

Fall 2025

Early Childhood: Human Capital Development and Public Policy: PPHA 407

Monday/Wednesday 10:30-11:50 Keller 0010

Instructor: Professor Ariel Kalil (akalil@uchicago.edu), Harris School of Public Policy Studies

Professor Office Hours: Wednesdays 3:00-4:30 pm or by appointment (Office Hours are on Zoom – check Canvas for Zoom link and use sign-up sheet to reserve a 15-minute slot – weekly office hour sign-up ends at the start of Wednesday's class)

TA: Noah Liu (noahliuhx@uchicago.edu)

TA Office Hours: Tuesday 4:00-5:00 pm (Office Hours are on Zoom – check Canvas for Zoom link and use sign-up sheet to reserve a 15-minute slot – weekly office hour sign-up ends by 12:00 pm on Tuesday)

This course provides an introductory overview of the contexts that shape childhood development, particularly for individuals living in challenging circumstances. The interdisciplinary course will examine evidence from psychology, economics, sociology, and public policy related to these topics. We will explore how public policies can establish a solid foundation for promoting equality of opportunity, reducing social class disparities in life outcomes, building human capital, fostering economic growth, and generating positive social change. In doing so, we will review the evidence on whether the environments of children's development are open to public policy intervention and analyze the costs and benefits of various policy approaches. Among other topics, we will study childhood poverty, the impact of parenting and the home environment on children's development, and the evidence supporting educational interventions in early childhood for children facing economic disadvantages.

Questions to Motivate Your Thinking and Class Participation

- Theory: How should we evaluate the potential impact and effectiveness of investments in children's home environments versus interventions in out-of-home settings? Should programs be targeted or universal?
- Research Design: What do we learn from a randomized trial? What other kinds of research designs can, or should we employ?
- Data: What are the most effective ways to measure parenting, school environments, and children's skill development?
- Relevance: Are the estimates policy-relevant? Can we derive actionable insights from the results? Are the programs easily scalable?

Course Format

Classes will be a mix of lecture and discussion focused on topics presented in the readings. You are highly encouraged to participate in class. You will get more out of the material the more you try to apply it to the topics of interest to you.

Course Materials

All course materials are posted on Canvas. The “**Modules**” section of Canvas serves as a dynamic version of the syllabus. Modules include direct links to readings and PDF materials. Students should complete all required readings before class. During class, time will be spent discussing and critiquing these readings. Students need to understand the following: What is the theory being presented? What are the main findings? How do they connect to public policy? Active participation from everyone is essential for the course's success. Therefore, you must finish all assigned readings and come prepared to discuss and debate the issues. You're encouraged to actively participate by sharing insights, asking questions, and providing relevant examples from your experiences.

Course Policies

Attendance: Missing class is disadvantageous to your learning. Our class time together is your opportunity to ask questions and have them answered. And, ideas that we discuss and debate during these class meeting times will be reflected on the exams.

Attendance will be taken every day. If you must be absent, please provide a valid excuse and let our TA know – to the best of your ability – before class. Students with unexcused absences will not be allowed to make up the “Check-In Challenges” (see below, under course assignments and grading)

But -- please do not attend class if you are experiencing COVID symptoms! You will not be penalized as long as you inform our TA. If you need to quarantine or are showing COVID-19 or other illness symptoms, please contact our TA directly to discuss accommodations for missing class.

If there are extenuating circumstances, such as death in the family or ongoing illness, that will cause you to miss class for a long period, please contact our TA.

Laptops, Tablets & Cell Phones

Please keep laptops and electronic devices silenced, put away, and out of sight. The research is clear: distractions and (attempted) multi-tasking can be detrimental to your ability to pay attention and retain information. Plan to take notes longhand on paper. Empirical research has also shown that laptop multitasking creates a distracting classroom environment for others.

- Gingerich, A.C., & Lineweaver, T.T. (2014). OMG! Texting in Class = U Fail ☹ Empirical evidence that text messaging during class disrupts comprehension. *Teaching of Psychology*, 41, 44-51.
- Mueller, P.A., & Oppenheimer, D.M. (2014). The pen is mightier than the keyboard: Advantages of longhand over laptop note taking. *Psychological Science*, 25, 1159-1168. See also: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/>

- Sana, F., Weston, T., & Cepeda, N.J. (2013). Laptop multitasking hinders classroom learning for both users and nearby peers. *Computers and Education*, 62, 24-31.

