Predoctoral Research Fellowships (RA-ships)

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My Background

- Williams Economics ‘14
- NERA Economic Consulting (2014-2016)
- Equality of Opportunity Project / UC Berkeley (2016-)
  - Saez-Yagan
  - Chetty-Hendren-Friedman
Typical Motivations

- Decide whether to pursue PhD
- Gain research experience
- Improve graduate school admissions outcomes
Typical Motivations

- Decide whether to pursue PhD
  - Effective
  - Expensive
- Gain research experience
- Improve graduate school admissions outcomes
Typical Motivations

- Decide whether to pursue PhD
- Gain research experience
  - Of course
  - Consider the counterfactual?
  - Path-dependency?
- Improve graduate school admissions outcomes
Typical Motivations

◊ Decide whether to pursue PhD
◊ Gain research experience
◊ Improve graduate school admissions outcomes
  ◊ GRE
  ◊ Classes (do your homework)
  ◊ Top 10 → Top 5 (incentives problem)
◊ Examples
  ◊ NYU → Berkeley
  ◊ Michigan → Harvard
  ◊ Berkeley → Berkeley
Typical Motivations

- Decide whether to pursue PhD
- Gain research experience
- Improve graduate school admissions outcomes
- Get the lay of the land
- Build a network
Day-to-day life

- Happy stories and horror stories from different people
- *Ask a current R.A. once you are offered the job*
- Experience varies:
  - By research group
  - Within research group, by professor
  - Within professor, by project
  - Within project, by stage
Application Process

1. Send in cover letter, C.V. and research paper
2. Take a data test – “First day on the job”
3. Potential first round interview (most variable)
   ◦ Drill-like econometrics questions
   ◦ Explain economic concepts simply
   ◦ Walk through resume
4. Interview with professors
   ◦ Research, research, research
   ◦ Personality
Miscellaneous Tips

◊ Send an empirical paper
◊ Do your test in Stata
◊ Over-comment code to showcase logical thinking
◊ Be a robot first when interpreting regression output
◊ Apply a lot of places (Rejections are plausibly uncorrelated)
  ◊ Looking for specific domain knowledge
  ◊ Someone already has an “in”
  ◊ Measurement error
The 16 places I applied

1. Stanford Law School (rejected immediately)
2. Evidence for Policy Design (declined offer)
3. Olken-Hanna (rejected, disaster interview)
4. Princeton IRS (rejected, not truly open)
5. Thomas Kane (rejected immediately)
6. Fryer EdLabs (rejected after interview)
7. Amanda Pallais (rejected after interview)
8. Mathematica Policy Research (rejected immediately)
9. Amitabh Chandra (rejected immediately)
10. Columbia Economics Dept. (rejected immediately)
11. UCSD Economics Dept. (rejected immediately)
12. Wharton Policy Initiative (withdrew after interview)
13. Stanford GSB (withdrew after interview)
14. Urban Labs (withdrew after interview)
15. Angrist-Autor-Pathak (maybe their backup?)
16. Equality of Opportunity Project (accepted offer!)
The 16 places I applied

◊ Model of well-ranked applicants on industry-wide scale is a bad one
  ◊ High variance
    ◊ 7 immediate rejects
    ◊ 9 interviews
◊ There are a lot of opportunities
Questions?

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www.nber.org/jobs/nonnberjobs.html
www.nber.org/jobs/employment_opp.html