

Application for Lecturer Position

Human Geography, Planning and/or International Development Studies

Peter Courtney

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Peter Courtney

Joint PhD Candidate in Economics

Stellenbosch University & Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

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Dr Courtney Vegelin

Programme Director

Department of Geography, Planning and International Development Studies

Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences

University of Amsterdam

Dear Dr Vegelin,

I am writing to apply for the one-year thesis supervision position in Human Geography, Planning and/or International Development Studies at the University of Amsterdam. As a joint PhD candidate at Stellenbosch University and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam with substantial experience bridging development economics, spatial analysis, and issues of social justice, I am confident that I can make a meaningful contribution to supervising students engaged with the spatiality of social, economic, and environmental processes. I am particularly excited about the opportunity to work alongside the Human Capital section, as my research directly addresses the spatial dimensions of education, skills development, and human capital formation.

Academic Background and Research Expertise

My research sits at the intersection of development economics, spatial econometrics, and questions of social justice—precisely the areas central to your department's teaching programmes. My MSc thesis, *Invisible Borders – Persisting Scars* (Wageningen University, Cum Laude), examined how

historical spatial boundaries continue to shape contemporary inequality across South Africa, using sophisticated spatial econometric techniques to demonstrate how geographic legacies persist in determining educational outcomes and economic opportunities.

Currently, my doctoral research extends this spatial perspective across education systems, land policy, and inclusive development in South Africa. My **C. Lowell Harriss Dissertation Fellowship from the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy** supports research on property valuation and land value taxation—work that directly engages urban geography, fiscal policy, and spatial justice. Recent working papers have focused on rationalising undersubscribed schools using spatial efficiency analysis, and understanding how educational infrastructure investments intersect with fiscal consolidation and inclusive growth.

Technical and Methodological Strengths

A distinguishing feature of my work is my fluency in using **R as a GIS coding language**. I regularly use packages such as `sf`, `terra`, `tmap`, and `leaflet` to conduct spatial econometric analyses, create publication-quality maps, and perform complex geospatial operations. This computational approach to GIS allows me to seamlessly integrate spatial visualisation with rigorous statistical analysis—a skill I am eager to share with students developing their own research projects.

Bridging Academic Rigour and Development Practice

My experience combines academic research with practical engagement in the development sector, including work with J-PAL Africa, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, and Usawa Agenda (a Gates Foundation grantee on education reform). These experiences have given me direct insight into how geographic considerations shape development interventions and service delivery. I bring this practical perspective to academic supervision, helping students bridge theoretical frameworks with real-world applications.

Teaching Philosophy and Student Supervision

I am deeply committed to the pedagogical approach outlined in your vacancy—taking a genuine interest in students’ own ideas through open discussion and helping them develop feasible research topics. During my time as a Teaching Assistant for Economics of Education at Stellenbosch University, I designed Stata-based assignments that enabled students to engage directly with data. I understand that effective thesis supervision requires balancing intellectual ambition with practical feasibility, providing structured guidance whilst allowing space for students’ creativity and independence.

I am particularly enthusiastic about supervising students working on themes related to urban transformations and spatial inequality, migration and mobility, climate change and environmental justice, land policy and urban planning, and education geography.

Alignment with the Department's Vision

The Department of GPIO's commitment to critical inquiry combined with constructive solutions to societal problems resonates strongly with my own research agenda. My publications—ranging from peer-reviewed book chapters to policy-oriented working papers for UNU-WIDER to public-facing op-eds—demonstrate my commitment to research that is both academically rigorous and socially engaged.

Having studied at Wageningen University and currently being affiliated with VU Amsterdam through the Tinbergen Institute, I am familiar with the Dutch academic environment and confident I can contribute meaningfully to your internationally-oriented teaching programmes.

Practical Considerations

I am available for 8-12 hours per week as specified, and given my current affiliation with VU Amsterdam, I can easily be present in Amsterdam for regular student meetings. I am flexible and able to adjust supervision styles based on students' diverse backgrounds and research needs.

Conclusion

The opportunity to supervise students at the University of Amsterdam is particularly exciting because it aligns perfectly with my research expertise, methodological skills, and commitment to fostering the next generation of scholars engaged with pressing questions of spatial justice and development. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss how my background in spatial econometrics, development economics, and GIS methods can contribute to the Department of Geography, Planning and International Development Studies.

Thank you for considering my application. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Courtney

Enclosures:

Curriculum Vitae

List of Publications