



Katharine G. Abraham

GRFP Recipient: 1977

Undergraduate Institution:
B.S. 1976, Iowa State University

Graduate Institution:
Ph.D. 1982, Harvard University

Graduate Field of Study:
Economics

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Current Position:
Member, President's Council
of Economic Advisers

RESEARCH INTERESTS //

Since her days as a Harvard University Ph.D. student, Katharine G. Abraham has been concerned with how the labor market functions and the effects of government policies on the labor market. Her research has examined topics that include the role of seniority in firms' internal labor markets; growth in firms' use of temporary and contract workers; the importance of cyclical versus structural factors in explaining movements in unemployment; the effects of differing labor market institutions on firms' responses to changes in the demand for labor; and the factors that affect the retirement decisions of older workers. In recent years, much of her research has been concerned with the measurement of economic activity, including the development of expanded measures that encompass both market and non-market production (for example, investments in human capital).

A FOND MEMORY FROM MY EXPERIENCE AS A FELLOW //

When I started college in 1972, there were still relatively few women in the field of economics and in more than one instance I encountered skepticism that it was a field in which I could expect to succeed. Still, I did well as an undergraduate, first at Carleton College and later at Iowa State University, taking a rigorous course load that I hoped would prepare me for graduate studies, and I was admitted to both of the selective graduate programs to which I applied. I chose to attend Harvard University and was awarded a first-year financial aid package that made that possible. After I arrived, my adviser told me about the NSF Fellowship program and encouraged me to submit an application.

Being awarded an NSF Fellowship was a terrific confidence booster. It also meant that, during the remainder of my time in graduate school, I was able to focus on my research, accepting teaching and other responsibilities only to the extent that they seemed helpful to my professional development, rather than their being necessary to support myself. To this day I continue to be grateful for the freedom that having a Fellowship gave me.

AWARDS/ HONORS //

- Distinguished Achievement Citation, Iowa State University Alumni Association (1999)
- Julius Shiskin Memorial Award for Economic Statistics (2002)
- Honorary doctorate, Iowa State University (2002)
- Fellow, American Statistical Association (2003)
- Fellow, Society of Labor Economists (2007)
- Roger Herriot Award for Innovation in Federal Statistics (2010)

POSITION PROFILE //

Selected by President Barack Obama, Katharine Abraham currently serves as a member of the Council of Economic Advisers, a position in which she is responsible for offering the president objective advice on the formulation of economic policy. She is on leave from the University of Maryland, where she is a professor in the Joint Program in Survey Methodology and a faculty associate of the Maryland Population Research Center.

From 1993-2001, Abraham served as commissioner of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, a position to which she was nominated by President William J. Clinton. Prior to that, she held appointments in the Department of Economics, University of Maryland; the Brookings Institution; and the Sloan School of Management, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She is a fellow of the Society of Labor Economists and of the American Statistical Association, holds an honorary doctorate from Iowa State University, and is a past vice president of the American Economic Association.

