



NEWS

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2022 ISSUE III

FOCUS Introduction: Navigating the Ph.D. Admissions Process

Kasey Buckles

Over the past two years, I have noticed growing uncertainty and anxiety about what it takes to be admitted to a Ph.D. program in economics. I've seen mini-controversies erupt on Twitter about the emergence of the pre-doc, and whether this is good or bad for students. I've

watched as multiple institutions announced they would de-emphasize the GRE or stop using it altogether. I've heard from colleagues lamenting that students they had written letters for were not getting the acceptances they expected. And students seem to sense that the admissions standards are ever-increasing, to levels that are unattainable for those without an elite background or who didn't commit to an economics Ph.D. before learning to walk.

Some turmoil was expected during the pandemic, as graduate admissions committees—like everyone else—faced uncertainty. Accepted students deferred enrollment while current students took advantage of extensions, making it difficult to determine the supply of available spots. Disruptions to the flow of international students and a tumultuous labor market affected demand for those spots. But there are other, longer-term factors that may be at play, like increases in applications from abroad and the growing versatility of the economics Ph.D. (e.g. demand from the tech sector).

Given this context, the CSWEP Board felt it was time for the CSWEP News to revisit the topic of the Ph.D. admissions process. We last devoted an issue to this theme in 2014; much has changed since then, and what hasn't changed bears repeating.

Of course, other groups have recently worked to add transparency to the admissions process; indeed, CSWEP has collaborated with CSMGEP, CSQIEP,

and CEE to sponsor a series of **panels** offering advice to faculty advisors of potential applicants. In this issue, Dick Startz (UC–Santa Barbara) summarizes some of the themes from those panels in his piece “Helping Faculty Help Students Get Into Ph.D. Programs in Economics.” This piece has great tips on how to mentor students as they prepare, what makes an applicant stand out, and how to write a great recommendation letter.

Our second article, “The Path to an Economics Ph.D.: Advising Students About ‘Pre-Docs,’” is written by Olga Schurchov of Wellesley College. Wellesley is a liberal arts college with a rich history of sending their graduates to top Ph.D. programs, and Dr. Schurchov currently takes the lead in advising their interested students. In her piece, she picks up the thorny topic of the pre-doc years, and how one should spend them. She clearly outlines some of the most common paths, and the upsides and downsides of each.

When editing the issue, I wanted to make sure that we also heard from someone currently serving as a graduate admissions committee chair or Director of Graduate Studies. I quickly realized that an article from just one such person would be limited, as the advice one might get varies by rank of the department, mission of the institution, or even the personal preferences of the committee member. To help readers get a more balanced perspective, I convened a panel of seven current committee

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From the Chair

Anusha Chari

Summer flew by, and I hope you had a chance to rest and rejuvenate. The new school year begins, and I am delighted to present Issue 3 of the *CSWEP News*! As the graduate admissions season will soon be underway, this issue presents a guide for helping students gain admission into economics Ph.D. programs. Kasey Buckles, Associate Chair and Director of Mentoring on CSWEP's board, has assembled a terrific collection of articles and tips.

As we know, entry into U.S. economics Ph.D. programs is highly selective, with candidates from all over the world competing for prized spots, especially at top doctoral programs. Indeed, Dick Startz documents a striking fact in this issue's *Focus* opening piece. Nearly 25% of Ph.D. graduates from top-ten schools came from just ten undergraduate institutions reflecting the excellent job that these institutions do in preparing undergraduates to put their best foot forward in their Ph.D. applications, providing mentoring and other essential aspects of support. To increase diversity in economics Ph.D. program admissions, CSWEP, along with our sister committees CSMGEP, CSQIEP, and the CEE, sponsored a series of panel discussions to help faculty help their students gain admission into graduate programs.

Dick Startz highlights valuable insights from these discussions providing advice on preparing students and helping them navigate the admissions process. Preparations range from mentoring, undertaking undergraduate research projects, perhaps entering a pre-doc program, and taking courses that will stand them in good stead as they encounter technically challenging coursework. The piece also provides valuable information for advising students and writing recommendation letters to increase admission chances.

In the second piece, Olga Shurchkov outlines alternative paths to an economics Ph.D. taking a deep dive into advising students about the merits of the

pre-doc route. She explores the different avenues to Ph.D. programs through the lens of writing an effective research statement that conveys an understanding of what it means to pursue a career in academic economics and how to demonstrate curiosity and the potential to acquire skills to conduct original research. A fairly new avenue she investigates is that of data science experience in the tech industry before entering a graduate program in economics. Irrespective of the path taken, she advises undergraduates to take time between degrees to acquire information and experience that will strategically pay off as success in Ph.D. programs. I encourage you to read her thoughtful piece.

In the third piece, Kasey Buckles summarizes anonymized responses from admissions committee members and directors of graduate studies providing candid advice to potential applicants. She explores a variety of topics with the interviewees, such as observed trends in applicant qualifications, the importance of prior research experience, the weights placed on test scores and other metrics, features that make an application stand out, and all-important advice for letter writers. Her interviews provide a treasure trove of advice. Please also take a look at the advice box with the top ten tips and insights to share with students. We provide the **complete responses** from the panel on CSWEP's website (To download a file containing complete responses, click on the bullet labeled "Interviews of Graduate Admissions Officers").

