavergne)
Empirical Industrial Organization (Ana Gazmuri and Christian Bontemps)
Industrial Organization - Theory (Andrew Rhodes, Bruno Jullien and Patrick Rey)

At Harvard:

Industrial Organization (Ariel Pakes and Robin Lee)
Health Economics Reading group (organized by Joseph Newhouse)

Publications:

"The Use of Distributional Weights in Benefit–Cost Analysis: Insights from Welfare Economics", with Marc Fleurbaey. 2016. Review of Environmental Economics and Policy.

> This article examines how distributional weights can be introduced into benefit–cost analysis (BCA) by using insights from recent developments in welfare economics, in particular the theory of fair social allocation and happiness studies. We argue that it is easier than commonly believed to design weights that embody the Paretian and equity properties of a well-crafted social welfare function. However, the informational requirements for such weights suggest that it may be helpful to examine the potential for simpler weights (e.g., based on simple objective indexes of well-being) to provide reasonable approximations of ideal weights for use in BCA.

Work in Progress:

"Physician incentives and Medicare Part B pricing"

"Dynamic pricing by new sellers on two-sided platforms" - with Emil Palikot
Presented at CORE digitization workshop and Warwick PhD workshop, X IBEO workshop, CRESSE, EARIE (2019), Harvard Graduate IO workshop (Fall 2019)

"Dynamic effects of taxation of carbonated drinks and their advertising" - with Pierre Dubois, Rachel Griffith and Martin O'Connell

Policy reports:

"Mobile Money and Livelihoods in India", with Chandni Raja and Joshua Bernstein. 2014.

Essay

I am a PhD candidate in Economics at Toulouse School of Economics. My primary research fields are industrial organization and applied econometrics. I am starting new research projects in healthcare and I wish to attend the boot camp in order to be better equipped to formulate and tackle frontier research questions on healthcare markets. I did not have the opportunity to attend a health economics track at Toulouse. Instead, I am following the Health Economics reading group at Harvard this fall. Your bootcamp with its focus on IO, public finance and behavioral economics will be very useful for me to refine my current research questions in health economics, connect them with my toolkit of IO and dynamic methods, and hopefully build my research agenda at the frontier of research in this field.

I have a project at the intersection of industrial organization and public health: With Pierre Dubois (TSE), Rachel Griffith (IFS) and Martin O'Connell (IFS), we are analyzing the dynamic effects of a sales and advertisement tax on the demand, supply and advertisement dynamics of junk food. In Dubois, Griffith and O'Connell (2018), the authors showed how a full ban on advertisement of potato crisps induces stronger price competition between firms, thus dampening the effects on the demand for crisps. In this project, we allow for dynamic counterfactuals that involve partial bans on ads or interactions with sales taxes using UK data on fizzy drinks consumption and advertisement.

I am currently exploring a few directions in research on healthcare markets:

First, I am interested in physician agency and incentives. A first direction is studying the incentives that Medicare Part B insurance regime creates for physicians to use high-price drugs, as well as the resulting increase in prices from the side of the pharmaceutical companies. Medicare Part B covers physician fees generally, and reimburses also drugs that are physician-administered, including some high-value drugs and biologics. While Medicare Part D drugs are prescribed by the physician and bought by the patient at a pharmacy, Part B drugs are bought, stored and administered directly by the physician. The physician is then reimbursed 106% of the average sales price of the drug. The 6% is called the handling fee and was designed to compensate physicians for the need to store and handle the drug. However, this handling fee can constitute a source of profit for the physicians: one new hemophilia patient generates more than 8000 USD a year in the handling fees alone for the physician, regardless of the physician fees. A single line of cancer treatment for a single patient can generate between 1000 and 3000 USD a year in handling fees depending on the type of the treatment. In a first pass, I am merging physician-level annual Medicare Part D and Part B utilization data from the CMS datasets. The CMS also includes information about charges reimbursed to the physician. In a first pass, I would like to estimate a physician-patient discrete choice model for drugs within a therapeutic

class, allowing for differential physician incentives between prescription drugs (part D) and directly administered drugs (part D).

