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When I was in school, I always wanted to do physics but I ended up studying economics at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy (NaUKMA). However, I was very lucky to have outstanding classmates and professors and learning economics turned out to be a great deal of fun. As I was approaching graduation with BA in Economics, I started to think about what do next. Professor Iryna Lukyanenko, my long-time mentor and advisor by that time, suggested that a newly established EERC program may be a good idea. At the time, EERC was affiliated with the NaUKMA and it was easy to check it out. Some of my senior mates from the university basketball team were already in the EERC and they sounded very positive about the program. I got curious and wanted to know more about it and about prospects of its graduates. Fortunately, EERC professors did not mind that I and a few of my friends sat in their classes. This was an illuminating experience. I very much liked the subject, the way material was taught, and the level of discussion. I was also impressed with the competitive and creative spirit of the program. As I have seen many times, the quality of peers and professors is a decisive factor for motivation, hard work, exchange of ideas and, ultimately, success. EERC was unbeatable in this respect: the pool of faculty and students was way beyond my expectations. In addition, despite being a very young program back in 1999, EERC already had a solid record of placement of its graduates in private sector and excellent Ph.D. programs abroad. In the end, it was clear that EERC was the best option for the graduate program.

After being accepted into the program, I plunged into studies very enthusiastically. Everything was new: instruction methods, types of interaction between faculty and students, English as a level of instruction. In the beginning, it was almost a shock and, I think, for many students (including me) “surviving” was the main objective, which was not a trivial task because the standards were set very high and attrition was substantial. The bright side of studying at EERC, however, was outweighing everything else. EERC offered excellent teaching, brilliant classmates and engaging professors. The pace was intensive with exam sessions every two months. It was quite amazing how much material we could cover. Although in the first year everybody was taking the standard sequence of classes, in the second year we had a real luxury of building curriculum from a broad array of classes covering basically every field of economics.

More importantly, unlike any other school, EERC not only taught students how to “reproduce” knowledge but also how to “create” new knowledge, how to do research. As I was progressing in the EERC program, I was increasingly interested in doing research. Professors Iryna Lukyanenko, Charles Steele and others were generous with their time and gave me a real feel of how to do research. I was working as a research assistant at various places and just seeing how research is done was extremely helpful. The final straw that convinced me to pursue an academic career was a summer school at the Harvard University. Back in old days, Citibank was awarding two fellowships to EERC students for this summer school and I was fortunate to get one of them. After visiting Harvard, I could not think of any path other than doing research.

In my second year of EERC, I applied and got accepted to several Ph.D. programs in the U.S.A. I did not know where to go and it was really advice from EERC's Professor Hartmut Lehmann which convinced me to go to the University of Michigan. (By now, it is probably clear that I and other students got a great deal of guidance from EERC professors.) It was a challenging program but every time when passing some milestone in my studies at Michigan I thought that it would have been hardly possible if I did not go at EERC. And it is not only the education which I got at EERC. It was also many friends, colleagues, mentors whose support and advice I felt over all these years. EERC has a remarkable network of its graduates (I can't recall a conference or a business meeting where I did not see a former classmate or a professor) and I am proud to be a part of this network.

It has been more than 10 years since I got into EERC and I have had a long path to becoming an assistant professor of economics at UC Berkeley. However, EERC was the first and most crucial step in this path. EERC was, is and, I hope, will be a life-changing program for many students.