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National Bureau of Economic Research  
1050 Massachusetts Ave.  
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Sir or Madam:

I am writing to express my interest in the NBER Productivity, Innovation and Entrepreneurship Program's Post-Doctoral Fellowship in Innovation Policy. I am currently a PhD candidate in the Economics department at Boston University, though I am housed at the NBER this year. In addition to Innovation, my fields of study are Economic History, Labor Economics, and Urban/Regional Economics. The first chapter of my dissertation, "Dense Enough To Be Brilliant: Patents, Urbanization, and Transportation in Nineteenth Century" explores the evolution of the geographical distribution of patenting, used as a measure of innovative activity, in response to the sharp increases in access to transportation, and therefore larger markets, that occurred in the nineteenth-century United States.

As a student at BU I have had the opportunity to participate in the local scholarly community, both at the NBER and in Cambridge more broadly. In particular, I have greatly enjoyed attending the Productivity Lunch on Tuesdays, for both the presentations and the academic company. I am very excited to be presenting my work on patents and market access at the Productivity Lunch on December 9th.

My upcoming presentation will focus on the relationship between expanding access to markets and patenting over the nineteenth century, and is part of a broader body of research focusing on how the geographic distribution of innovation is affected by greater connectivity. In my work on nineteenth-century U.S. patents, I have spent considerable time and resources developing a detailed and granular dataset on the location and content of patents, building off of excellent foundations given to me by others. I am in the process of moving from creation of these data, to analysis and writing; this fellowship will provide me with the opportunity to distill this work. My historical focus brings both generality to the study of innovation, as the differences in context provide potential checks for purportedly generalized theories, as well as interesting analogies to the modern world. Increases in connectivity characterize the modern world, and the changes seen in the nineteenth century may provide guidance for the changes being encountered today. With this fellowship I will focus on how the text of patents sheds light on the role of information transmission in encouraging innovative activity, helping us understand the role of connectivity on innovation.

Please find my proposal for this fellowship attached. I will be available for an interview at the ASSA meeting in Boston in January or in Boston at your convenience. In addition to the included material, I am happy to provide any other materials on request. Thank you for your consideration; I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Elisabeth Ruth Perlman  
encl: Curriculum Vitae, Proposal