In addition to our Focus section, this issue contains information about several upcoming calls for papers and professional development opportunities. Please see a call for paper submissions to CSWEP sessions for the 2023 Eastern Economic Association meetings in New York in February 2023 and for the 2023 Midwestern Economic Association meetings in March/April 2023 in Cleveland. The issue lists a wonderful lineup

About CSWEP

A standing committee of the American Economic Association, the Committee on the Status of Women in the Economics Profession (CSWEP) is charged with serving professional women economists by promoting their careers and monitoring their progress. CSWEP sponsors mentoring programs, surveys economics departments and freely disseminates information on professional opportunities, career development and how the profession works, both on the web and via free digital subscriptions to the *CSWEP News*.

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Helping Faculty Help Students Get Into Ph.D. Programs in Economics

Dick Startz

Admission to Ph.D. programs in economics is surprisingly concentrated among relatively elite undergraduate institutions. For example, in a recent year, about a quarter of Ph.D. graduates at the top ten economics programs came from only ten undergraduate schools. This is likely due in part to these institutions doing a particularly good job in preparing their students for the Ph.D. and to the faculty having the knowledge of how to help their students get in. With an aim toward increasing diversity in the economics profession, CSWEP,

CSMGEP, CSQIEP, and CEE have sponsored a series of panels offering advice to faculty who are advising undergraduates considering applying to graduate school. A video of one panel can be found <https://www.aeaweb.org/about-aea/committees/cswep/programs/resources/webinars/helping-2021>.

Panelists include Francisca Antman, University of Colorado, Boulder; Prashant Bharadwaj, University of California, San Diego; Sandile Hlatshwayo, International Monetary Fund; John List, University of Chicago; Trevon Logan,

The Ohio State University; James Peoples, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee; Christina Romer, University of California, Berkeley; Nancy Rose, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Danila Serra, Texas A&M University; and myself. I present here some of the main themes from these panels, with the understanding that this summary is mine and has not been cleared with my co-panelists. Advice falls into two broad categories: preparation and admissions.

From the Chair

of CSWEP sessions at the Southern Economics Association meetings in Fort Lauderdale and the 2022 APPAM meetings in Washington, DC, both in November 2022. The Southern meetings will also host a graduate student mentoring workshop for third- and fourth-year female and non-binary students. Many thanks to Jennifer Doleac, Laura Connolly, and Stephanie Aaronson for their help organizing these sessions and to Catherine Maclean, Orgul Ozturk, and Melanie Guldi for the workshop.

We are delighted to present our Brag Box in this issue and hope to have a regular feature celebrating the achievements of women economists as they progress through their careers. In this issue, we congratulate 28 women who became Full Professors during the 2021-2022 academic year. Given that at last count in our 2021 survey, women accounted for 15.5% of full professors at doctoral program granting institutions and 32.4% at institutions without doctoral programs, we are delighted to felicitate these accomplished and talented women—do take a look at their names.

Finally, we have an important reminder about the 2022 CSWEP Survey from our Associate Chair and Survey Director, Maggie Levenstein. Since

1972 CSWEP has collected data on the gender composition of faculty and students in both Ph.D. granting and non-Ph.D. granting U.S. economics departments. These data are unique in the social sciences and beyond. The results are presented in the CSWEP *Annual Report* and at the ASSA meetings in January. Information from previous years is available at <https://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR37118.v5>. The 2022 survey was sent to all department chairs in mid-September, and the completed survey is due October 21. CSWEP is very appreciative of the work of the 200+ department chairs and staff and the CSWEP liaisons who work to complete these surveys promptly every year.

In addition to the opportunities detailed in this issue of the *News*, please check our [website](#) and [@aeacswep](#) on Twitter for up-to-date information about several upcoming events and opportunities. To sign up for our mailing list or volunteer as a mentor or CSWEP liaison, please email info@csweb.org. As always, we invite feedback and ideas for new initiatives. ■

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members. I summarize their responses to my questions in the article “Insight from Graduate Admissions Committee Chair and Members,” and their full responses are [available online](#).

Even with the amazing contributors to this issue, this topic is too large to be contained in a few articles. Other professional groups, departments, and helpful people have developed great resources on the topic (the AEA has a [fantastic page](#) with information for prospective students). We have compiled a list of some of our favorites on the CSWEP webpage [here](#). While you are there, don't forget to check out [our list of events and fellowships](#) for prospective graduate students, and [our resources](#) for faculty looking to mentor diverse future economists.

A final note: because most of the readers of *CSWEP News* are post-Ph.D., the articles are written with an audience of advisors and mentors in mind. However, we encourage you to share them directly with prospective students, undergraduate clubs, advising staff, and others. Our hope is that this issue takes some of the mystery—and therefore some of the stress—out of the process for current and future economists alike.

Helping Students Prepare Mentoring

It may be useful to imagine having a conversation with an undergraduate one wants to encourage to think about continuing to a Ph.D. Students' base knowledge is wildly heterogeneous. They often don't know the relevant questions, let alone answers. First-generation college students may well not really understand what a Ph.D. is, and may come from families where success means becoming a doctor or a lawyer. Explaining what Ph.D.s do and what the life of a Ph.D. is like is important. Students should understand that the Ph.D. is primarily intended to train academics, but should also be aware that the majority of Ph.D.s end up outside academia. It's useful to discuss the benefits of being an academic (the excitement of finding things that no one has ever known and spending your time with smart young people) as well as characteristics that make it an ill-fitting career for many (working alone, having to deal with rejection). Students should also be told that economists earn a decent living! At later stages, students should learn that economics graduate programs are more different from undergraduate programs than is true for most other disciplines. This is especially true of the first year.

