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Dissertation Abstract

My dissertation explores how organizations decide to respond to the laws that affect them. It does so to investigate how they convert abstract legal changes into concrete policy responses. Much of the legal impact literature focuses exclusively on legal institutions and social outcomes. My project does the opposite. It analyzes the actors affected by law as if they were political institutions making complex policy choices in response to it. It focuses on the importance of information and the ways in which they learn from others facing the same problems. In doing so, it provides insight into issues of legal implementation, legal impact, policy making, learning, and diffusion. The dissertation combines a general theoretical model of policy diffusion and learning from others with original interview and survey data. The model points to, and emphasizes, the interdependence of legal policy decisions. It builds on the largely empirical diffusion literature by deriving clear predictions from straightforward micro-foundations. It yields propositions about which organizations are most likely to rely on learning from others, and who they are likely to learn from. The data, collected from colleges and universities, concern how organizations decided how to respond to legal changes in areas such as affirmative action and medical privacy. They provide support for the targeted-learning model of legal response. They suggest that other colleges and universities look to each others' policies in systematic ways as a response to the information available to them to maximize the likelihood of making a good decision. The data also suggest that choices about legal information sources actually shape concrete legal policy decisions. The theory is general and applies to other policy making contexts. By approaching legal response from this angle, the dissertation supports a general model of policy choice under uncertainty which has applications to other political institutions, settings, and activities.

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### **Chapter Outline**

1. Introduction
2. A Model of Learning From Others in Legal Response

3. Survey Data and Empirical Hypotheses
4. Case Study: Affirmative Action in Financial Aid
5. Case Study: HIPAA Privacy Rule Compliance
6. Case Study: Comparing Student Athletes' Behavior and Human Research Subject Protections
7. Conclusion