Nikki Alexander holds dynamic roles. She’s an economics master’s student heavily involved in academic research, student government, full-time work and even Judo. Alexander’s involvement, commitment, and motivation have not gone unnoticed.

“Nikki is very dedicated to certain issues that are important to her, having especially to do with education and its relation to social opportunity,” said Tracy Mott, associate professor and chair in the economics department. “She is motivated and directs her work to something very important to our society.”

Alexander’s research blends two fields of study: social mobility and economic development. On the social mobility side, she explores how to increase social mobility through college education. She further compares income inequality to the unequal distribution of college degrees among students from different income levels. On the economic development side, her research centers on the economic and political impact of different education systems in Cuba and other Latin American countries.

Alexander’s personal experiences contribute to her passion and dedication to tackle imperative societal issues. As a first-generation college student from a low-income family, these topics are quite important to her.

“I have experienced first-hand how hard it is to break out of poverty,” said Alexander. “I really want to make a difference for children who are born into these kinds of environments. I want my work as an economist to make a real impact by creating and implementing policies that target low-income, first generation college students.”

“Nikki is the first person to complete college in her family, but she’s gone far beyond that,” said Markus Schneider, assistant professor of economics and Alexander’s thesis advisor. “The biggest strength I see is her ability to smartly take advantage of opportunities as they present themselves - and to create opportunities where they don’t exist.”

An additional goal of Alexander’s studies is to establish effective education systems in developing countries. In relation to her research focus, Alexander worked with faculty this past year on an article that compares education systems in Cuba and Haiti and their subsequent economic and political development. The paper is undergoing final editor reviews with the International Journal of Education and Development.

“It’s worth pointing out that Nikki is a very hard worker.” said Mott. “She has been very willing, which not many students are, to get involved in the student organizations. She has made significant contributions to decisions and outcomes of the council of graduate students here.”
Alexander is also a member of Graduate Students for the Four Facilities, which aims to help graduate students in the departments of Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences and Math, and Engineering and Computer Science fund their conference endeavors. She also devotes time to the Learning Effectiveness Program and the Student Athlete Support Services program.

“I think it’s important to be involved in interdisciplinary groups on campus,” said Alexander. “As grad students, we rarely get a chance to meet students from other programs. It’s wonderful to get a chance to find out what students in other programs are researching.”

Alexander encourages students to make the most out of their education at DU by exploring all fields of interest and by getting involved in campus life. She believes involvement in campus and departments contribute to a successful graduate school experience.

“The economics program at DU helped me realize I want to be a career economist,” she said. “The program also influenced the way I look at politics, media and the world. It has helped me critically examine the way economic and political systems work and the impact on individuals.”

In addition to her studies and extracurricular activities, Alexander also finds time to intern full-time with General Services Administration and practice Judo. She has practiced Judo for 12 years and is a first degree black belt. She currently trains five to six days a week and competes at the national level. She is also an instructor for children's Judo classes at Denver Judo.

Alexander aspires to earn her PhD in economics and to continue studying social mobility and economic development.