One goal of more mentoring is to increase diversity in the economics profession. The participation of minority groups has increased at the BA and MA level, but has been essentially flat at the Ph.D. level. In addition to internal mentoring of undergraduates, students should be pointed to the CSMGEP 8-week summer program, which has helped produce a significant fraction of minority economists. Also, many schools have [McNair programs](#) which provide mentoring and support for students considering graduate school.

Undergraduate research

Research experience provides undergraduates with three advantages: (1) they learn whether they like doing research; (2) they gain practical skills useful for

the future; and (3) they earn a signal useful for graduate admission, both directly and in terms of more effective letters of recommendation. Research experiences are especially valuable when there are open-ended elements that allow a student to stretch.

Schools can set up programs to facilitate undergraduate research (see [Texas A&M](#) for an example). Setting up a program requires defining applicant criteria; examples include a minimum grade point average and having taken sufficient econometrics courses. Programs need to be structured to keep students on track. A necessary element is a commitment from enough faculty members to supervise undergraduates.

Pre-docs

One of the relatively recent changes in the path to graduate school is the enormous increase in the number of students doing pre-docs. Doing a pre-doc helps students gain skills, helps them decide if a Ph.D. is right for them, and importantly can lead to particularly effective letters of recommendation. For these reasons, a pre-doc can be especially valuable for students coming from institutions that do not ordinarily send many students to the Ph.D. However, some pre-docs offer a supportive experience while others are focused on extracting labor—guidance to students in choosing a pre-doc is valuable. Students may find <https://predoc.org/> a valuable resource, and of course, Olga Schurchov's article on pre-doc experiences in this issue.

Technical requirements

It is helpful to reach students early. Students should be advised especially to take serious math courses, in general through real analysis. However, students should also be advised that they need to earn good grades in math and should take difficult math courses during terms when they have sufficient time. Coursework in statistics is also valuable, as is some exposure to computer programming.

Students should be guided to attend office hours and in general to get

to know a number of faculty members. This is especially important for first-generation and minority students who may not feel a connection with the faculty. The GRE, in particular the quantitative part of the GRE, continues to be an important screening device for graduate admission and students should be advised to study for the test as they may have forgotten much of the material.

Helping Students Get In Advising the student

Students should make a list of potential schools to apply to, including both some reach and some safety schools. They should show the list to letter writers and have them recommend adding or deleting schools. It is also important for students to keep good communication with letter writers.

Advice about graduate school is available from the AEA at "[Preparing for graduate school](#)." For advice for students about applications, the AEA offers "[Further reading for students considering graduate study in economics](#)."

For American students, advise them to apply for a National Science Foundation (NSF) fellowship. While very competitive, NSF fellowships cover expenses and a stipend for several years and make fellows very attractive candidates for Ph.D. programs. In addition, putting together an application is a useful exercise in thinking through a research proposal. Applications are due in mid-October each year, and students should plan to apply in the year before they hope to begin their Ph.D. program.

Letters of recommendation

Letter writers should be Ph.D. economists who know the students and their abilities and interests well. Letters from faculty who mostly just know that the student took their class and received a good grade are generally ineffective. Sometimes one letter from a math professor may be appropriate, if the math professor can seriously testify to the student's math ability. As one example, a student lent a math professor a copy of Mas-Colell, Whinston, and Green's



The Path to an Economics Ph.D.: Advising Students about “Pre-Docs”

Olga Shurchkov

So you have a student who thinks they can ... econ? Great. Whether that student is still finishing their undergraduate studies or has already graduated, the next step is to help them decide how to spend the next X years prior to applying to graduate school.

I spoke with members of admission committees at Ph.D.-granting institutions of varying ranks and sizes, and a common theme of what is valued emerged. With more and more schools getting rid of the GRE requirement, grade inflation in the US, and difficulties with cross-country GPA/course comparisons, more weight is being placed on the personal statement. A successful statement demonstrates an understanding of what it's like to be an academic economist (i.e., *information*) and conveys the potential to develop the skills necessary for answering a

research question that has sparked your curiosity (i.e., *value*).

I was surprised to hear from members of admissions committees how rare such statements are. The ability to think and write seriously about a research agenda is not just about getting into the best Ph.D. program or winning a fellowship. Being able to write a coherent and compelling statement will maximize a student's chances of success in graduate school and beyond. Therefore, when weighing the pros and cons of various pre-doc options below, students should view them through the lens of their research statement and how they would add information and value for their future career as an economist.

Path 1: Straight to Ph.D.

When I was applying to graduate school, going straight from undergrad into a

Ph.D. program was quite common. Anecdotal, this path seems to have become rarer, at least at top departments. Why? Although it might be tempting to try to get there quickly, there are drawbacks. Observing their professors or even doing research at an undergraduate level will not give students enough information about what life as an economist is really like. Furthermore, in comparison to other applicants with past research experience, a student's chances of getting into a top program and thriving will likely be lower. I recommend this path only if a student (a) is very sure about pursuing a Ph.D., and (b) has ticked all the boxes in their application, with the most important one being a demonstrated ability to propose a serious research question (such as by co-authoring with their undergraduate advisor or writing a very advanced thesis).



