Course Overview

This seminar takes a multi-disciplinary approach to understanding demographic aspects of poverty and child well-being in the U.S. We will explore the theoretical underpinnings, empirical evidence and policy implications of the research on:

- Measuring child poverty and well-being
- Comparisons of child poverty and well-being between the U.S. and other rich countries
- Effects of family structure, poverty, and income on child well-being
- Effects of cash and in-kind transfers on child-well-being
- Effects of income, poverty, and child well-being on family structure
- Effects of child gender on child well-being
- Relationships among welfare reform, parental employment, and child well-being
- Demographic impacts of income support policies that affect poverty and well-being
- Fragile families and marriage promotion policy

The seminar is intended for students from the social sciences and applied social sciences who are interested in taking a multi-disciplinary approach to understanding these issues and in improving their abilities to critically assess social science research. Students are expected to have had at least two graduate level courses in quantitative methods, with an emphasis on applied regression analysis.

Readings

Please purchase from the University Bookstore:


This book has become the classic study of the consequences of family structure for children’s well-being. We will read all of it, and then see how more recent research has confirmed or challenged its key findings.

The other assigned readings, marked by * or #, come from multi-disciplinary sources. Most are on the web. Some are either on UW’s e-reserve web site for CSDE 595, or on regular 2-hour reserve in Odegaard Library. Some of the non-web reserve items are also available at the CSDE library in 114 Raitt Hall. Readings without a * or # are optional and represent other high quality recent work on the issues of the seminar.

To view readings on web sites, click on the journal title or URL listed for an assigned reading. This will either take you directly to the article or, in a number of cases, to journal issue in which the reading appears or to the journal’s main page, where you can then find the year and issue in which the article appears site. You can, of course, print those article if you wish.
To locate the e-reserve readings, go to http://www.lib.washington.edu/services/course, click on the Seattle campus link, search for ‘Plotnick’ (do not pick “Search by course” or “Search by instructor”). Then click on the “Demography and public policy” link. For some reason, there is also a “Special topics” link, but it has no readings on-line. Find the author and title of the paper you want to read and click on the link.

For the few readings available only by hard copy, you will need to go to Odegaard Library [and, when indicated, the CSDE library] and check them out at the reserve reading desk.

Course requirements

Readings and class participation: Students are expected to be active participants in the seminar, prepared to discuss all assigned readings each week and having read your classmates’ questions/comments [see below].

Discussion questions/comments. Starting with the class of April 4, each class members will prepare two questions or a comment based on the week’s readings that could be used as starting points for class discussions. You do not have to do this assignment for the 2 weeks when you will be presenting an article [see below]. In addition, to accommodate deadlines or exams in other courses, illness, and emergencies, you may skip this assignment once. [The choice of which week to skip does not need my approval.] This means you are responsible for completing this assignment for 6 classes.

The questions/comments are meant to generate a range of views and concerns about the issues covered in the class session. They are also intended to provoke discussion about how the assigned articles address the issues. For example, you might ask about the appropriateness and plausibility of an article’s assumptions (explicit or implicit) or its theoretical perspective. You might want to question a study’s empirical methods, its interpretation of the empirical findings, or its discussion of the findings’ policy implications. You might want to comment on how the research could be extended.

If possible, e-mail your questions/comment to the class and me by Monday evening. This will give us some time to think about the issues that everyone raises. Late submissions will not be accepted except for illness or other extenuating circumstances. The questions will not be graded but are an important ingredient of the seminar and of your contribution to a stimulating intellectual environment.

Presentations and short critiques of articles: Each student will prepare two in-class presentations of research papers, to be chosen from the list of assigned readings and three short essays. Each essay (3-5 double spaced pages) will critically assess an assigned article. Two of the three will discuss the articles you present (as discussed below). The third will discuss another assigned reading. If you would like to write your third essay about an article on the course outline but not assigned, or perhaps one that is not on the list at all, this may be possible, but check with me first. The purpose of this assignment is to develop your ability to read closely and analyze critically recent research, and to develop further a sense of how good research builds on existing knowledge and points to future breakthroughs.

Each essay should first briefly summarize the article’s main topics, how the article fits into the literature, how the topic is theoretically and empirically analyzed, and the major findings. Then the essay should critique aspects of the article that you find deficient or incomplete. Here are some issues to consider: Did it ignore a plausible alternative conceptual framework?
Are the data suitable for the empirical analysis and hypothesis tests? Is there a better data set for studying the issue? Are the statistical methods and model specifications appropriate and, even if they are, could the author have used other methods as well? Your assessment of the methods need not be critical, but should be analytical. Has the author overstated or misinterpreted the findings? How sensible are any policy suggestions and are they adequately supported by the study’s findings? How can future research build on the article? Other issues, problems, suggestions for improving the research? Last, the essay should assess the main contribution (or contributions) the article makes to the literature. This section could go before the criticisms if you wish.

