

August 2, 2023

Faculty Search Committee  
Department of Agricultural & Resource Economics,  
University of Arizona

Dear Committee Members,

I write to apply for the Assistant Professor position in the Department of Agricultural & Resource Economics. I am a doctoral student in the Agricultural and Applied Economics department at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and I expect to complete my degree by May 2024. My research interests encompass health, aging, welfare, human capital, social security, and social inequity in both the US and India.

A major part of my research involves evaluating technological shocks on individual health and human capital outcomes, using tools of behavioral economics and modern econometrics methods. I have several working papers that deal with behavioral issues. My job market paper uses the advanced DID technique with individual-level panel data and provides causal evidence of the impact of the staggered rollout of high-speed internet (broadband) technology on one of the key behavioral health among older adults, i.e., *mental health (depression symptoms)*. I find that high-speed internet positively affects the mental health of older adults, primarily due to improvements in other behavioral channels like an increase in *social connectedness* and a decline in *social isolation*. These findings contrast with the recent evidence in economics highlighting the detrimental impact of social media on the mental health of college students, primarily attributed to unfavorable *social comparisons*. These contrasting findings for younger and older cohorts emphasize that the impact of similar technologies can differ significantly based on the behavior of individuals of different age groups. These findings are important for the states like Arizona, which has an increasing population of older adults. In addition to this work, I have other ongoing research projects that deal with technological shocks and policies that affect other behavioral aspects like motivation and cognitive function.

During my Ph.D., I mentored undergrad students, including students with diverse backgrounds like first-generation. I could connect with them based on being a first-gen scholar myself and being from the lowest socioeconomic background in Indian society with a lack of resources and social capital and facing discrimination throughout life. Also, I have experience teaching undergraduate guest lectures that involve health, development, agricultural technological innovations, and gender inequality. I have acquired various research funding for my research and am working on a project to submit an NIA R01 grant to study cognitive health in developing countries. I was also involved in departmental and outside departmental services, like reviewing for journals, conferences, and faculty and student hiring committees that helped me develop training for administrative services. Finally, I collaborate with scholars from interdisciplinary backgrounds, including sociology, public policy, and public health.

I look forward to discussing this position with you and will be available for interviews. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

*Sincerely,*  
*Vikas PD Gawai*

**Enclosed:** Curriculum vitae, job market paper, research statement, diversity statement, and the names of the recommendation letter writers on the next page.

**Names of Letter Writers:**

Jeremy Foltz (advisor)  
Professor, Agricultural and Applied Economics  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
jdfoltz@wisc.edu, (608) 262-6871

Lauren Schmitz  
Assistant Professor, La Follette School of Public Affairs  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
llschmitz@wisc.edu, (608) 263-7398

John Mullahy  
Professor, Population Health Sciences  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
jmullahy@wisc.edu, (608) 265-5410