

Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Uschi Backes-Gellner, University of Zurich
Zurich, September 22nd, 2022

Laudatio for Prof. Dr. h.c. Eric P. Bettinger, PhD, Stanford University

Dear colleagues,
dear ladies and gentlemen,
dear Eric, and dear Suzan Bettinger,

it is my great honor and pleasure to deliver the laudatory speech for Eric P. Bettinger, this year's UZH honorary doctorate of the Faculty of Business, Economics and Informatics.

We are all very happy tonight to finally have the opportunity to celebrate onsite the honorary doctorate, which was already officially granted to Eric in a virtual event in April this year. But there was no real celebration at the time, because we were still under the impression of COVID restrictions - so we are pleased to be onsite tonight, here in the UZH Aula, the place where Winston Churchill in 1946, on almost the exact same day, September 19th, delivered his world-renowned *Speech to the Academic Youth in Europe*.

We are also happy to have some additional guests in the *online* livestream from the US and all around the world, and I'd like to warmly welcome our virtual guests as well.

It is my honor now to introduce to you the great achievements of our new honorary doctor. I can – of course - only point out a few aspects of his remarkable scientific oeuvre, his contributions to the development of young scholars and the research community at large, and his outstanding personal qualities, which we pay tribute to by awarding him an honorary doctorate. The selection is, of course, subjective and it will include some personal impressions that round off the picture.

I have known Eric Bettinger from the literature for almost two decades, and I know him personally since a Leading House conference at Schloss Marbach in 2010 where he presented his research on randomized control trials in the Economics of Education to a group of young scholars and high ranking educational policy makers from Switzerland. Eric was so inspiring for the young scholars as well as for the policy makers that we kept on inviting him for follow up meetings, which he kindly accepted, and which finally lead to him becoming a regular teacher in our Doctoral Course Program in the Economics of Education.

Over time, I learned more about Eric's work, his personality and his biography, and I am happy to share some of my insights with you in the following.

Eric comes from a family with many children and was born and raised in rural Oregon. So, it was not exactly in his cradle that he would one day become a renowned professor at Stanford University and one of the leading researchers in Education Economics. However, with his CV, he is actually one of the best examples for why his field of research "Economics of Education" and his own contributions to the field are so important and for why he deserves an honorary doctorate.

What is his educational path and what are the topics of his research, and his contributions to the field and his societal impact?

Eric earned a Bachelor degree from *Brigham Young University* and a Ph.D. in Economics from *Massachusetts Institute of Technology*. In the year 2000 he started teaching at *Case Western University*. Since 2008 he is Professor at Stanford University and teaches in the *Graduate School of Education* and the *Graduate School of Business*. In addition, he is – among others - a member of the *National Bureau of Economic Research*, the *Lemann Center for Entrepreneurship and Educational Innovation*, the *Stanford Center for Education Policy Analysis*, and the ‘*Abdul Latif Jameel*’ *Poverty Action Lab*.

Today, Eric is one of the world's leading Education Economists and has produced highly relevant research results, particularly regarding the effects of educational interventions.

One focus of Eric’s highly cited research is on evaluating the impact of incentives in education. He shows, for example, that at the primary and secondary school level, even very small – but well-designed – financial incentives have a large effect on the school success of young adolescents. In another branch of his research, he shows that *simplified application procedures* or *simple information interventions* can have large impacts in tertiary education, especially for students with low-income backgrounds.

Eric has also made significant contributions on the importance of diversity in educational institutions, pointing out, for example, the importance of female faculty members – as role models - for course and program choices of female students. All of his contributions have always been very topical, highly relevant and they were highly recognized also by educational policy makers.

With his contributions, Eric has also been a key player in shaping the development of Education Economics as a field, particularly through his methodological focus on rigorous econometric methods and his pioneering use of randomized field experiments to identify causal effects of educational policy interventions. We will have the privilege to seeing some of his research in his Keynote Lecture, and I am sure you will join me in admiring his research contributions.

However, Eric is not only an excellent researcher, he is also an outstanding teacher, both in undergraduate education as well as in graduate and doctoral education. And this is not only the case for his students at Stanford University, but also, since 2012, for the doctoral students at Zurich University in the Course Program for Doctoral Students in Economics of Education. But, as if that would not be enough, he never limits himself to just teaching in the classroom. He always takes the time for individual mentoring sessions with the young scholars, so that he can pass on his valuable ideas to individual PhD students and help them to successfully develop their dissertation projects at important crossroads. His methodological contributions and research are thus systematically passed on to the next generation of scholars, and they will remain permanently recognizable and reflected in the curricula of universities around the world for years to come.

Moreover, Eric’s work has also always been highly relevant to educational policy makers, and he had significant influence on educational policy making in the US and abroad. Eric has served – among others - as an advisor to the White House, to several US-states, to various developing and developed countries around the world, to national and international foundations and to non-profit education institutions.

We are proud that Eric, for a long time, has also maintained close contacts with the University of Zurich and with our Faculty. For many years now, he serves on the Scientific Advisory Board of our Leading House on the Economics of Vocational Education, and he has been instrumental in strengthening the development of young scholars and enhancing the international visibility of the Leading House. He has come regularly for teaching, for research visits, for workshops with junior scholars and for joint projects with coauthors across several institutes and centers of the Faculty.

Eric Bettinger is thus an ideal candidate for an honorary doctorate from the University of Zurich and the Faculty of Business, Economics and Informatics. The award of an honorary doctorate to Prof. Eric Bettinger is meant to honor Eric as an outstanding researcher and teacher, but it is as much an honor to our Faculty and the University of Zurich.

So congratulations to the Faculty, but more importantly, congratulations to you, Eric, on your UZH honorary doctorate.