Application for NBER Entrepreneurship Boot Camp

Submitted By:
Rachel Marie Brooks Atkins
Doctoral Candidate
The New School

Rachel Atkins
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Brooklyn, NY 11216

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National Bureau of Economic Research
1050 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02138, US

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to express strong interest in the NBER Entrepreneurship Boot Camp. I am a doctoral candidate in Urban and Public Policy at The New School's Milano School of International Affairs, Management, and Urban Policy and my dissertation research will cover innovation and racial disparities in entrepreneurship. Prior to Milano I earned a Master of Public Administration degree from New York University, a Master of Government Administration from the University of Pennsylvania and a Bachelor of Science in Economics from West Chester University of Pennsylvania. Though I have completed numerous theory and methods courses while enrolled in these programs I have not had a seminar course on entrepreneurship economics or finance. My studies in these fields have primarily been self-directed. I am eager to attend the NBER Entrepreneurship Boot Camp in order to expand my knowledge and grasp of the literature on this topic. I also have a strong desire to interact with and learn from the accomplished faculty and students who will be in attendance.

While taking classes at Milano I taught undergraduate courses in microeconomics, macroeconomics, labor economics, and statistics. The experience further solidified my understanding of and ability to communicate foundational theories in economics and methods. Currently, I am writing my dissertation proposal and working as a Research Assistant for two members of the Milano faculty. Professor Darrick Hamilton hired me to analyze minority small business ownership and the racial wealth gap in Washington DC using data from the National Asset Scorecard in Communities of Color. I was also hired by Professor Rachel Meltzer to analyze data from the Longitudinal Employer Household Dynamics Survey for her research on the impact of Super Storm Sandy on small businesses in New York City. These projects gave me an opportunity to work through issues raised in the academic literature, such as how to define and measure entrepreneurial activity and small business ownership given the available data.

I enthusiastically submit this application as my academic, teaching, and research experiences have prepared me well for the NBER Entrepreneurship Boot Camp. Included in this document are my curriculum vitae and essay further describing my reasons for applying to this program and research interests. You will receive a letter of recommendation on my behalf from Professor Darrick Hamilton, my academic advisor and the chair of my dissertation committee. I can be reached by email at broor975@newchool.edu or by phone at 917-833-4822.

Thank you for your consideration. I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Rachel Marie Brooks Atkins

NBER Boot Camp Essay

My interest in entrepreneurship first began to grow while I worked as a research analyst for Econsult Corporation, an economic and public policy consulting firm in Philadelphia. There I conducted numerous economic and fiscal impact studies of local development projects and worked with several economic development authorities (EDAs) on strategic plans and other specific policy initiatives and programs. On one specific project, I worked with the US Virgin Islands (USVI) EDA on a tax incentive program intended to bring new businesses to the Territory. This project sparked a few questions in my mind about the connections between entrepreneurship and economic development as well as the role policy makers play in the process of development. The theoretical basis for this program was unclear to me. It was difficult to understand how the types of new and existing businesses that were locating in the USVI because of the tax incentive program would generate the type of meaningful growth and development that policymakers hoped to produce. This experience drove me to pursue further study of entrepreneurship and economic growth.

Subsequently I worked on projects for the City of Philadelphia's Office of Economic Opportunity that further increased my desire to study entrepreneurship. I contributed to a study on disparities in the City's "contract set-aside" program for minority and woman owned businesses. The program was designed to increase participation of minority and woman owned businesses in city government contracting. On this project I was also tasked with researching best practices from cities across the country that operate similar programs. What I found from speaking with program officers across major US cities was that many were struggling to make a dent in their observed contracting disparities. These projects raised in me a variety of questions surrounding the causes and consequences of racial disparities in rates of entrepreneurship and small business ownership as well as disparities in entrepreneur/small business owner outcomes by race. However, I knew that I needed the additional knowledge and skills that a doctoral program could offer to answer these questions and ultimately provide meaningful contributions to policymaking in this area.