Academic Integrity: Cheating and plagiarism are serious forms of academic misconduct and will result in a failing grade. All written submissions must be your own original work. As described in the student handbook, “Proper acknowledgment of another's ideas, whether by direct quotation or paraphrase, is expected. In particular, if any written or electronic source is consulted and material is used from that source, directly or indirectly, the source should be identified by author, title, and page number, or by website and date accessed. Any doubts about what constitutes ‘use’ should be addressed to the instructor.”

Be aware, plagiarism goes beyond copying text word-for-word and can include poor paraphrasing. See the examples here: <https://integrity.mit.edu/handbook/academic-writing/avoiding-plagiarism-paraphrasing>.

Communication: Announcements to the class will be sent via Canvas. If you have substantive questions that will require more than a few sentences in response, please talk to me or the TA after class, come to office hours, or make an appointment. If you need to e-mail me about other matters, please allow up to 24 hours for a response.

Accommodations for Disabilities

If you require any accommodations for this course, please bring a copy of your Accommodation Determination Letter (provided to you by the Student Disability Services office) to me as soon as possible so that we may discuss how your accommodations may be implemented. The University of Chicago is committed to ensuring the full participation of all students in its programs. If you have a documented disability (or think you may have a disability) and, as a result, need a reasonable accommodation to participate in class, complete course requirements, or benefit from the University's programs or services, you are encouraged to contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. To receive reasonable accommodation, you must be appropriately registered with Student Disability Services. Please contact the office at 773-702-6000/TTY 773-795-1186 or disabilities@uchicago.edu, or visit the website at disabilities.uchicago.edu. Student Disability Services is located at 5501 S. Ellis Avenue.

Accommodations for Religious Observances

Students must inform me in writing of their need to observe a religious holiday reasonably well in advance of the absence, preferably at the beginning of the quarter. As with any absence, it is your responsibility to catch up on any material discussed and assignments given during the missed class period.

Overview of Course Assignments and Grading

Exams (3 X 20 points = 60 points total)

There will be two in-class midterms (**Monday, October 27**, and **Wednesday, November 19**) and a final exam during finals week. Each of these exams must be completed on your laptop and uploaded to Canvas at the end of the exam period. The exams will include a mix of short-answer/definitions and essay questions. You are allowed to bring one single-sided piece of paper (8.5 x 11 inches) as a "cheat sheet," but you will not be permitted to

consult any materials on your laptop or the internet. Students who violate this policy will receive a failing grade for the class.

Check-In Challenge (10 X 3 points each) = 30 points total

Check-In Challenges are quick, surprise-style quizzes that keep you focused on the material and ensure you stay current with readings and lectures. They aren't designed to trip you up—instead, they give you a chance to reinforce key ideas, earn credit toward your participation grade, and review concepts for the next class. These quizzes will be completed in class during the last 10 minutes of class periods in Weeks 4 to 9.

Pitch & Pushback: A Policy Challenge on Disadvantaged Children (10 points)

This oral exam simulates a real-world policy debate. Working in pairs, you'll take turns proposing a policy aimed at improving the life chances of disadvantaged children. Your partner will then offer a critique, and you'll defend your idea. Afterwards, you'll switch roles. This mini policy debate is designed to be lively, interactive, and fun. It will also help you refine your skills in persuasion, critical thinking, and applying course material. This activity will take place during Week 9 (outside of class time). More information will be provided later in the quarter.

Grades will be awarded based on total points:

A 93-100; A- 90-92; B+ 87-89; B 83-86; B- 80-82
C+ 77-79; C 73-78; C- 70-72; F < 70

Book (PDF posted on Canvas, or purchase a hard copy for yourself)

Doepke, M. & Zilibotti, F. (2019). *Love, Money, and Parenting: How Economics Explains the Way We Raise Our Kids*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

I. Introduction to the Course

M1 Sep 29 Orientation to the course, overview of key topics

Knudsen, E. I, Heckman, J. J., Cameron, J. L., & Shonkoff, J. P. (2006). Economic, neurobiological, and behavioral perspectives on building America's future workforce. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 103(27), 10155–10162.

