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Speaker: Professor Alessandro Acquisti, Heinz College, Carnegie Mellon University

Date: Friday, March 8, 2013

Time: 2-3:30 pm

Location: Room 1333

Title: An Experiment In Hiring Discrimination Via Online Social Networks

Abstract: Anecdotal evidence and self-report surveys suggest that U.S. firms are using Web 2.0 and social networking sites to seek information about prospective hires. However, little is known about how the information they find online actually influences their hiring decisions. We present a series of controlled experiments of the impact that information posted on a popular social networking site by job applicants can have on employers’ hiring behavior. In two studies (a survey experiment and a field experiment) we measure the ratio of callbacks that different job applicants receive as function of their personal traits. The experiments focus on sensitive traits that are either unlawful or risky for U.S. employers to enquire about during interviews, but which can be inferred from applicants' online presences. In this manuscript, we present the experimental design for both experiments, and initial results from the survey experiment.

Bio: Alessandro Acquisti is an associate professor at the Heinz College, Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) and the co-director of CMU Center for Behavioral and Decision Research. He investigates the economics of privacy. His studies have spearheaded the application of behavioral economics to the analysis of privacy and information security decision making, and the analysis of privacy and disclosure behavior in online social networks. Alessandro has been the recipient of the PET Award for Outstanding Research in Privacy Enhancing Technologies, the IBM Best Academic Privacy Faculty Award, multiple Best Paper awards, and the Heinz College School of Information's Teaching Excellence Award. He has testified before the U.S. Senate and House committees on issues related to privacy policy and consumer behavior. Alessandro's findings have been featured in national and international media outlets, including the Economist, the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, the Washington Post, the Financial Times, Wired.com, NPR, and CNN. His 2009 study on the predictability of Social Security numbers was featured in the “Year in Ideas” issue of the NYT Magazine (the SSNs assignment scheme was changed by the US Social Security Administration in
2011). Alessandro holds a PhD from UC Berkeley, and Master degrees from UC Berkeley, the London School of Economics, and Trinity College Dublin. He has held visiting positions at the Universities of Rome, Paris, and Freiburg (visiting professor); Harvard University (visiting scholar); University of Chicago (visiting fellow); Microsoft Research (visiting researcher); and Google (visiting scientist). He has been a member of the National Academies' Committee on public response to alerts and warnings using social media.