During the coursework phase of my doctoral program I used the assigned term paper in almost every course as an opportunity to research and write about some aspect of entrepreneurship or entrepreneurship policies. For example, I wrote an extensive literature review critiquing the existing body of research on minority set-aside programs in a course on public economics, explored the literature on disparities in self-employment rates and economic outcomes by race for a class in income inequality, and examined the literature connecting entrepreneurship to economic growth in cities for a course on urban economics. These assignments afforded me opportunities not only to research literature on various topics related to entrepreneurship but also to apply the theories I learned in class to critically evaluate this literature. Course instructors consistently provided me with helpful feedback on my writing and the subject matter of the course, but did not often address theories specific to entrepreneurship. As a result, I am seeking to fill the potential gaps in and deepen my understanding of entrepreneurship economic theory and methods by applying to the NBER's Entrepreneurship Boot Camp.

Since I have completed the required coursework and passed the qualifying exam, I am now working on my dissertation proposal while continuing to fulfill my research assistant responsibilities. I am currently exploring the distinction between "managerial" small business ownership and "innovative" entrepreneurship" as described by Schumpeter in The Theory of Economic Development. Using data such as the Kauffman Firm Survey or the new Census Annual Survey of Entrepreneurs I plan to explore owner, firm, and environmental/geographic characteristics to see if they can predict whether small firms

engage in “innovative” activities. I am also interested in the impact of innovative activities on firm outcomes and whether or not the presence (or lack of) innovation can explain some of the racial differences we observe in entrepreneur outcomes.

The differences between “managerial” and “innovative” entrepreneurs are foundational to Schumpeter’s theory of economic development. He argues that the activity of innovators generate economic development. With this in mind, I would like to empirically explore and compare the impact of managerial and innovative entrepreneurs on economic growth and development at different levels of geography such as the neighborhood, city, and region. Furthermore, I would like to stratify the analysis to observe whether there are differences in the distribution and impact of managerial and innovative entrepreneurs across space by race of the entrepreneur and racial composition of the geographic area. Since the Kauffman Firm Survey is longitudinal and oversamples innovative and minority owned firms I will likely use this data for the analysis.

Though I have completed several literature reviews covering various aspects of the topics described above, one of the primary reasons I would like to attend the NBER Entrepreneurship Research Boot Camp is to gain broader exposure to the literature on, theories of, and methods used in entrepreneurship economics. The survey instruments I mentioned above have attempted to measure innovative activity within firms, however, I really want to learn more about how innovation is measured, conceptualized and operationalized in the literature. I am also interested in the ways in which researchers “connect the dots” between innovative activity and economic growth and development. The identification issue is tricky since it is not always obvious whether new businesses enter markets because of opportunities that stem from a growing economy or if those businesses are in fact the engine of growth.

My dissertation will comprise the first set of studies in a research agenda that I plan to continue over the first few years of my career post-graduation. In the future I hope to further explore the role of networks in entrepreneur success and in explaining racial disparities in entrepreneur outcomes. There is an extensive literature of qualitative research on ethnic enclaves which delve into the mechanisms of how co-ethnic networks benefit entrepreneurs in various immigrant communities. I would like to quantitatively test some of the theories in this body of work and see if it can be applied to US-born black communities as well. I also hope to revisit minority and woman business enterprise set-aside programs to better understand whether they can expand supplier networks over the long run or if the program design is conducive only for producing short run benefits. Lastly, I am also interested in the ways in which consumer preferences impact disparities in firm outcomes by race.

Though I have a solid foundation in research and analytical methods, economics, and public policy theory I am applying to this Entrepreneurship Research Boot Camp because I am eager to increase my proficiency in the subfield of entrepreneurship economics. The participating faculty have published extensively in areas related to my research interest. I am particularly eager to learn from faculty such as Philippe Aghion given his expertise in Schumpeterian growth and public policy analysis, Josh Lerner in light of his cross country comparative analysis of entrepreneurial growth; and Thomas Hellmann who examines the impact of public and private institutional constraints on firm formation. The opportunity to study with these and other distinguished experts in the field would prove invaluable both as I write my dissertation and as I complete my training as a scholar in the fields of entrepreneurship economics and public policy analysis.