Doepke & Zilibotti (2019). *Love, Money, and Parenting*
<https://youtu.be/3DI4AcOCPO4?si=Zq4UmuzkRCf94ayS>

W1 Oct 1 Orientation and overview, continued

The Executive Office of the President (Council of Economic Advisors) (2016) *Economic Report of the President. Chapter 4 "Inequality in Early Childhood and Effective Policy Interventions."* (pp. 153-206).

Ceci, S. J., & Papierno, P. B. (2005). The rhetoric and reality of gap closing: When the "Have-Nots" gain but the "Haves" gain even more. *American Psychologist*, 60(2), 149–160.

Laura Tyson (2012, September 21). "Income inequality and educational opportunity." NY Times
<https://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/09/21/income-inequality-and-educational-opportunity/>

II. Poverty and Child Development; Early Life Stress

M2 Oct 6 Poverty: Measurement and mechanisms

Peter Coy (September 11, 2023). "The Unfinished Pursuit of a Better Poverty Measure" New York Times.

INET Series on "The Economics of Childhood" with Professor Steven Durlauf (episodes 1-6). Watch all on YouTube (about 80 minutes total):
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLmtuEaMvhDZYW_06YE8nKLN24O6BBlyft

Mani, A., Mullainathan, S., Shafir, E., & Zhao, J. (2013). Poverty impedes cognitive function. *Science*, Vol. 341, pp. 976-979.

W2 Oct 8 Alleviating poverty: Does changing income change child outcomes?

Mayer, Susan E. (2010, Winter). "Revisiting an old question: How much does parental income affect child outcomes?" Institute for Research on Poverty, UW Madison, *Focus* Vol. 27, No. 2.

Hart, E. R., Gennetian, L. A., Sperber, J. F., Penalva, R., Magnuson, K., Duncan, G. J., Halpern-Meekin, S., Yoshikawa, H., Fox, N. A., & Noble, K. G. (2024). The effect of unconditional cash transfers on maternal assessments of children's early language and socioemotional development: Experimental evidence from U.S. families residing in poverty. *Developmental Psychology*.

Borra, C., Costa- Ramon, A., Gonzales, L., & Sevilla, A. (2024). "The Causal Effect of an Income Shock on Children's Human Capital" forthcoming, *Journal of Labor Economics*. (click hyperlink to download paper)

Peter S. Goodman. "Finland Has Second Thoughts About Giving Free Money to Jobless People" (2018, April 24). New York Times.

Elly Fishman (2023, September 26). "What \$500 Means to Zinida Moore." *Chicago Magazine*.

M3 Oct 13 Early life stress; different types of child skill

Thompson, R. (2014, Spring). Stress and child development. *The Future of Children Volume 24 (1)* pp. 41-59.

Watts, T., Duncan, G., & Quan, H. (2018). Revisiting the Marshmallow Test: A conceptual replication investigating links between early delay of gratification and later outcomes. *Psychological Science Vol. 29*(7) 1159–1177

New York Times (Andrea Elliott): December 2013: Invisible Child: Dasani's Homeless Life (parts 1-5). Available at:
<http://www.nytimes.com/projects/2013/invisible-child/#/?chapt=1>

New York Times (Andrea Elliott): October 2021: When Dasani Left Home. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/28/magazine/dasani-invisible-child.html>

III: Parenting and the Home Environment

W3 Oct 15 Parental inputs and how they matter for child skill development

Listen to the podcast “Parenting is the key to early development and social mobility” with James Heckman and Jorge Luis Garcia (56 minutes)
<https://www.buzzsprout.com/2148289/13389213>

Schaub, M. (2010). Parenting for cognitive development from 1950 to 2000: The institutionalization of mass education and the social construction of parenting in the United States. *Sociology of Education*, Vol. 83(1), p46-66

Guryan, J., Hurst, E., & Kearney, M. (2008). Parental education and parental time with children. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 22, 23-46.

Kalil, A. & Ryan, R. (2020). Parenting practices and socioeconomic gaps in childhood outcomes *The Future of Children* 30 (1), 29-54.

