Dear NBER Committee,

I am writing to apply for the Boot Camp on Behavioral Public Economics for 2023 based on my qualifications and an interest in representing one of the underrepresented groups. I am a fifth-year Ph.D. student in the Ag and Applied Economics department at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. I received my master’s in economics from the same university in 2018, where I received an award under the ‘best paper scholarship’ that shaped my motivation to pursue a Ph.D. in economics. For the 2023-24 academic year, I have been competitively selected as one of the 'diversity scholars' in the Department of Public Affairs at the American University, and I have also been chosen as one of the 'research fellows' at the Retirement and Disability Research Consortium (RDRC), Center for Financial Security (CFS) at UW-Madison for the 2022-23 academic year.

I am an applied microeconomist focusing on health, human capital, and technological policies. My research evaluates public policies and quantifies their effects on multiple dimensions, including health, human capital, inequality, and outcomes related to vulnerable and disadvantageous populations across rich and low-income countries. I use a variety of data sources and advanced empirical methods to provide causal evidence.

I am interested in behavioral public economics to understand how various public policies affect the behavior and well-being of people worldwide, especially people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Through my work, I want to inform the effectiveness of policies that have real-world impacts on the lives of less advantaged people across rich and low-income countries.

In my job market paper (in progress), I study whether the expansion of broadband technology affects the mental health of older adults in the US, using advanced methods in difference-in-differences (DID). Results suggest strong positive effects on the mental health of older adults over time, with stronger effects for women. These effects contrast with the recent evidence suggesting adverse mental health effects of social media technology (Facebook) on college students’ mental health in the US, underscoring the benefits of broadband technology for older cohorts. I find changes in behavior channels, like being more socially connected and better health literacy, might be driving some of the benefits of the broadband expansion on the mental health of older adults. This evidence calls for policy interventions for investing in some of these channels to mitigate mental health-related issues. This research has policy implications for underserved geographic areas and vulnerable and disadvantaged populations for their well-being and welfare.

For my other working paper, I received a competitive grant from the Social Security Administration (SSA) and RDRC, CFS, UW-Madison to evaluate the effectiveness of broadband on the Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) application rates in the event of SSA office closures. For this project, I am building on the work by Manasi Deshpande and Yue Li (2019). In my other dissertation chapters, my co-authors and I study the effects of early life exposure to a massive agricultural policy of the Green Revolution (an agricultural policy that affected millions of children and families worldwide) in India on later life health, including cognitive functions and intergenerational human capital.

I contribute to the diversity in the field of economics in various ways. First, I bring a diverse social experience with me. I belong to the lowest socio-economic strata of Indian society, also referred to as *untouchables*, which made me a victim of various direct and indirect discrimination throughout my life. This group historically has been severely underrepresented in basic rights, including education, the labor market, and social capital. I was a beneficiary of public policies like food grains for households below the poverty line (equivalent to food stamps in the US) and government academic scholarships (e.g., full funding for masters in economics). Being a recipient of these public programs made me want to study how these policies affect people's behavior and welfare. Secondly, as a person of color and a member of the First-Generation community, I understand the importance of promoting inclusivity in all aspects of society. I have actively participated in diversity and inclusion initiatives, from mentoring First-Gen undergraduate students to representing students on committees for hiring faculty and Ph.D. students. Finally, I bring academic diversity involving investigating questions informed by experiences. For example, before joining graduate school, I worked at construction sites in India. Everyday interaction with daily-wage workers and understanding their real-life problems helped me develop critical views on labor policies and their ground effectiveness. I want to bring in their concerns in public policies.

Lastly, I am extremely interested in applying to the Boot Camp on Behavioral Public Economics for various reasons. First, I would get a golden opportunity to learn about cutting-edge research and methods at the intersection of Behavioral and Public Economics. Secondly, with this Boot Camp, I will get a chance to network with the student and faculty in the field and learn from their expertise. For instance, I would like to connect with Prof. Ben Handel, who studies technology and health behavior, and Prof. Manasi Deshpande, who studies social security. Being in such an active environment would be highly beneficial for my research and lead to potential collaborations.

I have included in my application my CV and transcripts. The faculty members for my reference are Prof. Jeremy Foltz (UW-Madison) and Prof. John Mullahy (UW-Madison). The learnings during the Boot Camp will greatly help my career and job market. I thank you for your consideration and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

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