

Ruinan Zhao

Department of Economics, University of California, Riverside
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Work Authorization: U.S. Permanent Resident

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*, Early View (2025). doi:10.1002/pam.70053

Job Market Paper

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

Abstract: We examine the four-day school week’s impact on high school outcomes using nearly two decades of Colorado administrative data covering over one million unique student records. Exploiting quasi-random district adoption in a difference-in-differences design, we provide large-scale causal evidence on how the policy affects student outcomes. We find modest improvements in standardized test scores, lower dropout, and higher on-time and overall graduation. In addition, students first exposed to the four-day school week before high school experience larger improvements in persistence and attainment. At the same time, disadvantaged groups benefit less, raising equity concerns. Overall, these results challenge the view that a shorter week may harm learning and offer timely evidence for districts and states considering alternative calendars.

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

- “From Prison to Employment: The Effects of P2E Program on Recidivism and Labor Market Outcomes” (with Ozkan Eren).
- “Asylum-seeking Youth in U.S. Schools: Early Insights from the Buslift” (with Kevin Shih).

Research and Policy Experience

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

- Managed restricted, sensitive individual-level administrative data from the California Department of Justice and the California Department of Corrections across multi-year panels; built longitudinal datasets through large-scale merging, cleaning, and variable construction.
- Delivered policy-focused statistical and econometric analysis; produced clear summaries for research center reports and briefings.

Colorado Department of Education — Policy Report (Four-Day School Week) *In progress*

- Use 2003–2024 statewide administrative data covering over one million unique student records; construct linked longitudinal datasets and technical documentation.
- Conduct rigorous econometric analyses of student achievement, dropout, and graduation outcomes; translate results into policy briefs and presentations.

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 |

Fellowships and Awards

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| Graduate Student Award, Southern Economic Association | 2025 |
| Conference Travel Grant | 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 |

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 |

Journal Referee

Journal of Labor Research; Journal of Policy Analysis and Management

Skills

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

References

Ozkan Eren (Chair)

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