Weaver IC, Cervoni N, Champagne FA, D'Alessio AC, Sharma S, Seckl JR, Dymov S, Szyf M, Meaney MJ (2004). Epigenetic programming by maternal behavior. *Nature Neuroscience*, 7 (8), 847–54.

Doepke & Zilibotti Chapter 1

M4 Oct 20 Differences in Parenting by Family Background

Listen to the podcast: “Raising parents: Are we overparenting our kids” with Emily Oster (47 minutes) <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/ep-1-are-we-over-parenting-our-kids/id1766973918?i=1000669913754>

Kalil, A., Mayer, S.E., Delgado, W., & Gennetian, L. (2024). Education gradients in parental time investment and subjective well-being. *Rev Econ Household* <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11150-024-09734-5>

Silverman, D., Hernandez, I., Schneider, M., Ryan, R., Kalil, A., & Destin, M. (2024). Economic mobility and parents' opportunity hoarding.

Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. Vol. 121 No. 37
e2407230121

Doepke & Zilibotti Chapter 4 and 6

The Economist (2020, October 3). “Working-class parents are becoming more like middle-class ones.”

Doepke, M. & Zilibotti, F. (2019). The parent trap. Washington Post, February 19, 2019.
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/posteverything/wp/2019/02/22/feature/how-economic-inequality-gives-rise-to-hyper-parenting/>

W4 Oct 22 Policy Interventions to Change Parenting and Child Skill

Portilla, X., Faucetta, K., Saunders, K., & Taub. A. (2025). *Beyond the Early Years: The Long-Term Effects of Home Visiting on Mothers, Families, and Children. Results from the Mother and Infant Home Visiting Program Evaluation*. OPRE Report 2025-052. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ONLY

Araujo, M., Dormal, M. et al. (2021). Home visiting at scale and child development. *Journal of Public Economics Plus* 2, 10003

Rury, D., Kalil, A., Mayer, S., & Bresciani, D. (2025). Prompting parent-child talk boosts children’s vocabulary and changes parents’ beliefs about learning: Evidence from a field experiment. *Manuscript under review*.

Dupas, P., Falezan, C., Jayachandran, S. & Walsh, M. (2025). Informing mothers about the benefits of conversing with infants: Experimental evidence from Ghana. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 17 (2): 388–417.

In-class Midterm I Monday W5 October 27

IV: Family Structure

W5 Oct 29 Changing demographics of family structure; associations with child development

Jencks, C., and McLanahan, S. (2015) Was Moynihan right? What happens to children of unmarried mothers. *EdNext*, 15(2).

Bertrand, Marianne, and Jessica Pan (2013). The trouble with boys: Social influences and the gender gap in disruptive behavior. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 5(1), pp. 32-64.

New York Times (Jason deParle, July 14, 2012). “Two classes, divided by ‘I do.’” <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/15/us/two-classes-in-america-divided-by-i-do.html?ref=us>

Watch: David Brooks, “How the Nuclear Family Broke Down” from the Atlantic Magazine (5 minutes).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sd9d5z7idyQ>

Watch: Conversation with Melissa Kearney on “The Importance of the Two-Parent Home.”: <https://www.aei.org/events/the-two-parent-privilege-a-book-event-with-melissa-kearney>

M6 Nov 3 Policy Interventions to Change Family Structure

Edin, K. and Kefalas, M. (2005). Unmarried with children. *Contexts* 4(2), 16-22.

Reeves, R. (2014, February 13). How to Save Marriage in America. *The Atlantic*.

Schneider, D. (2015). Lessons learned from non-marriage experiments. *Future of Children*, 25 (2), pp 155-178.

Haskins, R. (2014, Spring). Marriage, parenthood, and public policy. *National Affairs*, 55-72.

Kalil, A. (2024, April 25). “Multigenerational households are key to better support for children of single mothers.” *Chicago Tribune Op-Ed*.

V. Early Childhood Care and Intervention

W6 Nov 5 Early childhood care: History and measurement

Wrigley, J. (1989). Different care for different kids: Social class and child care policy. *Education Policy* 3 (4), 421-439.

