The Urban Institute December 12, 2024
Data Governance and Privacy Practice Area

Dear Hiring Team,

My name is Suzanne Thornton and I am writing to apply for the Research Associate position in Data Governance and Privacy (R-801591). The Urban Institute's dedication to contributing meaningful, evidence-based work to serve the public by expanding opportunities for all, reducing hardships for the most vulnerable, and strengthening the effectiveness of public policies aligns with my personal and professional values. As a life-long learner, I have come to believe that knowledge is second only to compassion. I wish to apply my expertise and grow my skills in a way that protects and supports human rights in our advanced age of technology. I am drawn towards this career opportunity in data governance and privacy because I believe these are critical areas for advancing policies that honor the rights of the public in our increasingly data-driven society.

I began to apply my technical skills as a graduate student where I collaborated with a doctor from the Robert Wood Johnson hospital to develop a predictive model for drug-resistant epilepsy. As the sole statistical consultant on this project, I was responsible for data cleaning and exploration, model building and evaluation, and drawing proper conclusions from the data and model. This collaborative experience in developing data-driven solutions to a pressing medical issue resulted in a publication in the renowned journal *Neurology*. After graduating, I published my dissertation research on an advanced computational inference technique called approximate confidence distribution computing while teaching at Swarthmore College. This research is related to approximate Bayesian computing and indirect inference, computational approaches for estimating parameters of complex models where traditional likelihood-based approaches fail. My approach is similar in that it relies upon synthetic data generation but is unique in that it prioritizes calibrated inferential conclusions. In the last couple of years, I have intentionally oriented my career towards statistical practice which I knew would afford me more opportunities to innovate solutions to real world challenges. As an affiliate of the National Institute for Standards of Technology (NIST), I've helped develop a novel Bayesian measurement error model to more accurately represent the relationship between nanoparticle size and loading capacity. I'm also currently working on developing guidelines for clock data time series imputation techniques with an interdisciplinary team of scientists and statisticians.

Urban's values of collaboration, equity, inclusivity, independence, and integrity have played an important role in my career thus far. In 2020, I was selected by the president of the American Statistical Association (ASA) to lead a working group on LGBTQ+ inclusion within the discipline. After this experience, I served on the ASA's LGBTQ+ Advocacy Committee and this year, I was proud to take on the role of committee chair. My priorities as a leader in these positions have been to foster an inclusive, welcoming environment where people feel empowered to contribute their perspectives and to explore their curiosity and their passions. My most enjoyable work experiences thus far have been in interdisciplinary team settings where a diverse group of individuals work together towards shared goals. I have received positive feedback from these endeavors, not the least of which was overwhelmingly positive student feedback in the Spring semester of 2020, when our college courses abruptly switched to a virtual format. As an instructor, I also developed coursework that integrated the American Statistical Association's Guidelines for Ethical Practice and have several publications on ethical considerations for data collection and analysis.

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My proficiencies in statistics and as a leader have been recognized in different ways. Most recently, two internal NIST Building the Future grants were awarded to me and my co-authors for an exploration into standards for deepfake detection and for advancing statistical methods in clock metrology. While at Swarthmore, I was nominated by the ASA to join the National Advisory Committee to the US Census and as a graduate student, I received awards for my dissertation work. I look forward to the opportunity to grow my expertise through contributing to cutting-edge developments in statistical data privacy.

I am excited about the opportunity to begin a career at Urban and to expand my knowledge and skillset by working with the dedicated members of the Data Governance and Privacy Practice Area. Please let me know if you have any additional questions for me and feel free to view my professional website (link in footer below) for additional information. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Thornton