Helping Faculty Help Students ↑

(1995) *Microeconomic Theory* so the professor could write that the student could perform at that level.

If there is an anomaly in a student's record, recommenders should explain it and explain why it doesn't matter. Examples include students who got off to a slow start because they began college with weak preparation or students who had a health or personal problem during one term. Of course, it is important to be able to show that such difficulties were overcome.

Letters are essentially never negative. Empty praise is ineffective. If you don't know a student well, recommend they seek someone else to write the letter.

The most effective letters compare the applicant to past applicants, naming the past applicants and the institutions they attended. Statements such as “top three among my past 30 research assistants,” or “one of the two best students

I've had in the past 10 years” are also effective. If you are a recent graduate, you can also compare an applicant to your own graduate school cohort.

Explaining the student's work as a research assistant is valuable, as it indicates you know the student well. But focus more on the skills needed to be a successful economist, such as being thoughtful about how to think about a project, and not so much on whether the student is a whiz at Stata or SQL.

If the student is not a native speaker of English but speaks well, saying so may be valuable at institutions that support their students as teaching assistants.

In rare cases, a student has a strong preference for a particular school. When students say so, it is not particularly credible. A recommender can serve as an honest broker because the recommender isn't going to make this

statement to multiple schools. Some schools care about the likelihood a student will accept an offer, others don't.

Take care about comments on personality and other non-academic issues beyond ones that are relevant, such as working well with peers. In particular, be careful that such comments don't reflect gender or other stereotypes.

Conclusion

Students at elite undergraduate institutions enjoy the resources to prepare for graduate schools and receive experienced assistance in the admissions process. Most students attend institutions where such resources are less abundant. Hopefully, the information here will assist faculty in helping their students follow the paths that the faculty themselves have undertaken. Widening the diameter of the pipeline into economics is surely in the interest of the profession as a whole. ■

Path 2: Masters in Economics (or Equivalent)

Getting a Master's degree prior to applying to a Ph.D. program is a typical path for students outside of the US. My sense is that it does not substantially increase the probability of admission, per se, since it does not typically provide additional research experience. However, if a student needs more time to decide on a career track, this is one way to delay the decision. Applicants who feel they would struggle with the first-year coursework might also find it worthwhile (for example, those who have spent longer than most outside of academia, in a non-research job, and need to reacquire the necessary technical skills).

Path 3: Pre-Doc Full-Time RA Position

As a full-time RA, a student will get a front-row view of the life of an economist. They will likely be given specific tasks, like cleaning data, proofreading (code, mathematical models, papers, etc.), doing literature reviews, and conducting empirical analyses. Institutions like the Federal Reserve, J-PAL, and the Brookings Institution have long histories of hiring pre-doctoral RAs, and the number of positions at universities or with individual faculty members seems to grow each year. Students can find information on available RA jobs on sites like predoc.org and the [NBER Career Resources](#) page, or by following [@econ_RA](#) on Twitter.

A full-time RA job can open many doors and provide excellent training. However, there is a risk that an unsuccessful match to a supervisor could make for an unpleasant experience or, in the worst case, be a waste of time. This is why it is crucial to encourage your students to find out all they can about the position beforehand. For example, will they be supervised directly by the faculty member or, say, by a post-doc or graduate student? Will they be the only RA or work on a big team,

where others can help them figure out small issues and check out their work? As their advisor, you can use your networks and experience to help your students identify supervisors with a reputation for mentorship and a strong record of placing students into good Ph.D. programs.

Under this rubric, I should also mention bridge-to-Ph.D. programs, such as the ones at [Columbia](#) and [Stanford](#) Universities. These have the flavor of full-time RA positions, but are broader and include additional mentorship and learning opportunities. Because these programs are very new, their relative success vis-à-vis a more standard RA position is not clear. They likely dilute both the risks and the rewards. By design, a broader bridge program lessens the reputational and mismatch risks relative to a position where a student typically works with just one person. But they may get less hands-on research experience and fewer chances to connect meaningfully with any given faculty member.

In summary, a full-time RA pre-doc will expose students to the front lines of research, and they will gain valuable research tools that they can build on in graduate school. If a student is pretty sure that a Ph.D. in economics is their calling, a full-time pre-doc—direct or via a bridge program—is a fantastic option.

Path 4: Government Agency or International Organization

Working at a central bank or an international organization like the World Bank is a popular option for potential Ph.D.-bound college graduates. Since this is a full-time RA job, the tradeoffs are similar to those I described in Path 3, with a couple of caveats. These types of jobs allow recent graduates to experience not just the research process, but also the policy side of economics. This is valuable from the perspective of getting ideas for their own potential future contributions. The other benefits are higher pay relative to other options presented so far, and the fact that this

path preserves the ability to pivot out of academia. The flip side is that there are many applicants with this kind of pre-doc experience, which could make it harder to differentiate oneself.

Path 5: Economic Consulting

In addition to the financial benefits of working as a research associate at an economic consulting firm, graduates will gain some insights into a non-academic job that attracts many Ph.D. economists: expert witness. In a way, this path reveals the outside option for Ph.D.s before they see the default (academia). This job also provides exposure to other industries like law and finance, opening up other career possibilities. A warning: this option adds little value to admission prospects or subsequent success in the program. The longer someone stays in this type of job, the more technical skills they will lose and will have to regain once in the Ph.D. program. This path may be advisable for those who are unsure about their interest in academia, and who are willing to do another pre-doc, like Path 3, before applying.