Araujo, M. Dormal, M., & Schady, N. (2019). Childcare quality and child development. *Journal of Human Resources*, 54 (3), 656-682.

Gormley, W. (2007). Early childhood care and education: Lessons and puzzles. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 26 (3), 633-671.
(read only pp 633-638; 654-657 for today)

Sojourner, A. (2024, April 29). A promise not kept: Early childhood education and development. *Milken Institute Review*. Available at: <https://www.milkenreview.org/articles/a-promise-not-kept?IssueID=53>

M7 Nov 10 Child care: Inputs and fadeout

Gormley, W. (2007). Early childhood care and education: Lessons and puzzles. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 26 (3), 633-671. **(read only pp 638-643 for today)**

Bailey, D., Duncan, G. J., Odgers, C. L., & Yu, W. (2017). Persistence and fadeout in the impacts of child and adolescent interventions. *Journal of research on educational effectiveness*, 10(1), 7-39.

Haskins, R. & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2016, Fall). Trouble in the land of early childhood education? *The Future of Children, Policy Brief*, pp.1-8.

Burchinal, M., Whittaker, A, et al. (2024, May). Unsettled science on longer-run effects of early education. *Science*, 384, 6695, 506-508.

W7 Nov 12 The Federal Head Start Program

Gormley, W. (2007). Early childhood care and education: Lessons and puzzles. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 26 (3), 633-671. **(read only pp 644-649 for today)**

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2010, January). *Head Start Impact Study: Final report*. Washington, DC: Author. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ONLY

Gelber, A. & Isen, A. (2013). Children's schooling and parents' behavior: Evidence from the Head Start Impact Study. *Journal of Public Economics*, 101, 25-38.

Feller, A., Grindal, T., Miratrix, L., & Page, L. (2016). Compared to what? Variation in the impacts of early childhood education by alternative care type. *The Annals of Applied Statistics, Ann. Appl. Stat.* 10(3), 1245-1285.

M8 Nov 17: Universal and Targeted Pre-K (*Noah Liu Guest Lecture*)

Gormley, W. (2007). Early childhood care and education: Lessons and puzzles. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 26 (3), 633-671. **(read only pp 650-653; 657-664 only for today)**

Gray-Lobe, G., Pathak, P. & Walters, C. (2023). The long-term effects of universal pre-K in Boston. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*. 363-411.

In-class Midterm II Weds W7 November 19

Thanksgiving Break November 24 and 26

VI. Innovations in Data Science and Behavioral Science

M9 December 1

Mayer, S., Kalil, A., Oreopoulos, P. & Gallegos, S. (2019). Using behavioral insights to increase parental engagement. The Parents and Children Together (PACT) intervention. *Journal of Human Resources*, 54:900-925.

Kalil, A., Mayer, S., & Gallegos, S. (2019). Using behavioral insights to increase attendance at subsidized preschool programs: The Show Up to Grow Up Intervention. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*.

Liu, L. & Kalil, A. (2025). *Chat2Learn: A Proof-of-Concept Evaluation of a Technology-Based Tool to Enhance Parent-Child Language Interaction*. BFI Working Paper, <https://bfi.uchicago.edu/working-papers/chat2learn-a-proof-of-concept-evaluation-of-a-technology-based-tool-to-enhance-parent-child-language-interaction/>

Tina Rosenberg (February 4, 2019). “When it’s hard to make ends meet, can Smart Apps help?” New York Times.

VII. Interventions for Adolescents

W9 December 3

Resnjanskij, S., Ruhose, J., Wiederhold, S., & Woessmann, L. (2023). Can mentoring alleviate family disadvantage in adolescence? A field experiment to improve labor-market prospects. *Journal of Political Economy*.

Kraft, M. Bolves, A, & Hurd, N. (2023). How informal mentoring by teachers, counselors, and coaches supports students; long-run academic success. *Economics of Education Review*, 95.

Herrera, C., DuBois, D., Heubach, J., & Grossman, J. (2023). Effects of the Big Brothers Big Sisters of America Community-Based Mentoring Program on social-emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes of participating youth: A randomized controlled trial. *Children and Youth Services Review*, Volume 144.

Final Exam during Exam Week