Curriculum Vitae
Rachel Marie Brooks Atkins

Education

Expected — **Ph.D. in Public and Urban Policy**
May 2017 — Milano School of International Affairs, Management, and Urban Policy
The New School University, New York, NY
Dissertation Research Topic: Essays on innovation and racial disparities in entrepreneurship
Academic Advisor: Professor Darrick Hamilton

August 2013 — **Master of Public Administration**
Robert F. Wagner School of Public Service
New York University, New York, NY
Thesis title: Minority Entrepreneurship and Affirmative Action
Academic Advisor: Professor Ingrid Ellen

May 2010 — **Master of Government Administration**
Fels Institute of Government
University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA
Courses: Mathematical Statistics I; Introduction to Statistical Computing; Statistics for Public Leadership; Politics, Technology, and Economic Development
Academic Advisor: Professor. John J. Mulhern

May 2004 — **Bachelor of Science**
Department of Economics
West Chester University of Pennsylvania, West Chester, PA
Summa Cum Laude

Teaching Experience

2015 — **Teaching Fellow,** Statistics with SPSS
New School University, New York, New York

2014 & 2015 — **Adjunct Faculty,** Microeconomics, Macroeconomics, and Labor Economics
Fashion Institute of Technology (SUNY), New York, NY

2013 — **Teaching Assistant,** Urban Economics
New York University, New York, NY

2010 — **Teaching Assistant**, Policy Development
University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA

Research Experience

2012-2013 — **Project Manager, Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) Project**
Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy
New York University, New York, NY

- Managed a team of research assistants assigned to the LIHTC project
- Established processes and protocols for collecting, cleaning, and updating data in the LIHTC tenant database
- Served as a liaison between state housing administrators and the Furman Center's LIHTC research team

2010-2012 — **Graduate Research Assistant**
Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy
New York University, New York, NY

- Created, maintained and updated a multi-state database of tenants living in LIHTC housing units
- Cleaned and performed statistical analysis of LIHTC data using STATA statistical software

- Conducted literature review of research on neighborhood gentrification

2005-2010 **Research Analyst**
Econsult Corporation, Philadelphia, PA

- Created a model for assessing employment costs under various compensation schedules for use in collective bargaining between a community college and faculty union
- Collected, cleaned, and analyzed quantitative and qualitative data for program evaluations, and policy research
- Assisted expert witnesses with preparation for testimony in employment litigation cases
- Developed and delivered analytic tools, presentations, proposals, and research reports

Publications – Journals

Atkins, Rachel M.B., and Katherine M. O'Regan. (2014). "Developing a Proxy for Identifying Family Developments in HUD's LIHTC Data: Using Information on the Distribution of Bedroom-Sizes". *Cityscape* 16, no. 3

Publications – Reports

Mayor's Advisory Commission on Construction Industry Diversity. (2009). *Report and Recommendations*: Report prepared for the City of Philadelphia Office of the Mayor http://www.econsult.com/articles/031609_MACCID_Full_Report.pdf

Econsult Corporation, MFR Consultants, Inc., (2007). *Comprehensive Report Examining Lending Practices of Authorized Depositories for The City of Philadelphia Calendar Year 2005:* Report prepared for the City of Philadelphia

Econsult Corporation, (2006). *Economic Impact of the Music Industry in Philadelphia and Potential Economic Impact of the Proposed R&B Hall of Fame*: Report prepared for Universal Companies, Philadelphia, PA

Publications – Conference Proceedings

Brooks, R. (2004). Resources Matter? An Analysis of New Jersey's Elementary Test Scores, In Proceedings of the 2004 Pennsylvania Economics Association Annual Conference http://aux.edinboro.edu/pea/pub/Proceed2004/pea04-6%20-%20Brooks%20article.pdf

Honors and Awards

2010 – 2012 Academic Scholarship, *Robert F. Wagner School of Public Service*
2000 – 2004 Pennsylvania Board of Governors Scholarship

Other Professional Experience

2014 -2015 **Policy Advisor and General Consultant**
Terry Tracy for Philadelphia City Council At-Large

- Led the team which developed and published *Path to Prosperity: A Plan for Philadelphia by Terry Tracy*
- Developed and executed a communications and social media strategy for promoting the *Path to Prosperity* document and related content

2004 – 2005 **Specialist, Consolidations and Reporting Division**
Verizon Communications Inc., Philadelphia, PA

- Coordinated the cash flow submission process for subsidiaries to ensure Sarbanes-Oxley compliance
- Created analysis reports on Balance Sheet, Income Statement, and Cash Flow Statement data
- Prepared materials for presentation at monthly meetings with the Chief Financial Officer

Special Skills

- Programing in statistical software such as STATA, SAS and SPSS
- Microsoft Access, Excel, Word, PowerPoint, Outlook
- Statistics and Mathematics
- Excellent oral and written communication skills
- Quickly learning new skills and concepts

Boards and Advocacy Experience

2015 - Present **Advisory Board Member and Disability Policy Advisor** iHi International