Second, I am interested in patients' access to mental health services, specifically whether gate-keeping by a primary healthcare provider prevent patients access to specialist mental healthcare. In 2015, nearly 8 million patients have sought mental healthcare services in France, most of them suffering from light to mild depression. Psychotherapy is the recommended first-line treatment in this case but is not generally covered by social security while drug-based therapies and psychiatrist visits are. Concomitantly, France has a high level of anti-depressant use relative to its European peers. In response, the French NIH started evaluating the effect of full coverage of office-based psychotherapy in 2018. However, even in the trials, access to the specialist psychotherapist without out-of-pocket expenses is still conditional on a referral from the patient's primary care physician. It is then important to understand the effect of gate-keeping by the primary care physician on access to specialized mental healthcare, and the difference in treatment choices by GPs and specialists. To do so, we hope to use the variation in mental health outcomes around an exogenous discontinuity in reimbursement rates for direct psychiatrist visits around the age of 25 in France. Patients aged 25 and below can directly visit the psychiatrist without out-of-pocket expenses, whereas older patients have to go through their GP or face higher co-pays if they visit the psychiatrist directly. We are currently requesting access to a nationally representative dataset of patient-level claims. We would like to compare the mental health outcomes (anti- depressant prescriptions and planned and unplanned hospitalizations for depressive episodes) between patients above and below 25 years.

In the long run, I would like to build a research agenda where I explore further how physician behavior changes over time under the influence of two factors: interactions with pharmaceutical companies, and digitization (through platforms like Doctolib in Europe). I also have an ongoing empirical project in the economics of digitization with Emil Palikot (TSE) where we analyze the pricing behavior of new sellers on a two-sided platform and show evidence of large heterogeneity of the disutility of using the platform between the sellers, as well as strategic pricing by the sellers.

Pierre Dubois
Toulouse School of Economics
Professor of Economics
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email: pierre.dubois@tse-fr.eu
Visiting professor, department of economics, Harvard University (2019-2020)

October 10 2019

Recommendation of Rossi Abi-Rafeh to the Health Economics Research Boot Camp for Graduate Students at NBER on December 3-5, 2019 in Cambridge, MA

To Ben Handel, Katherine Ho, Jonathan Kolstad:

Dear Ben, Kate, Jonathan,

I am writing to recommend very strongly Rossi Abi-Rafeh (who is a PhD candidate at the Toulouse School of Economics under my supervision) to the Health Economics Research Boot Camp for Graduate Students which is going to happen at NBER on December 3-5, 2019 in Cambridge, MA. Rossi is in his 4th year and is doing his research in the field of industrial organization with some application in Health. As I'm visiting Harvard University for the full academic year, I have him visiting Harvard economics department from September until the end of December 2019. He is thus currently living in Cambridge.

He is an excellent student, very active and smart. He is interested in public health and healthcare markets as well as economics of digitization. But let me summarize some of his diverse work.

Rossi has further ongoing work in health economics. Using United States CMS data, he has recently started a project to study the effect of Medicare part B reimbursement rules on the incentives of physicians and the pricing of drugs, and is currently applying for administrative French health insurance data to study the role of primary care physicians in young adults' access to mental health therapy.

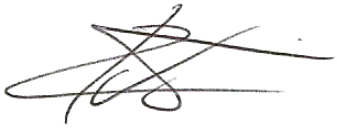
Rossi is also working with me, Rachel Griffith (Manchester, IFS London) and Martin O'Connell (IFS London) on a project analyzing the effect of a sales tax or partial advertisement ban on the advertisement and price dynamics of sugary soft drinks in the UK.

Finally, Rossi has a project with Emil Palikot (PhD student at TSE) where they analyze the pricing behavior of new sellers on a two-sided platform. They exploit a rich dataset on rides offered on Blablacar, a major online ride-sharing marketplace. They use a structural model to estimate the seller's marginal costs and opportunity cost, and test whether drivers engage in introductory discounts (dynamic pricing) or learn about their costs.

Prior to starting his PhD, Rossi was salutatorian in his MPhil at Toulouse, co-authored a survey on fair cost-benefit evaluation with Professor Marc Fleurbaey, and has an MSc in Economics from the LSE, and an MSc in statistics and econometrics from ENSAE Paris.

On the personal side, he is extremely nice and constructive with great social skills. An example of student you would like to have in workshops.

Sincerely yours,



Pierre DUBOIS