# Application for

# NBER Entrepreneurship Research Boot Camp

Applicant: Zeki Berkay Saygin

February 14, 2025

## Contact


- Name: Zeki Berkay Saygin
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## Education

- School: University of Chicago
- Program: Ph.D. in Economics
- Area of Interest: Economic Growth and Industrial Organization
- Year of Entry: 2023
- Expected Year of Completion: 2029

## Reference

- Faculty Member Supplying a Letter of Recommendation: Ufuk Akcigit

# Zeki Berkay Saygin

Kenneth C. Griffin Department of Economics, University of Chicago
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*February 14, 2025*

## Education

**University of Chicago, Chicago, IL**

Ph.D. in Economics — *Expected: Jun 2029*

M.A. in Economics *(transitional)* — Jun 2024

**Columbia University, New York, NY**

M.A. in Economics — Dec 2022

**Bogazici University, Istanbul, Turkey**

B.A. in Economics *(dual degree)* — Jun 2019

B.A. in Management — Jun 2019

## Research

**"Türkiye Akademik Diaspora Raporu: Beyin Göçünden Beyin Gücüne" (2023)**
Technical Report with Ufuk Akcigit, Cagatay Koc, Sinan Parmar, Jeremy Pearce, Younghun Shim, Nil Taspinar, Deniz Tokmakoglu

**"Restabilizing Matching Algorithm: Convergence from Non-empty Matching" (2022)**
Master's Thesis, Advisor: Guillaume Haeringer

**"Safeguard Measures: What is the Record?" (2018)**
Undergraduate Paper, Advisor: Refik Erzan

## Experience

**University of Chicago, Department of Economics, Chicago, IL**

Teaching Assistant for Nancy Stokey (Theory of Income I - Ph.D. Core) — Sep 2024 – Dec 2024

Predoctoral Research Fellow for Ufuk Akcigit — Jan 2023 – Aug 2023

Research Assistant for Ufuk Akcigit — May 2022 – Dec 2022

**World Bank Group, Washington, DC**

Short-Term Consultant on the World Development Report 2024 — Mar 2023 – Aug 2023

**Columbia University, Department of Economics, New York, NY**

Research Assistant for Guillaume Haeringer — Jun 2022 – Aug 2022

Teaching Assistant for Cesar Barilla (Game Theory) — May 2022 – Jul 2022

Research Assistant for Yeon-Koo Che — May 2022 – Jun 2022

**Bogazici University, Department of Management, Istanbul, Turkey**

Teaching Assistant for Mustafa H. Tongarlak (Management Science) Jan 2018 – Jun 2018

## Other Selected Professional Experience

**Google, Istanbul, Turkey**

Product Marketing Manager (Europe Middle East Africa) Oct 2020 – Aug 2021

Associate Product Marketing Manager (Turkey) Jan 2019 – Oct 2020

Business Intern (Turkey) Jan 2018 – Dec 2018

**Oliver Wyman, Istanbul, Turkey**

Management Consulting Intern Jul 2017 – Sep 2017

## Awards and Honors

Program for Economic Research Fellowship, Columbia University, 2022

High Honors, Bogazici University, 2019

Dean's List, Bogazici University, Every Semester Between 2014–2019

Winner, CEO for a Day, Odgers Berndtson Turkey, 2018

1st Place, SAP Case Competition, Bogazici University Operations Research Club, 2016

1st Place, P&G International CEO Challenge Case Competition, Procter & Gamble Europe, 2016

2nd Place, Unilever Ideatrophy Case Competition, Unilever Turkey, 2015

246th Among 1.9m Candidates (0.01%), Turkish National University Entrance Exam, 2013

National Swimmer of Turkey, 2009–2011

## Skills

**Programming** Python, R, MATLAB, Stata, Julia, LaTeX

**Languages** English (Fluent), Turkish (Native)

## Statement

I am a second-year Economics Ph.D. student at the University of Chicago. My specialization is in economic growth and industrial organization. Since 2022, I worked extensively with Ufuk Akcigit on innovation and firm dynamism. My research agenda is to understand how transformative ideas come to life and how they impact society.

Entrepreneurship—perhaps the most important factor in this process—is an intricate element to model as it encompasses many topics including risk preference, uncertainty, occupational choice, financial frictions, R&D process, the evolution of science, labor, trade, and spatial externalities. I am excited to attend the Entrepreneurship Research Boot Camp and develop a more complete framework to synthesize these dynamics. In addition, I intend to expand my network, refine my research questions for my third-year paper, get feedback on my ideas, and broaden my command of the entrepreneurship literature.

In my previous research with Ufuk Akcigit, I studied firm dynamism in small businesses as well as the role of migration and knowledge diffusion on the performance of scientists using microdata. I also worked on the 2024 World Development Report by producing results on firm dynamism and innovation. Working with policymakers allowed me to get a birdseye view on the issues that matter for entrepreneurs such as access to finance and industrial policy, while working closely with Ufuk Akcigit on Schumpeterian Growth models allowed me to build insight into the problem of an innovating firm and equipped me with technical toolkit.

