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Destination

The University of Queensland
The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Re. Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Educational Inequalities (Level B)

Dear Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences representative,

I write this letter to apply for the Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Educational Inequalities (Level B) opportunity within the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Queensland, posted on 21st August 2019 on the Seek.com.au webpage.

My name is Sergey Alexeev and I am a PhD in Economics candidate (specialising in Econometrics of Education) at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS). I submitted my thesis titled “Three Essays on the Economics of Education and Inequality” on 30th June 2019, and expect to receive my doctorate by December 2019.

In this letter, by addressing the specified selection criteria of the position description, I hope to demonstrate that my research skills and interests, teaching abilities, and general life experience have shaped me as an ideal candidate for the opening at the University of Queensland.

1. Applicants must hold or be nearing completion of a PhD in a field applicable to addressing educational inequalities (sociology, education, social statistics, applied economics or a related area with a strong research component). A Level B applicant must hold a PhD in an applicable field.

I am an econometrician with a PhD in Economics (completed and awaiting conferral). The Economics of Education and the Economics of Inequality are my specialities, and I have conducted both theoretical and empirical research in these areas as an academic researcher and a public sector employee.

Throughout my academic career at European, North American and Australian universities, I have been contributing to research into understanding education systems, as well as developing better educational governance and policy.

I have also been systematically involved in collaborating with stakeholder groups and partners in ways that afford the translation of research insights across a range of aca-

ademic and professional forums. My research work, undertaken individually and collaboratively, is on a rising trajectory and is closely aligned with the Faculty's goals.

I am excited by the potential opportunity to contribute to the ongoing work of the Institute for Social Science Research, and to undertake solutions focused research addressing societal challenges by applying my econometrics expertise and unique cross-country experience.

2. High quality research methods for application in empirical social science in one or more of the following areas: quantitative social science; applied statistics; program and policy evaluation.

As a demonstration of my high quality research methods, I have finished two papers in the area of the Economics of Education. *The Structure of Wages in Russia: 1985–2015* (Alexeev 2019d) is under review in the A* level general-interest economics journal, *The European Economic Review*, and *The Effect of the Test-Preparation Industry on Centralized College Admission* (Alexeev 2019b) is under review in the B level economics theory journal, *A Quarterly Journal of Operations Research*.

In addition, I have one paper in the area of the Economics of Inequality. *On Australian Exceptionalism: The Role of Home Ownership in Income Mobility, Inequality and Polarization* (Alexeev 2019a) currently has a “revise and resubmit” status in the A level Journal of Housing Economics.

Furthermore, I am currently contracted by the New South Wales (NSW) Department of Education (DoE) where I am involved in developing econometrics models to evaluate the influence of the government's “Bump It Up” program on NSW public school students. My evaluation report will soon be published on the NSW DoE's web-page.

Finally, I am developing a policy evaluation paper, titled *The Right to Kill: Anti-gay Propaganda and Hate Crimes in Russia* (Alexeev 2019c), where I am using the database on court decisions to create a regional level dataset to estimate the change in incidences of hate-crimes against LGBT members of Russian society after the introduction of laws that were institutionalised under the pretext of “protecting” school students against so-called “gay propaganda” in Russia.

3. Exceptionally strong written and oral communication skills for diverse audiences and grant writing and dissemination, including well-developed presentation skills.

Throughout my employment at Australian, Canadian and Russian universities, I successfully taught students from diverse backgrounds. My current teaching evaluation at UTS as a tutor for “Intermediate Microeconomics” is 4.55 out of 5.0. Some of my teaching success is due to my YouTube channel, which supplements my tutorials.¹

I believe that modern information technologies, if applied properly, can considerably increase the quality of communication. For example, during my PhD in Economics

program, I created a custom Beamer template that allowed me to represent data in a number of ways to communicate findings to a diverse audience.²

4. Ability to manage competing priorities and multiple projects concurrently, and excellent time management skills.

I am a highly organised individual, and the projects that I have been trusted to work on throughout my industry and academic experiences, including those mentioned above, have always been delivered in a timely manner. I believe that it is important to produce deliverables and outcomes well before their deadline, and then use the remaining time for revision, editing and external evaluation.

Although I started the PhD program in 2015, my work on research papers started in 2017, as economists at UTS are required to successfully finish coursework during the first two years of their degree. From 2017 to 2019, I completed three research papers, and I hope to produce many more.

As further evidence of my organisational skills, I also worked as Lead Project Manager at Saint Petersburg University of IT, Mechanics and Optics in 2011, where I systematically utilised my organisational skills to help students and graduates secure funding for their research and start-up projects.

