

Ruinan Zhao

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Education

University of California, Riverside

Ph.D. in Economics

Expected 2026

M.A. in Economics

2021

University of California, San Diego

B.A. in Economics, *Highest Distinction*

2019

Research Interests

Labor Economics, Economics of Education, Applied Microeconomics, Public Policy.

Publications

- “The Impact of Granting Undocumented Immigrants Driver’s Licenses on Fatal Crashes”
Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, forthcoming.

Job Market Paper

- “How Does a Four-Day School Week Affect High School Students? Evidence from Colorado”
(with Meng Song).

Abstract: This paper studies the effects of four-day school weeks (4DSW) on high school outcomes using comprehensive administrative data from Colorado, the state with the highest prevalence of 4DSW adoption. The dataset covers nearly two decades of entry cohorts and more than one million unique student records, allowing the first large-scale causal analysis of the policy in Colorado. Exploiting staggered adoption across districts in a difference-in-differences design, we find that 4DSW modestly improve standardized test scores, reduce dropout, and increase both on-time and overall graduation. The effects are particularly strong for students first exposed in middle school, highlighting the importance of timing and adjustment. At the same time, heterogeneous impacts show that English Learners and homeless students benefit less, raising equity concerns. Teacher retention improves under the 4DSW, but additional mechanisms likely contribute to the gains. Together, these findings challenge the common view that 4DSW harm student learning and provide timely evidence for districts and states considering alternative school schedules.

Working Papers

- “Faculty Gender Attitudes and Their Impact on College Students’ Academic Achievement”
(with Ozkan Eren and Zhuoyu Qiu).
- “Higher Education in the Trump Era: Impacts on College Student Outcomes”
(with Ozkan Eren and Zhuoyu Qiu).

Works in Progress

- “Asylum-seeking Youth in U.S. Schools: Early Insights from the Buslift” (with Kevin Shih).

Research Experience and Policy Report

Research Assistant, Presley Center of Crime and Justice, UC Riverside 2022–Present

- Managed and analyzed restricted individual-level prisoner datasets from the California Department of Justice and Department of Corrections, covering tens of thousands of observations across multiple years.
- Conducted large-scale data construction, variable harmonization, and integration of administrative records for empirical analysis.
- Developed and implemented econometric models to evaluate policy-relevant questions, with results incorporated into research deliverables for the Center.

Policy Report on the Four-Day School Week, Colorado Department of Education

In Progress

- Utilize statewide administrative data (2003–2024) on over a million of unique student and teacher record to produce comprehensive policy report on the four-day school week in Colorado.
- Conduct statistical analysis of student achievement and attainment outcomes, and translate findings into policy insights for the Colorado Department of Education.

Fellowships and Awards

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| Graduate Student Award, Southern Economic Association | 2025 |
| Outstanding Teaching Assistant, UC Riverside | 2024 |
| Dean’s Distinguished Fellowship, UC Riverside | 2020–Present |
| Magna Cum Laude, UC San Diego | 2019 |
| Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society, UC San Diego | 2019 |
| Provost’s Honors, UC San Diego | 2017–2019 |

Teaching Experience

Instructor, UC Riverside

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| Econ 003: Introduction to Microeconomics | Summer 2025 |
| Econ 102: Intermediate Microeconomics | Summer 2024 |
| Econ 153: Labor Economics | Summer 2023; Spring 2024 |
| Econ 162: Managerial Economics | Summer 2022 |

Teaching Assistant, UC Riverside

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| Econ 107: Introductory Econometrics | Fall 2023; Summer 2024; Fall 2024 |
| Econ 102: Intermediate Microeconomics | Spring 2022 |
| Econ 105: Intermediate Macroeconomics | Spring 2025 |
| Econ 003: Introduction to Microeconomics | Winter 2022; Winter 2025; Summer 2025 |
| Econ 101: Statistics for Economics | Fall 2021 |

Journal Referee

Journal of Labor Research

Conferences and Seminars

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| Southern Economic Association Annual Meetings (Department Nominated) | Tampa, FL, 2025 |
| Applied Economics Seminar | UC Riverside, CA, 2025 |
| Chinese Economist Society Annual Meetings | Guangzhou, China, 2025 |
| Applied Microeconomics Workshop | UC Riverside, CA, 2025 |
| All-California Labor Economics Conference (Poster) | UC Santa Barbara, CA, 2023 |
| Graduate Student Brownbag | UC Riverside, CA, 2022 & 2023 |

Skills

Programming: Stata, R, Python, MATLAB, SQL, \LaTeX .

Languages: English (Fluent), Chinese (Native)

Work Authorization: U.S. Permanent Resident

References

Ozkan Eren (Chair)

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Michael Bates

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