2008 – 2010 **Advisory Board Member** Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare's Bureau of Autism Services

2007 – 2008 **Miss Pennsylvania 2007,** Miss America Organization
State Advocacy Chairperson for Autism Speaks | Testified before Insurance and Banking Committee for PA House Bill 1150 | Developed and conducted workshops for the Federal Right Decisions Right Now grant program

List of Completed PhD Courses

Methods Courses
Applied Statistics and Econometrics I & II
Applied Microeconometrics
Research Methods
Estimating Impacts in Public Policy Research
Approaches in Qualitative Inquiry
Fieldwork Data Collection

Economics Courses
Public Economics and Finance
Urban Economics
Income Distribution in the US
Racial Economic Disparities: Causes and Consequences
Math for economists

Public Policy Courses
Political Economy and Public Policy Analysis I & II
Public Policy
Policy Seminar
Colloquium on Law, Economics, and politics of Urban Policy

Other Relevant Courses
Urban Systems
Community Development
Doctoral Research Workshop
Doctoral Research Colloquium

THE NEW SCHOOL MILANO

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Monday, March 21, 2016

Brett Maranjian
National Bureau of Economic Research
1050 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02138, US
maranjian@nber.org

Dear Ms. Maranjian,

It is with great pleasure that I recommend Rachel Marie Brooks Atkins for the NBER Entrepreneurship Research Boot Camp. I have known Rachel for over three years, and am very qualified to speak towards her motivation and analytical ability to conduct research. Based on my experience with Rachel and other doctoral students both at The New School and other institutions, I, without hesitation, strongly recommend that she is admitted into your research boot camp.

As the director of The New School policy doctoral program and faculty member of the economics and policy departments, I can say with confidence that Rachel ranks amongst the best students that we have had in terms of diligence, thoughtfulness and intuition.

In terms of area for improvement, it is somewhat ironic that the one area in which she could benefit from the most is minimizing self-doubt. In contrast many of her peers could benefit from her meticulousness, at times Rachel may downplay the strength of her argument, perhaps driven by an admirable concern of being overly careful. Nonetheless, her 3.8 GPA is outstanding, as well as her other contributions to the program including taking a leadership role by inaugurating a student governance committee for our doctoral program.

My first formal academic interaction with Rachel took place in my racial economic disparity course, which is framed in the economics literature examining theoretical and empirical approaches to understanding racial disparity. She was the top student in the class displaying no problems with understanding and critiquing literature from some of the top economics journals. Perhaps, this experience motivated her to pursue additional economics coursework including several econometric courses. She has a strong foundation in economics with deep knowledge in understanding theoretical and empirical approaches of racial disparity in economics – an economic subfield that has been labeled stratification economics.

In fact, because of this foundation, I hired Rachel as my research assistant to work on the *National Asset Scorecard for Communities of Color* project, which is funded by the Ford Foundation, and which, I along with William Darity, Jr at Duke University serve as the co-

primary investigators. The project involves analyzing original data that collected asset and debt information on groups disaggregated by ancestral and tribal origin in five metropolitan areas. At this stage of her development, Rachel is an exceptional writer. Thus, we have asked her to co-author our report for Washington, DC, which will include an emphasis of entrepreneurship, in part, because Washington, DC presents a metropolitan context in which blacks have the highest business ownership rate in our data set.

Given my understanding of the NBER's mission to provide inclusive spaces to develop the talent of creative, insightful and meticulous young professionals, Rachel is an excellent candidate for the Entrepreneurship Research Boot Camp, and would make valuable contributions to the program. Undoubtedly, the considerable resources that NBER has to offer would have tremendous value added for Rachel's professional development as well.

Rachel takes her academic preparation seriously – she is committed to understanding the economic science of group-based disparity and doing research on entrepreneurship and addressing exorbitant racial business gap. She wants to write a dissertation on the role of innovation and racial disparities in outcomes among entrepreneurs.

I strongly recommend that you admit Rachel into the NBER Entrepreneurship Research Boot Camp; it is a decision with which you will be pleased.

Sincerely,

Darrick Hamilton, PhD.

Associate Professor of Economics and Urban Policy
The Milano School of International Affairs, Management and Urban Policy
& Department of Economics, New School for Social Research
Director, Doctoral Program in Urban and Public Policy
The New School

President of the National Economic Association