Path 6: Data Science in the Tech Industry

This option was completely new to me when I first started looking into this topic, but a couple of current Ph.D. students who previously worked for tech companies tell me that this path is gaining popularity. I think this novel path is quite promising. As a data scientist, your student will learn coding, industry facts, and data visualization strategies. The field of economics is moving toward the use of field experiments and big data, often using data from the private sector, and a relationship with a company through past work experience can lay the groundwork for a future partnership. With a growing number of Ph.D. economists accepting these types of jobs, students will not be without an opportunity to get recommendation letters or a glimpse into another potential non-academic post-Ph.D. track.



Insight from Graduate Admissions Committee Chairs and Members

Kasey Buckles

An obvious source of insight into the Ph.D. admissions process is someone who has recently served on an admissions committee. Because the experiences of committee members might vary across institutions, I decided to convene a panel of seven current or recent committee members, including six committee chairs or directors of graduate studies. I summarize their advice here, and their complete responses are available on the CSWEP website. I have anonymized the responses to allow the panelists to speak freely, without being concerned that they are answering on behalf of their institution. I do indicate the approximate ranking of the panelist's department (based on *U.S. News and World Report* rankings), to help the reader put the responses in context. There are two panelists from the top 10 and two from the top 20; in these cases I randomly designate them as "A" and "B" to distinguish the responses. The remaining three panelists are from the

top 30, the top 40, and from outside the top 50.

Q1: Have you noticed any trends in the qualifications or characteristics of applicants in recent years?

The modal response from the panel was an observed increase in applicants' research experience, from undergraduate research programs, assistantships, and especially pre-docs. One panelist (Top 30) reported more candidates from outside of the U.S., especially China.

Q2: Has your department changed what they are looking for in a graduate application over time? Is any qualification or skill becoming more (or less) important?

While two panelists (Top 10A, Outside 50) said there has been no real change in what they are looking for, two others said that their institutions are reconsidering the role of the GRE: "Applicants will no longer be able to submit GRE scores, as of the coming 2022-23

admissions season" (Top 20A), and "GRE scores were optional during the 2 pandemic years. Accordingly, overall, we pay less attention to this. It seems the assessment of the quantitative background and Math courses taken, in fact, fill this gap" (Top 40). The panelists also reported an increased emphasis on research experience (Top 10B, Top 20B, Top 30), with one reasoning, "We see no shortage of applicants who have high levels of training in some combination of mathematics and data science. This leads me to spend more time looking

Join the CSWEP Liaison Network!

Three cheers for the 150+ economists who have agreed to serve as CSWEP Liaisons! We are already seeing the positive effects of your hard work with increased demand for CSWEP paper sessions, fellowships and other opportunities. Thank you! Dissemination of information—including notice of mentoring events, new editions of the CSWEP *News* and reporting requests for our Annual Survey and Questionnaire—is an important charge of CSWEP. For this key task, we need your help. We are looking for liaisons from the following colleges and universities:

University of Alabama
Augustana University (South Dakota)
DePauw University (Indiana)
Lake Forest College (Illinois)
Lawrence University (Wisconsin)
Randolph-Macon College (Virginia)
Ripon College (Wisconsin)
Sewanee University of the South (Tennessee)
Susquehanna University (Pennsylvania)

If you know individuals at these institutions who you think might be interested in serving as a CSWEP Liaison, please encourage them to contact us at info@cswep.org. We are also seeking liaisons from outside the academy. To indicate your willingness to serve, send an e-mail with your contact information to info@cswep.org.

Pre-Docs ↑

The financial benefits of this option are also obvious, as well as the ability to have a variety of career paths outside of academia.

Of course, your student must have the capacity to work in industry first, with its tight deadlines, quick turnarounds, and long hours—they should not take this path if it's farfetched for them. It is also a relative unknown in the world of graduate school admissions, and obviously the majority of young data scientists do not end up in economics Ph.D. programs (though it's not clear whether this is due to demand or supply!).

Conclusion

I hope I made it clear that I recommend taking time "off" prior to applying to Ph.D. programs. This is because when

someone starts a Ph.D. program, they are embarking on a potentially life-long career as an economist, and they should make sure they know what they are getting into and give themselves the tools to succeed. In this article, I have outlined the costs and benefits of some of the most common paths taken during the pre-doc period. Of course, there are many other possible paths not listed in this essay—while in graduate school, I met extremely successful peers whose pre-doc experiences included high school physics teacher, hedge fund manager, and even another Ph.D. (in math). Given all the information and tradeoffs, give your students the confidence to make the choice that feels right for them, because only they know their own preferences and possibilities. ■