**Before we meet on April 4, please select 4 or 5 articles that you would like to present,** some from sessions of April 11, 18, 25 and May 2, others from the sessions of May 9, 16, 23 and 30. Each article will be presented by one reviewer, so you need more than two choices because two or more students will probably choose some articles. More than one student can write an essay on articles that will not be presented. I recommend that your articles come from more than one social science field, but this is not required.

Students will present their articles to the class using the following format. The presenter first summarizes the paper objectively. The presenter does not review the entire paper but, rather, describes the general theoretical and empirical approaches, explains how the article fits into the literature, and highlights what the author thinks are the major findings and their implications. Then, the presenter takes on the discussant role and critiques the paper (drawing from the essay). This format is more commonly used in small conferences than large ones. In a real conference, the author would then have the opportunity to respond to the presenter. Other class members may wish to take on this role.

Presentations should be 20-25 minutes. (Be sure to rehearse your presentation so it stays under 25 minutes.) You should use no more than 10 minutes to summarize the paper. Feel free to use PowerPoint, overheads, or handouts. If you plan to use PowerPoint or Word for your presentation, send me an electronic copy of the presentation file no later than the morning of the presentation.

Two documents from the *Journal of Marriage and Family* web site may helpful when reviewing articles: [How to Review an Article](#) and [Guidelines for Reviewers](#)

**The essay on the first article that you present is due May 5. The essay on the second article that you present is due June 2. The third is due June 7.**

**Grading**

- Class participation and discussion questions 30%
- Two short essays with presentations 50% (25% each)
- Third essay 20%
Office Hours, Phone, and E-mail

Office hours: Thursday 3-5, after class, or by appointment in 225 Parrington
Phone: 685-2055
E-mail: plotnick@u.washington.edu

To set an appointment, please call me or send an e-mail requesting an appointment. I have an open door policy – knock if you want to see me and if I’m in, I usually can take time to talk. If not, we can set up a meeting time.

I check my e-mail regularly and will respond quickly to simple questions and other routine matters. E-mail is not very useful for detailed give-and-take discussions or for questions that raise complex issues.

Disability Accommodation

If you would like to request academic accommodation because of a disability, please contact Disabled Student Services, 4045 Brooklyn Avenue NE, Room 230, 543-6450 (for TTY: 685-7264), http://www.washington.edu/admin/dso/index.html. If you have a letter from Disabled Student Services indicating that you have a disability requiring academic accommodation, please discuss with me the accommodations you need for the class.

Course Topics and Assigned Readings

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<td>April 4</td>
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In the reading list for weeks 3 - 10, * means the article is assigned and may be chosen for a presentation and # means the article is assigned but may NOT be chosen for a presentation. The other items are also good recent studies or important earlier works, but are optional. Assignments for April 18 and later may change depending on the availability of new studies, especially those presented at the March PAA conference.

**March 28  Course introduction; Measuring child poverty and well-being; International comparisons**

In addition to reading these materials, in the interest of improving communication among people with different social science backgrounds, please think about and jot down a few notes about how your academic field tends to approach the kinds of issues covered in the seminar. How would you answer questions such as: How does an X think about personal and family behavior, where X = sociologist, economist, etc.? What are your field’s guiding assumptions that are typically used to analyze behavior and inform policy recommendations? Are there special terms or jargon in your field that may confuse other people? I would like us to share these thoughts at our first class. Thanks.


April 4  **Effects of family structure on child well-being: The classic analysis**


http://www.jstor.org/browse/00029602?config=jstor


April 11  **Effects of family structure on child well-being: Recent research**


**Consequences of early and nonmarital childbirth**


April 18  Consequences of income (including income transfers) and poverty for child well-being


### Transfer income and child well-being


**OR**


April 25  Effects of child well-being on family structure, and
Demographic effects of income support policy relevant for understanding poverty

Reverse causality: Effects of child well-being on family structure


Demographic effects of income support policy relevant for poverty and child well-being


OR


Harknett, Kristen and Gennetian, Lisa. 2003 “How an earnings supplement can affect union formation among low-income single mothers,” Demography 40:3, pp. 451-78. OR


Child support policy


May 2  Demographic effects of income support policy relevant for understanding poverty, continued

Welfare, the family cap and non-marital childbearing


Welfare and child maltreatment


Welfare and migration (read one of the three *’ed articles)


May 9 Welfare reform, parental employment, and child well-being


OR


*Developmental Psychology*, special section on “Developmental Psychology and Public Policy” has several other good articles on anti-poverty policies and child well-being in addition to the above 2. [http://gateway.ut.ovid.com/gw1/ovidweb.cgi](http://gateway.ut.ovid.com/gw1/ovidweb.cgi)


**May 16  Effects of child gender on parents’ behavior and child well-being – Shelly Lundberg, guest seminar leader**


May 23 Fragile families


### May 30  Marriage promotion policy


- Brown, Susan et al. “Links between Premarital Cohabitation and Subsequent Marital Quality, Stability, and Divorce: A Comparison of Covenant versus Standard
Marriages,” Bowling Green State University Center for Family and Demographic Research.  

http://www.futureofchildren.org/homepage2824/index.htm

Ooms, Theodora. 2005 “The new kid on the block” What is marriage education and does it work?” Center for Law and Social Policy 


Fein, David. “Married and poor: Basic characteristics of economically disadvantaged couples in the US,” MDRC working paper 2004  
http://www.mdrc.org/publications/393/workpaper.html

http://www.jstor.org/browse/0022166x?config=jstor

http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/marriage-well-being03


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For following the literature in the future – The journals below regularly have articles on the seminar’s topics. Articles on these issues appear in a wide variety of other academic journals as well, including the top tier general disciplinary journals such as American Sociological Review or American Economic Review.

