August 2, 2023

Faculty Search Committee

Department of Agricultural & Resource Economics,  
University of Arizona

Dear Committee Members,

I write to apply for the position of 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 in May 2024. My research interests encompass health, aging, welfare, human capital, social security, and social inequity in both the US and India. Enclosed, please find my curriculum vitae, job market paper, research statement, diversity statement, teaching statement, and the names of the recommendation letter writers on the next page.

One major part of my research involves evaluating technological shock, behavioral economics, and modern econometrics methods, which makes me a strong candidate for this job. For instance, my job market paper uses advanced DID methods 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* anda decline in *social isolation*. These findings are in 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. Similarly, I have other research work which deals with technological shocks and policies that affects other behavioral aspects like motivation and cognitive function.

I was involved in mentoring and teaching 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 in 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 and public policy.

I believe my abilities, experience, and future goals make me an ideal candidate for this position. I look forward to discussing this position with you, and I will be available for interviews. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

*Sincerely,*

*Vikas PD Gawai*

**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