Top Tips & Insights from the Panel

1. Get letters from people who know you well and who can evaluate your research potential, and have honest conversations with them about your preparedness.
2. Good ways to build a relationship with a letter-writer include doing an independent research paper or thesis, taking small classes that allow the professor to get to know you, doing the honors track, and working as a research assistant (RA).
3. Take both math and economics courses. Consider adding a major or minor in another quantitative discipline.
4. Pre-docs and masters' programs can help make up for weaknesses in the undergraduate record.
5. Apply to a lot of programs at different levels—the process is highly competitive and also noisy. Rankings should be one criterion, but you should also pay attention to placements, to the ability of the current students to work with faculty and other students, good fit, and strong reputations within a particular field.
6. Include a strong writing sample, especially if it shows evidence of independent research ability.
7. The research statement should be specific—while you are not committed to the research program you describe, it shows seriousness and purpose.
8. Identify possible weaknesses in your application and ask your letter-writer(s) to address them. You may also raise the issue in your personal statement and explain how you have overcome or compensated for the weakness.
9. Unusual life stories and backgrounds can attract attention if they demonstrate perseverance or show how you overcame an unusual challenge. For example, if you are a chess master do not forget to include that in a suitable manner in your application.
10. Be on time with the application materials and respond to communications from schools. If you are on a waiting list, communicate with the admissions director so that they have information about your ongoing interest.

for evidence of research potential. A surprisingly small fraction of applicants submit papers . . . as writing samples. When a writing sample of this sort is of reasonably high quality, I view it as being among the strongest possible signals of research potential” (Top 20B).

Q3: One recent development is the emergence of pre-doctoral programs and positions. What are your institution's expectations regarding pre-docs, or other evidence of research experience?

Every panelist responded that they value evidence of research experience. However, they emphasized that “...this can come in various forms; not just from pre-doc or RA experiences” (Top 10A) and that evidence of independent research potential is especially valuable. One panelist (Top 20B) pointed out that time in a competitive pre-doc program is “...a strong signal of data science skills. By itself, however, I do not view [them as] a signal of research potential.” A second panelist echoed this reservation: “Sometimes the pre-doc assistantship the student did is on pure programming and very little to do with economics” (Top 30). The respondent from the Top-40 institution said that they have “no shot of getting prospective students that have a pre-doc experience from a top school” so they “pay attention to other research experiences . . . participation in undergraduate research programs, working and assisting faculty members with research, etc.” This panelist also noted that one advantage of having research experience is that “research experience and research exposure make for easy talking points,” so applicants should be prepared to talk about it during interviews.

Finally, the respondent from Top 20A said that, “We view pre-docs positively, but we also make efforts to find and admit candidates who have less elite research experience.”

Q4: How heavily does your department weight standard factors like GRE scores, GPA, and math preparation?

All respondents agreed that math preparation and grades—especially in related

or challenging courses—are important. Support for the use of GRE scores in admissions decisions was more measured: “...grades and math preparation are more important than GRE scores” (Top 10A). Indeed, one institution (Top 10A) no longer accepts GRE scores, while another (Outside the Top 50) adjusts them for potential biases. One respondent (Top 20B) mentioned that GRE scores and overall GPA “help to identify the weakest applications” but “do not play a major role in differentiating between the more competitive applications.” Another added that while they also use GRE scores and GPA as initial screeners, very good candidates who do not do well on these measures can overcome this deficit if a “letter writer is someone we know and trust and ranks the student highly and explains the reason for low scores” (Top 30).

Q5: Can you describe what makes an application stand out, beyond these factors?

The panelists' responses emphasized the importance of a comprehensive package that showcases the applicant's aptitude for research. The Top 20A panelist said that, “A strong writing sample coupled with a mature, well-crafted research statement can provide what I view as one of the strongest signals of research potential, in particular if an application's recommendation letters provide additional commentary on the quality of the applicant's independent research.” Similarly, another panelist looks for “maturity of the personal statement” and applications that include “personal statements telling a story addressing why the applicant is interested in Economics . . . what the applicant has done to get ready for a Ph.D. program . . . [and] complementary letters in that the letter writers capture various characteristics of the applicants” (Top 40). Other panelists identified many of these same components: “a strong writing sample” (Top 10A), “very good recommendation letters” (Top 10B), and “substantial research experience” (Top 20A).

Q6: Many of our readers will be letter-writers for applicants. What are the

Admissions Committee Insights

characteristics of letters that are most helpful to admissions committees?

The panelists emphasized the importance of honest assessment, which helps letter-writers build credibility. Beyond this, good letters “provide insight into the applicant’s abilities as well as character/motivation and creativity” (Top 10B), “focus on research potential, with substantial detail” (top 20A), and can “play an important role in explaining any potential puzzles in an application” (Top 20B). Specific comparisons to other candidates are valuable (Top 10A), “especially if a letter writer wrote letters for multiple candidates” (Top 30). Finally, letter-writers with area-specific knowledge can help candidates from places that may be unfamiliar to the committee (Top 30, Top 40).

Q7: Do you have any advice for students who find themselves on the waitlist for their preferred program?

