

Ruinan Zhao

Department of Economics, University of California, Riverside
900 University Ave, Riverside, CA 92521, USA
Email: ruinan.zhao@email.ucr.edu Phone: (626) 759-1697
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 school 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

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

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

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

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)

Professor of Economics
University of California, Riverside
ozkan.eren@ucr.edu
(951) 827-1592

Michael Bates

Associate Professor of Economics
University of California, Riverside
michael.bates@ucr.edu
(951) 827-1585

Kevin Shih

Associate Professor of Economics
University of California, Riverside
kevin.shih1@ucr.edu
(951) 827-8381