5. Strong attention to detail and a commitment to excellence.

As mentioned above, I believe that it is important to produce deliverables and outcomes well before their deadline, and then use the remaining time for revision, editing and external evaluation. This approach enables me not only to respect the time constraint, but also reliably achieve excellence and a strong attention to detail in my work.

I am proud of all the projects that I have been trusted to work on and, as I personally scrutinise every single detail, I always take full unreserved responsibility for them.

A recent major project that I have delivered in a timely manner and with strong attention to detail is my PhD in Economics thesis.³ Another recent example is the policy evaluation report that I am currently writing at the NSW DoE.

6. Track record of, or interest in, pursuing research in the areas of educational inequalities, educational equity and/or transitions from education to employment.

The areas of educational inequalities, educational equity, and transitions from education to employment are at the core of my research interests.

In my paper titled *The Effect of the Test-Preparation Industry on Centralized College Admission* (Alexeev 2019b), I am studying how unequal access to test-preparation capacities results in the unmerited acceptance of lesser skilled applicants in the college admission process. In another of my papers titled *The Structure of Wages in Russia:*

1985–2015 (Alexeev 2019d), I am showing that Eastern and Central European countries during economic transition periods experienced a lack of law and business college graduates, thus creating a massive wage premium for their skill set.

7. Evidence of ability to publish in high quality journals in a relevant field.

One of my papers, *On Australian Exceptionalism: The Role of Home Ownership in Income Mobility, Inequality and Polarization* (Alexeev 2019a), has a “revise and re-submit” status in the A level Journal of Housing Economics. Several more papers are currently under review and I expect that at least two of them will be accepted into publication by the end of 2019.

8. Ability to lead and work in multidisciplinary collaborative research teams and develop and foster collaborative links with other research and/or industry groups, nationally and internationally.

Throughout my career, I have demonstrated the ability to work effectively as part of, or take the lead in, a multi-disciplinary research team.

I am currently contracted by the NSW DoE where I work in a team of four people led by Principal Evaluator, Sara Rahman, to evaluate the influence of the “Bump It Up” program on NSW public school students. I also tutor for “Intermediate Microeconomics” at UTS, where I am part of a three-person team led by Lecturer, Dr. Massimo Scotti. Finally, in co-authorship with Associate Professor in Real Estate at Deakin University, Dr. Adrian Lee, I am developing a paper that measures how the quality of public schools influences real estate prices in Sydney.

As evidence of my ability to develop and foster collaborative links with other research groups internationally, in 2015, while working at GSOM SPbU, I introduced a faculty member of York University, Associate Professor, Dr. Andrei Semenov, to GSOM SPbU Academic Director, Dr. Igor Baranov. This resulted in Dr. Andrei Semenov’s appointment as Visiting Researcher and Visiting Professor at GSOM SPbU, and he still regularly visits Saint Petersburg to teach graduate students.

9. Experience of working with large-scale survey or administrative data.

My research papers demonstrate my experience of working with large-scale datasets. In particular, I have worked with the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA), United States’s Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), and Russia Longitudinal Monitoring Survey of HSE (RLMS) datasets.

Currently, in my occupation at the NSW DoE, I am working with high dimensional administrative datasets. In addition, I also consult the NSW DoE on the data that is necessary to collect to evaluate their ongoing policy interventions. Similarly, in my previous occupations, I worked with industry and macro level datasets.

I also have a number of research projects in progress, which use unique datasets that I designed and collected myself.⁴

10. Advanced statistical or econometric methods for longitudinal survey and administrative data.

In the paper titled *On Australian Exceptionalism: The Role of Home Ownership in Income Mobility, Inequality and Polarization* (Alexeev 2019a), I am using a longitudinal component to match respondents to their parents to estimate intergenerational mobility. In another paper titled *The Structure of Wages in Russia: 1985–2015* (Alexeev 2019d), I am using longitudinal information to recover time independent information about respondents to estimate returns on different college majors. Also, at the NSW DoE, I am using a difference-in-difference estimator to measure the influence of governmental policy on public school students. Finally, two of my research papers in progress also utilise difference-in-difference design.

11. Computer proficiency and programming experience in the use of Stata.

I have 6 years' experience in the use of Stata.

In addition, during my studies at York University, I used Gauss for two graduate level research projects; during coursework at UTS, I have been using both R and Matlab. I am also proficient in LaTeX, Unix and Mathematica, and I am currently learning Python.

12. Ability to identify and attract competitive grant funding.

When I worked as Lead Project Manager at Saint Petersburg University of IT, Mechanics and Optics in 2011, two researchers successfully received grant funding with my assistance.