First, panelists said that applicants should not “take waitlist status as a lack of interest; precise rankings are noisy” (Top 10A) and “if you are on a waitlist there is a reason” (Top 30). A key theme in the panelists’ responses was the importance of patience. “A substantial amount of movement off of waiting lists takes place during [the 48 hours before the decision deadline]” (Top 20B) and “Many people do not find that they are selected off the waitlist until the last day” (Top 10B). Panelists emphasized that waitlisted applicants should keep in touch with the director of admissions, to let them know about their continued (genuine) interest, especially if the program would be the applicant’s top choice. “Do not be shy but do not be aggressive either in your correspondence” (Top 30). Other ways to show interest include attending visit days and asking one’s letter-writers to convey information (Top 20A, Top 20B). “At the end of the day, all else equal, the more interested and the more engaged candidates will have a marginal advantage” (Top 40). ■

Calls, Announcements, and Sessions at Upcoming Meetings

Call for Participants and Topic Ideas CSWEP Sessions @ Midwest Economics Association 87th Annual Meeting

31 March–2 April 2023
CSWEP Panels will be on Friday, 31 March

The Westin Cleveland Downtown, Cleveland, OH

DEADLINE: 14 October 2022

CSWEP (Committee on the Status of Women in the Economics Profession) is organizing two panels on topics related to career development at the Midwest Economics Association Annual Meetings to be held from March 31–April 2, 2023.

The panels will be held on the **Friday (March 31)** of the conference. One panel will be geared to those looking for jobs (academic and nonacademic) and another panel will focus on mid-career issues. Each panel will have four participants who will each speak for about 10 minutes. The sessions are organized to allow for plenty of time for an active exchange of ideas and advice among the panelists and session attendees.

If you have specific suggestions regarding the topics to be covered or ideas for potential panelists (you can also suggest yourself), please submit your topics and ideas as soon as possible (no later than **October 14, 2022**) to Rebekah Loftis, CSWEP Administrator, at info@cswep.org. To foster the exchange of new ideas, we especially seek individuals who have not previously served as panelists.

In addition to the CSWEP panels the MEA meetings provide a great opportunity to present your own research. For those interested in presenting a paper, you can find paper submission information on the MEA website, <http://mea.sites.grinnell.edu/>.

Call for Complete Sessions and Individual Papers CSWEP Sessions @ Eastern Economic Association Conference 2023

24–26 February 2023

Sheraton New York Times Square Hotel, New York, NY

DEADLINE: 24 October 2022

CSWEP will sponsor a number of sessions at the annual meeting of the Eastern Economic Association.

Sessions are available for persons submitting an entire session (3 or 4 papers) or a complete panel on a specific topic in any area in economics, as well as topics related to career development. The organizer should prepare a proposal for a panel (including chair and participants) or session (including chair, abstracts, and discussants) and submit by email. Please be sure to include the appropriate JEL code(s) and the names, affiliations, and emails of all participants.

Additional sessions will be organized by the CSWEP Eastern Representative. Abstracts for papers in the topic areas of **gender, health economics, labor economics and public economics** are particularly solicited, but abstracts in other areas are also encouraged. Abstracts should be approximately one page in length and include the paper title, appropriate JEL code(s), names of authors, affiliation and rank, and email contact information.

Final decisions will be made before the regular EEA deadline.

All submissions should be emailed to:

Rebekah L. Loftis
CSWEP Committee Coordinator
American Economic Association
Email: info@cswep.org

If you have questions, specific suggestions regarding career topics to be covered, potential panelists, or ideas on how CSWEP can offer resources in career development at the Eastern meetings, please contact CSWEP using the above email address as well.

Calls, Announcements, Sessions

Fall 2022 CSWEP Survey!

DEADLINE: 21 October 2022

Since 1972 CSWEP has undertaken the collection of data on the gender composition of faculty and students in both Ph.D. granting and non-Ph.D. granting U.S. economics departments. These data are unique in the social sciences and beyond. The results are presented in the CSWEP *Annual Report* and at the ASSA meetings in January. Previous years are available at <https://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR37118.v5>. The 2022 survey was sent to all department chairs in mid-September and the completed survey is due October 21. CSWEP is very appreciative of the work of the 200+ department chairs and staff and the CSWEP liaisons who work to complete these surveys in a timely manner every year.

Call for Mentors and Mentees for the Adopt a Paper Mentoring Program

DEADLINE: 17 December 2022

Adopt a Paper is a mentoring program aimed at providing feedback to junior scholars in the field of economics. Most early career scholars find it difficult to receive comments on their research outputs post-graduation, prior to submission for journal publication. The Adopt a Paper program aims to *expand* and *diversify* access to high-quality feedback. Junior scholars in tenure-track and post-doctoral positions in research intensive colleges and universities submit a working paper to the program, and, if selected, receive comments from a senior scholar in their field, who volunteers to provide constructive feedback on the paper as well as publication advice. Mentors and mentees of all genders are welcome. We especially encourage mentee applications from women and underrepresented minorities. If you are a **senior scholar**, please consider providing this service to the profession. The deadline to sign up as a mentor or apply as a mentee is December 17, 2022. To participate, please visit: www.adoptapaper.org/apply. After applying, junior scholars will send their paper to adoptapaper@gmail.com by January 17, 2023. The program is run by Elira Kuka (George Washington University) and Danila Serra (Texas A&M University),

with the help of the Adopt a Paper Program Manager, Daniel Gomez (Texas A&M University). For more information, see www.adoptapaper.org or email: adoptapaper@gmail.com.

CSWEP Sessions at Southern Economic Association 92nd Annual Meeting

19–21 November 2022

Fort Lauderdale Marriott Beach Resort & Spa/B Ocean Resort Fort Lauderdale, Fort Lauderdale, FL

Crime and Justice

Saturday, 19 November 2022,
5:15 PM–7:00 PM

Session Organizer and Chair:
Jennifer L. Doleac (Texas A&M University)

Does internal oversight affect police effort and severity?

