

RA jobs in academia

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- ① Williams '19
- ② Math/econ double major
- ③ On campus: a cappella, chamber music, several faith groups
- ④ Co-author of a [guide](#) to economics RA jobs
- ⑤ 2nd year RA to Owen Zidar at Princeton

My experiences

Why RA?

- Interested in but not ready for grad school
- Goals:
 - Improve research skills
 - Strengthen grad school applications
 - Make connections

Applications

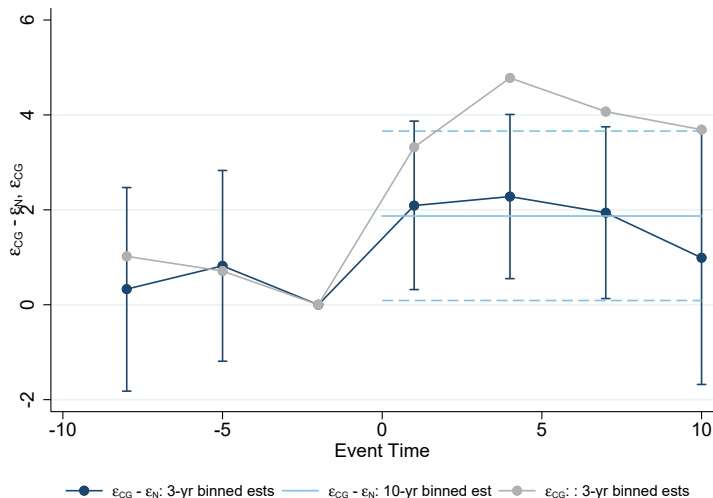
- Applied to around 10 jobs before I got my current one
- Applications for academic jobs generally had three phases:
 - 1 Submit materials (cover letter, resume, transcript)
 - 2 Complete coding task
 - 3 Interview
- I wasn't asked to complete all three phases for all the jobs I applied to
- Timeline varies (for me, ended in October)

My work

- **Broadly:** projects in public finance
- **Specifically:** projects on capital gains taxes, estimating top wealth, migration and the social safety net, health care and the labor market
- Field was all new to me!



“The Tax Elasticity of Capital Gains and Revenue-Maximizing Rates”



Types of task

- Clean data
- Write analysis code
- Read the literature
- Make figures
- Re-write code (a lot)
- Proofread
- Make slides
- Work through theoretical models

What I've liked

- Getting to see how research works
- People!
- Mentoring and grad school advice from Owen
- Plenty of opportunities to learn (classes, seminars, etc.)
- Being able to separate work from life



What's been hard

- A different kind of mentoring relationship
- Working very independently, but without much autonomy
- Some days are more engaging than others

Advice

Do your research before applying

- Reflect on your goals and interests
- Read work by the professors you might apply to work for
- Accomplish two things with this:
 - Avoid ending up in a job you don't enjoy
 - Strengthen your application
- But, research interests don't have to align perfectly

How to prepare

- **Before senior year:**

- Get some research experience if you can
- Explore your interests
- Build up technical skills

- **Senior year:**

- Talk to your professors!
- Ask for recommendations/references well before deadlines
- Use spreadsheets to organize deadlines and requirements
- Apply early if you can

Talk to current/past RAs before accepting any job

- Huge variation in RA jobs:
 - Work environment
 - Hours
 - Expectations
 - Mentorship
 - Support
- Fit matters!

Don't despair!

- These are competitive jobs
- Applications are time-consuming
- Plenty of ways to succeed without an RA job, inside and outside of economics

Econ RA Guide

Econ RA Guide

Is an RAship right for you? ▾

Job requirements ▴

Soft skills

Prior experience

Coursework

Technical skills

How to apply to an RAship ▾

Making the most of your RAship ▾

Appendix ▾

🔍 Search Econ RA Guide

Contact us!

Welcome to the Econ RA Guide!

What is an RA?

It is increasingly common within economics for people to work as a research assistant (RA) for a year or two after getting a bachelor's or master's degree, but before beginning a PhD program.¹ RA positions are essentially apprenticeships: they can give young economists the chance to strengthen their skills, build their CVs, and gain research experience before committing to more schooling. RA positions that are specifically targeted at people interested in continuing on to PhD programs are often referred to as "pre-docs" (short for pre-doctoral fellows). You might also see RAs called research associates or research fellows, but throughout this guide we'll stick with "RA".

RA positions can take many different forms. In general, though, RAs can count on working closely with PhD economists and contributing to projects at all stages of the research process— especially the data cleaning and processing phases.

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