In addition, as evident from my CV, I have personally received 7 competitive academic scholarships:

1. APR Intern Scholarship in 2019;
2. International Research Scholarship in 2015;
3. Ross Milbourne Research Scholarship in Economics in 2015;
4. UTS Top Up Scholarship in 2015;
5. York Graduate Scholarship for Academic Excellence in 2013;
6. York International Tuition Fee Scholarship in 2013; and
7. GSOM stipend grant for studying abroad in 2008.

13. Formal project management expertise or willingness to undertake training and engage in project management.

Although my recent background is in economics, my first tertiary degree was from a business school, where I received excellent training in project management. My understanding of project management was also later sharpened by my industry experience.

For example, in 2012, in the position of Assistant Project Manager at ReDeal Group, I managed the implementation and deployment of vending machines across Saint Petersburg. Currently, I am managing the execution of a policy evaluation report at the NSW DoE, which involves planning the analysis of policy and requesting information from various departments of the DoE.

14. Research experience in government, industry or the not-for-profit sector.

My research experience includes work in both government and industry sectors. For example, in 2010, while being employed as a mergers and acquisitions Data Analyst, I partook in modelling the consequences of a hypothetical merger of key Russian IT companies. Currently, at the NSW DoE, I am involved in developing econometrics models to evaluate the influence of the “Bump It Up” program on NSW public school students.

15. Experience liaising between university researchers and other sectors.

I am always looking for possibilities to apply policy innovations discovered in academia to real world problems.

For example, I have known that my UTS supervisor, Professor Isa Hafalir, is developing a cutting edge market design solution that has the potential to replace the current system of allocating children into public schools in NSW. I noticed this potential and introduced Professor Isa Hafalir to the NSW DoE’s Principal Evaluator, Sara Rahman. I mediated their meeting and helped them move towards the next stage of implementing the theoretical solution into practice.

16. Experience in communicating research results to a variety of audiences, including non-academic audiences.

As demonstration of my ability to effectively communicate research results to a variety of audiences, in 2017, while doing my PhD in Economics at UTS, I was asked to give an interview to the GSOM SPbU alumni organisation about my research.⁵ I also regularly post pieces about various research results on my private blog.⁶

In addition, I have always been communicating with non-academic audiences throughout my career. In 2011, during my work as Lead Project Manager at Saint Petersburg University of IT, Mechanics and Optics, I gave an interview to a local magazine “Lumiere” about business development and entrepreneurship.⁷ In the same year, I also wrote a piece that was published in a local newspaper, “Gatchina-Info”, about the utility of nations using history as guidance for modern-day problems.⁸

I hope I have addressed the selection criteria adequately, but please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries or require further information. I believe that the work that is being done by the University of Queensland's Institute for Social Science Research is very important, and it would be a privilege to have an opportunity to contribute to it.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my application.

Yours sincerely,

Sergey Alexeev

Notes

1. My teaching materials and student feedback for the course "Intermediate Microeconomics" can be accessed on my private web-page:
<http://www.backwardinduction.blog/2017-2018-intermediate-microeconomics-business-course-at-uts/>.
2. An example of the template can be accessed on my private web-page:
<http://www.backwardinduction.blog/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Alexeev.-14.08.2019-Mobility.pdf>.
3. The examiners' report on my PhD thesis can be accessed on my private web-page:
<http://www.backwardinduction.blog/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Binder1-3.pdf>.
4. My current research projects in progress in the area of Applied Econometrics can be accessed on my private web-page:
<http://www.backwardinduction.blog/his-research/>.
5. The interview can be accessed at the GSOM Family web-page:
https://gsom.spbu.ru/blog/blog2017_02_13/.
6. The private blog can be accessed at the my private web-page:
<http://www.backwardinduction.blog/blog/>.
7. A copy of the magazine's issue can be accessed at my private web-page:
http://www.backwardinduction.blog/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/lumiere_4i.pdf.
8. A photocopy of the magazine's issue can be found at my private web-page:
<http://www.backwardinduction.blog/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/WhatsApp-Image-2019-08-13-at-6.36.16-PM1-1.jpeg>.

References

- [1] S. Alexeev. *On Australian Exceptionalism: The Role of Home Ownership in Income Mobility, Inequality and Polarization*. Working Paper. 2019. URL: [🔗](#).
- [2] S. Alexeev. *The Effect of the Test-Preparation Industry on Centralized College Admission*. Working Paper. 2019. URL: [🔗](#).

- [3] S. Alexeev. *The Right to Kill: Anti-gay Propaganda and Hate Crimes in Russia*. Working Paper. 2019. URL: [↗](#).
- [4] S. Alexeev. *The Structure of Wages in Russia: 1985–2015*. Working Paper. 2019. URL: [↗](#).