Maya Mikdash (Texas A&M University)

Specialized courts and the reporting of intimate partner violence: evidence from Spain

Marta Martínez Matute (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid) and Jorge Hombrados (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid)

The effect of parole board composition on prisoner outcomes

Mariyana Zapryanova (Smith College), Julia Godfrey (University of Rochester), and Kegon Tan (University of Rochester)

The impact of financial sanctions in the U.S. justice system: regression discontinuity evidence from Michigan's driver responsibility program

Elizabeth Luh (University of Michigan), Keith Finlay (U.S. Census Bureau), Matthew Gross (University of Michigan), and Michael Mueller-Smith (University of Michigan)

Discussants:

Benjamin Hansen (University of Oregon)

Bilge Erten (Northeastern University)

Felipe Goncalves (University of California, Los Angeles)

Michael Mueller-Smith (University of Michigan)

The Role of Gender in the Labor Market

Monday, 21 November 2022,
7:45 AM–9:30 AM

Session Organizer and Chair:
Laura Connolly (Michigan Technological University)

Do women benefit from trade liberalization? Evidence from the effects of an import shock on the Mexican labor market

Pia Heckl (Vienna University of Economics and Business)

Female labor market opportunities and gender gaps in aspirations

Teresa Molina (University of Hawai'i at Mānoa) and Emiko Usui (Hitotsubashi University)

Sustaining gender parity in corporate leadership roles by means of random selection

Robert Wright (American Institute for Economic Research)

What's in a job ad? An experimental design to explore gender differences in job attributes

Laura Connolly (Michigan Technological University), Cali Curley (University of Miami), and Jennifer Connolly (University of Miami)

Discussants:

Eren Bilen (Dickinson College)

Nicholas Jolly (Marquette University)

Perihan Saygin (University of Florida)

Priyanka Chakraborty (Centenary College of Louisiana)

Understanding and Addressing Disparities

Monday, 21 November 2022,
9:45 AM–11:30 AM

Session Organizer and Chair:
Jennifer L. Doleac (Texas A&M University)

Mitigating racial bias in teachers' assessments of students

Maria Zhu (Syracuse University)

Calls, Announcements, Sessions

Recruiting economics majors: the impact of an information campaign targeted at high school counselors

Danila Serra (Texas A&M University), Jonathan Meer (Texas A&M University), and Melissa Gentry (Texas A&M University)

The unintended consequences of #MeToo: evidence from research collaborations

Marina Gertsberg (University of Melbourne)

Venture capital's 'Me Too' moment

Sophie Calder-Wang (University of Pennsylvania), Patrick Sweeney (Harvard University Business School), and Paul Gompers (Harvard University Business School)

Discussants:

Andrea Moro (Vanderbilt University)

Kelly Jones (American University)

Michael Kofoed (United States Military Academy)

Piera Bello (University of Bergamo)

CSWEP Sessions at Association for Public Policy Analysis & Management (APPAM) 2022 Fall Conference

17–19 November 2022

Washington Hilton, Washington, DC

Interdisciplinary Approaches to Understanding Innovation Incentives

Thursday, 17 November 2022, 1:45–3:15 PM

Session Organizer and Chair: Stephanie Aaronson (Brookings Institution)

Paid family leave and innovation: evidence from inventor-level productivity

Chun-Yu Ho (University at Albany, SUNY), Gerald Marschke (University at Albany, SUNY), Kyoungah Noh (University at Albany, SUNY) and Won Sung (Bank of Korea)

Entry and acquisitions in software industries

Luise Eisfeld (Toulouse School of Economics)

Why are inventors in large firms less productive?

Alison Pei (Duke University)

Interdisciplinary Research and Approaches Towards Creating More Gender-Aware, Gender-Equal Economic Policies

Friday, 18 November 2022, 1:45–3:15 PM

Eviction filings and domestic violence: evidence from the COVID-19 pandemic

Rebecca (Linchi) Hsu (Howard University) and Alexander Henke (Howard University)

The pandemic, national health policies, and maternal labor supply—evidence from Chile & Mexico

Misty L. Heggeness (US Census Bureau) and Ana Sofia Leon Lince (Universidad Diego Portales)

Protection for whom? Trade, labor enforcement, and gender disparities in the labor market

Lourenço S. Paz (Baylor University) and Jennifer P. Poole (American University)

Long-term care and family caregiving

Binderiya Byambasuren (American University)

"We need every day to herald some woman's achievements . . . go ahead and boast!"
—Carolyn Shaw Bell

For the start of the 2022–2023 academic year, we present a special edition of the Brag Box. We heartily congratulate all of the women below, who were promoted to Full Professor during the 2021–2022 academic year. CSWEP solicited names for this list on Twitter. If we missed anyone, or you have another item for a future Brag Box, please submit it to info@cswep.org. We want to hear from you!

Abi Adams-Prassl
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Lori Beaman
Northwestern University

Nazneen Ahmad
Weber State University

Emily Breza
Harvard University

Reagan Baughman
University of New Hampshire

Kasey Buckles
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Pinka Chatterji
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Emily Conover
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Sarah Pearlman
Vassar College

Codrina Rada
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Mar Reguant
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Queens College-CUNY

Emilia Simeonova
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Katharine Sims
Amherst College

Tara M. Sinclair
George Washington University

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Rebecca Thornton
Baylor University

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Belmont University

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