The research questions I am interested in addressing in my upcoming research include:

- How does family background affect entrepreneurship through risk preference, tacit knowledge, network, and self-insurance via initial wealth?
- How does AI shape transformative entrepreneurship by creating unforeseen scaling opportunities while also speeding up creative destruction?
- What is the optimal migration policy for entrepreneurs and skilled workers through the quantitative spatial framework?
- What are alternative industrial policies (beyond scale-based subsidies) that can boost transformative entrepreneurship more efficiently?
- What is the role of universities in entrepreneurship through patent offices, production of basic science, knowledge diffusion through partnerships, and network effects?

I believe I am a great fit for this boot camp, given my strong technical background, relevant research experience, and eagerness to continue working on this topic.



THE UNIVERSITY OF
CHICAGO

**Ufuk Akcigit**
*Arnold C. Harberger Professor of Economics*
*Director, Global Center for Economic Growth*
*Research Associate: NBER, CEPR, CESifo, Brookings*

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February 10, 2025

**Re: Letter of Recommendation for Mr. Zeki Berkay Saygin**

Dear Committee Members:

It is my greatest pleasure to write this letter in the strongest support of Mr. Zeki Berkay Saygin, who is applying for the *NBER Entrepreneurship Research Boot Camp*. Zeki is a **star** Ph.D. student in the Economics Department of the University of Chicago. He has been working in the field of macroeconomics, with a special emphasis on innovation, firm dynamics and economic growth. In the past, I have written many reference letters, and I would put Zeki in the same equivalence class as two of my students: Jonathan Roth (finished Harvard Ph.D.; now tenured at Brown) and Ege Ercan (currently completing his Ph.D. at Stanford GSB and doing very well there).

Zeki is brilliant and curious. In the Turkish national university entrance exam, he came in 246th among almost 2 million students. Those who know how competitive this exam is will recognize his achievement. As a result, he went to Bogazici University, by far one of the very best universities in Turkey. In his undergraduate education, Zeki pursued a double major in economics and business administration. Toward the end of his studies, he did an internship at Google's Istanbul office. It did not take Google's managers long to realize Zeki's exceptional talent, and they insisted he work for them full-time. Zeki decided to try it and worked there successfully for three years. But Google's work environment was not enough to satisfy Zeki's curiosity and thirst for research, so Zeki decided to go into academia. I particularly like this type of Ph.D. candidate for at least two reasons: First, they come to academia with no stone unturned in their career choice and concentrate entirely on their studies. Second, they get exposed to various real-life economic problems and problem-solving environments that help them think outside the box in research. The best example is Nick Bloom, who had a McKinsey consulting background before going to his Ph.D., and that experience must have contributed to his thinking about management practices. I am already seeing how Zeki is applying the skills and experiences he acquired during his Google days to his academic work.

After Google, Zeki went to Columbia University and enrolled in the Economics M.A. program. Zeki landed in the right place for his career. Not only he excelled in his coursework (he got almost perfect grades), but he also wrote an great thesis on mechanism design. In his thesis, Zeki developed tools to study the convergence properties from an arbitrary matching.

Over the last two years I worked on a new project that utilized large-scale patent and scientific publication data. Computer simulations were getting very intense and demanding, so I had to hire a research assistant to help me. A colleague told me about a brilliant student he had met, and he recommended that I interview him for my project. This talented student was Zeki Saygin. When I interviewed Zeki for the position, he impressed me with his careful and detailed answers to my questions. His analytical thinking was superb, and his skill set was very impressive. His undergrad and graduate background had given him the ability to understand and solve complex theoretical models, and his past experiences at Google helped him develop strong skills in processing microdata and to run computer simulations. After that interview, I decided to hire him immediately without any hesitation. I have been fortunate to have Zeki on board. We made significant progress on my project, and Zeki has shown a lot of creativity during his work, eventually becoming a co-author of the project.

His technical and computational skills were particularly helpful for us in overcoming several bottlenecks in processing the data. Zeki has never disappointed me with his research skills. Once you talk to Zeki about research, you will realize quickly what a curious, creative, and constructive researcher he is. I can see that he will be a catalyzer among his classmates at the NBER Boot Camp. I have no doubt that he will also set a great example to his peers and contribute to their Boot Camp experience through his enthusiasm, knowledge, and feedback.

During our joint work, he was fully involved in all stages of our project. He has always been a joy to work with. He is very knowledgeable, very thorough, extremely professional, and careful. He can make rapid progress on an idea on both theoretical and empirical grounds, and he has the maturity to step back often, reflect, and ask about the economics of the problem he is working on. He is also a charming person and a clear presenter. He is one of our very best Ph.D. students in the department.

I hope this letter has convinced you that you are evaluating the file of a fantastic student with the perfect skill set. In the past, His intellectual curiosity and technical abilities make him a potential future star in our profession.

Zeki has my strongest support and I know he will be a great asset to NBER Entrepreneurship Research Boot Camp and I recommend him with the highest enthusiasm and no reservations.

Please feel free to contact me if you need any further information.

Best regards,
Ufuk Akcigit