Child Development
Developmental Psychology
Demography
Journal of Aging and Social Policy
Journal of Family Issues
Journal of Human Resources

CSDE 595 and Public Affairs 573 Spring 2006
Web sites relevant to course issues:

Center for Research on Child Well-Being, Princeton University (The mission … is to identify and contribute to the development of economically efficient, politically feasible, and socially viable policies that address the needs of children in the areas of education, health, income, family, and community.) http://crcw.princeton.edu


National Poverty Center http://www.npc.umich.edu/ Has research papers on poverty issues as well as extensive links to poverty-related sources.

Institute for Research on Poverty, http://www.irp.wisc.edu/ See their publications, especially the discussion papers, as well as extensive links to poverty-related sources.

National Center for Children in Poverty. (The mission … is to identify and promote strategies that reduce the incidence of young child poverty in the United States and that improve the life chances of the millions of children under age six who are growing up poor.) http://cpmcnet.columbia.edu/dept/nccp/

Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan social policy research organization. Through rigorous research, we aim to build knowledge that improves the well-being of low-income people and the effectiveness of public policies and programs.) http://www.mdrc.org

The Urban Institute (The Urban Institute investigates social and economic problems confronting the nation and analyzes efforts to solve these problems. The Institute seeks to increase Americans' awareness of important public choices and improve the formulation and implementation of government decisions.) http://www.urban.org

Child Trends, Inc. (Child Trends, Inc. is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization that studies children, youth, and families through research, data collection, and data analysis.) http://www.childtrends.org

RAND (RAND aims to: Provide practical guidance by making policy choices clear and addressing barriers to effective policy implementation; develop innovative solutions to complex problems by bringing together researchers in all relevant academic specialties; achieve complete objectivity by avoiding partisanship and disregarding vested interests; meet the highest technical standards by employing advanced

Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE). The best British research center on families, poverty and policy. http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/case/

The Luxembourg Income Study. LIS is a cooperative research project with a membership that includes 25 countries on four continents: Europe, America, Asia and Oceania. The LIS database is a collection of household income surveys that provide demographic, income and expenditure information. The web site contains many working papers on poverty, inequality, social policy and related issues both for specific countries and with cross-national comparisons. http://www.lisproject.org/

Mathematica Policy Research [a high quality for-profit consulting firm] (MPR, Inc., conducts public policy research and surveys for federal and state governments as well as private-sector clients. We study health care, education, welfare, employment, nutrition, child development, and other policy issues.) http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/

Federal government sites of interest:

US Census Bureau http://www.census.gov/
Congressional Budget Office http://www.cbo.gov
Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE is the principal advisor to the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services on policy development issues.) http://aspe.os.dhhs.gov

The “Green Book” is compiled every other year by the staff of the Committee on Ways and Means of the U.S. House of Representatives. It provides program descriptions and historical data on a wide variety of social welfare policy topics, including Social Security, employment, earnings, poverty, welfare, child support, health insurance, the elderly, families with children, food stamps, Medicaid, child care, and taxation. It has become a standard reference work for those interested in the direction of social policy in the United States. http://www.gpoaccess.gov/wmprints/green/2004.html

Advocacy research organizations with useful information:

The Annie E. Casey Foundation (A private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States.) http://www.aecf.org/

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (The CBPP is a nonpartisan research organization and policy institute that conducts research and analysis on a range of government policies and programs, with an emphasis on those affecting low- and moderate-income people.) http://www.cbpp.org

Center for Law and Social Policy (“CLASP is a national non-profit organization with expertise in both law and policy affecting the poor. Through education, policy research and advocacy, CLASP seeks to improve the economic conditions of low-income families with children and secure access for the poor to our civil justice system.”) http://www.clasp.org
Children’s Defense Fund (The mission … is to Leave No Child Behind® and to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start, and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities.)    http://www.childrensdefense.org/

The Institute for Women's Policy Research “conducts rigorous research and disseminates its findings to address the needs of women, promote public dialogue, and strengthen families, communities, and societies. IWPR focuses on issues of poverty and welfare, employment and earnings, work and family issues, health and safety, and women's civic and political participation.”    http://www.iwpr.org

The Cato Institute (“seeks to broaden the parameters of public policy debate to allow consideration of the traditional American principles of limited government, individual liberty, free markets and peace.”)    http://www.cato.org

The Heritage Foundation (“is a research and educational institute -- a think tank -- whose mission is to formulate and promote conservative public policies based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense.”)    http://www.heritage.org/