

**Buffett Undergraduate Research Fellowship Opportunity**

*Experimentally testing the effectiveness of soft skills in improving employability among young graduates from Industrial Training Institutes (ITI) in Uttarakhand, India*

**Faculty Mentor:** Lori Beaman, Professor, Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences

**Project Synopsis:** Youth unemployment remains a critical policy challenge in developing countries, particularly in India, where young workers (ages 20–24) face significantly higher unemployment rates than older workers. To address this, the Indian government has established Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) nationwide, offering post-secondary training in over 150 trades. Despite these efforts, ITIs face persistent challenges, including low enrollment and a disconnect between the skills taught and those demanded by employers. In response, the Government of Uttarakhand has rolled out a new Employability Skills Curriculum (ESC) across all ITIs in the state and launched an ESI training program in June 2023, aimed at improving teaching practices. This study evaluates the impact of the ESI training program through a randomized controlled trial across 60 ITIs.

Along with coauthors, we collected data from approximately 2,000 students enrolled in 2024 and their instructors through surveys. Key outcomes include students' employability attributes, employment outcomes (placement rate, earnings, and alignment of jobs with training), and instructors' pedagogical knowledge and practices. The analysis of midline data is essential to fundraise for the collection of endline data.

The study will generate rigorous evidence on how strengthening instructor capacity can improve vocational education outcomes. Its findings will inform policies to enhance the ITI system and guide strategies for scaling effective approaches to vocational training and youth employment in India.

**Project Term:** Summer only

**Project Location:** In person, on campus

**Job Description:** The undergraduate RA will contribute to analyzing multi-wave survey data from approximately 2,000 students and their instructors, examining impacts on pedagogical practices, student skill development, and labor market outcomes. Primary responsibilities include: (1) cleaning and organizing survey data from baseline and follow-up rounds in STATA, including checking for inconsistencies, creating analysis-ready datasets, and maintaining comprehensive documentation; (2) conducting statistical analysis in Stata to evaluate treatment effects, including running regressions,

creating balance tables, and testing for heterogeneous effects; (3) producing professional data visualizations and summary statistics for academic papers and policy presentations; (4) analyzing qualitative responses about instructor teaching techniques using systematic coding schemes and thematic analysis; and (5) drafting research summaries tailored for different audiences, from technical academic sections to accessible policy briefs for government stakeholders. The RA will work closely with the research team to ensure rigorous analysis standards while developing valuable skills in development economics research methods. Having Hindi language skills will be essential for component (4) of this project.

**Time Commitment:** The time commitment is flexible, however full time work during the summer would be ideal. A minimum of 20 hours per week in the summer is required.

**Number of available positions:** One, preselected

