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"Accounting" for Last Names: The Effect of Surname Initial on Success in Academia

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Background and Hypotheses

Introduction

- Academic journals typically follow conventions of ordering authors by surname initial in both the title page as well as the bibliography section.
- Einav and Yariv (2006) find significant effects from the alphabetical placement of an Economics professor’s last name on their likelihood of gaining tenure.
- While the majority of accounting journals follow alphabetical conventions, some order the authors strictly on reported contribution.

Hypotheses

H1a: There exists a negative relationship between the likelihood of being tenured and surname number letter (A = 1, B = 2, C = 3 . . . Z = 26).

H1b: The relationship between tenure likelihood and surname number letter is moderated by the rank of the university.

H2: Professors with last names towards the beginning of the alphabet are paid more than their last-half counterparts.

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Methodology

Data

- The BYU Accounting Research Rankings database provided us with professor name, affiliation rank, and tenure status information.
- Using the names of the professors, we hand-coded their gender and whether they were Asian.
- We retrieved salary data for professors affiliated with the top-ten public universities.

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Female	0.24	0.43	0	1
Asian	0.21	0.41	0	1
Tenured	0.7	0.46	0	1
Years After Graduation	19	12.5	0	57
Last Half	0.42	0.49	0	1
Letter Number	12.44	7.6	1	26
Current Affiliation Rank	13.87	8.58	1	30
Salary	226,668	58,476	95,034	399,474

Controlling for Ethnicity

- We address the concern that a disproportionate amount of Asians in academia may influence our results (due to somewhat common last names).
- In some models we include Asian as a control variable; in others, we simply omit these observations.

Regression Model

To test our hypotheses, we replicate the model set forth by Einav and Yariv (2006):

$$\text{tenure} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Letter_Number} + \beta_2 \text{Asian} + \epsilon$$

$$\text{salary} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Letter_Number} + \beta_2 \text{Female} + \beta_3 \text{Asian} + \beta_4 \text{Tenured} + \epsilon$$

Results

Tenure

- We find that as a professor’s surname initial increases, their likelihood of being tenured decreases.
- For the Top 10 sample, this effect size is larger.
- The estimates lose statistical significance for the sample of Top 20-30 programs, indicating that the relationship between surname and tenure is moderated by university prestige.

The Impact of Surname Initial Number on Tenure Likelihood

Dependent variable: Tenure (1 if tenured, 0 otherwise)	Top 30 Schools	Top 30, no Asian	Top 10 Schools	Top 10, no Asian	Top 20-30 Schools	Top 20-30, no Asian
	dF/dx (SE)	dF/dx (SE)	dF/dx (SE)	dF/dx (SE)	dF/dx (SE)	dF/dx (SE)
Letter_	-0.005**	-0.005*	-0.009**	-0.007*	0.004	0.005
Number	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.005)
Asian			-0.044		-0.151**	
	(0.043)		(0.072)		(0.072)	
Observations	723	569	291	241	197	134
R-squared	0.008	0.005	0.020	0.013	0.022	0.009

*, **, *** indicates significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% level respectively

Salary

- We find a negative relationship between salary and surname initial (A = 1, B = 2, C = 3 . . . Z = 26).
- Our estimates indicate a \$20,000 decrease for being in the last half of the alphabet, or a \$1,000 decrease per letter.
- We contribute to the developing last-name literature by identifying the moderating effect of school rank on tenure status, and we observe that this effect as it applies to salaries.

The Impact of Surname Initial on Salary

Dependent variable: Salary	Last_Half	Last_Half w/ Controls	Letter_Number	Letter_Number w/ Controls
	Estimates (SE)	Estimates (SE)	Estimates (SE)	Estimates (SE)
Last_Half	-17,969** (8,091)	-19,193** (8,397)		
Letter_Number			-\$1,029** (494)	-\$1,129** (520)
Female			-9,065 (9,389)	-8,466 (9,463)
Asian			3,174 (8,757)	4,958 (8,912)
Tenured			-1,960 (7,668)	-2,396 (7,785)
Observations	206	206	206	206
R-squared	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.02

*, **, *** indicates significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% level respectively



The authors invite you to examine their paper in its entirety by scanning the QR code (left); the full version contains additional hypotheses, data, graphs, and conclusions not presented here.

