A leading practitioner has described child well-being as a three-legged stool supported by the child’s access to quality health care, sound early education, and family economic security. If the three legs work together to support child well-being, they also support and strengthen one another. Children from economically secure families are much more likely than children from poor families to gain access to both high-quality health care and early education.

Family economic security is closely associated with a range of positive social and economic outcomes for children, including higher academic attainment and achievement, fewer externalizing and internalizing behavioral problems, and better physical health. Adults who were poor as children are themselves more likely to be poor, resulting in the inter-generational transmission of poverty. For society, poverty is a moral blight and costs the economy many billions of dollars annually in forgone output, earnings, and tax revenue.

This interdisciplinary course—taught by a psychologist, a sociologist, and an economist—is designed to give students a critical introduction to United States public policy intended to improve development outcomes for children in low-income families. Course content is organized into three sections: family economic security; early childhood; and health and mental health. Within each section, we review the state of contemporary research on the problem and evaluate leading policy approaches. We employ multiple learning strategies to familiarize students with, and help them
develop their competencies in policy analysis. These methods include in-class presentations and discussions, independent readings, and a group policy analysis project.

PREREQUISITES
None

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

1. Describe the historical context of child poverty in the United States
2. Explain the major theories of poverty and the link between poverty and child health and well-being
3. Identify the major child policy issues at the federal, state, and local level
4. Examine and critically assess the link between public policy and child health and well-being
5. Organize information and relevant research to articulate and advocate policy positions through written submissions and verbal presentations.

ASSESSMENT AND GRADING POLICY

Student grades will be based on:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Three policy papers (4-6 pages) with class presentations</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General class participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group project</td>
<td>25%</td>
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</table>

Written Assignments and Individual Presentations

Each student will prepare and present to the class a total of three policy papers of 4-6 pages in length. The papers will analyze a policy problem within each of the broad course topics: (i) Family Economic Security and Welfare Policy; (ii) Early Childhood Learning and Development and (iii) Social Determinants of Child Health and Mental Health/Housing, Neighborhood and Child Development. The papers should be based on the reading assignments and linked to the learning objectives. Each paper will examine a specific problem related to child poverty and development, and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of one or more policy responses. The papers should include policy-relevant, analytic questions for class discussion.

Group Project and Presentation

Students will be divided into groups. Each group will: (i) identify an outstanding problem confronting low-income families and hindering their children’s healthy and positive development; (ii) review existing public policy approaches to the problem in the United States; and (iii) identify a promising new policy or program to address the problem. The shortcomings of existing policy and the group's policy/program recommendations should be supported by evidence, and the presentation prepared as if the group were addressing a legislative body empowered to make the policy change. The policy or program the group develops should encompass two or more aspects of economic security, child health/mental health and early childhood learning and development. A portion of each class will be devoted to work on the group project, and each group will deliver its findings orally with a PowerPoint presentation on the last class session of the course.
COURSE STRUCTURE
We employ multiple learning methods to familiarize students with, and help them develop their competencies in, child policy analyses. These methods include in-class presentations and discussions, independent readings, and a group policy analysis project.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The class is offered in seminar format and students are expected to attend all sessions and complete the readings on a timely basis so that they may participate in informed discussions. Students are expected to fulfill all written and oral assignments. Late assignments and incompletes will not be accepted without prior approval from the instructor.

Please refer to the information on Written Assignments, Presentations, and Examinations under the Assessment and Grading Policy section.

Some Useful Information:

A WORD ON PLAGIARISM:

Plagiarism is not tolerated. If you are not certain of how or when to cite reference materials, it is your responsibility to ask the professor for guidance. Violation of these and other applicable rules will result in failure for the assignment or exam in addition to other available sanctions.

MAILMAN SCHOOL POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS

Students and faculty have a shared commitment to the School's mission, values and oath. http://mailman.columbia.edu/about-us/school-mission/

Academic Integrity
Students are required to adhere to the Mailman School Honor Code, available online at http://mailman.columbia.edu/honorcode.

Disability Access
In order to receive disability-related academic accommodations, students must first be registered with the Office of Disability Services (ODS). Students who have, or think they may have a disability are invited to contact ODS for a confidential discussion at 212.854.2388 (V) 212.854.2378 (TTY), or by email at disability@columbia.edu. If you have already registered with ODS, please speak to your instructor to ensure that s/he has been notified of your recommended accommodations by Lillian Morales (lm31@columbia.edu), the School’s liaison to the Office of Disability Services.
**COURSE SCHEDULE**

Please see the lecture section of Courseworks to download the readings, exams, and lecture slides.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session 1</th>
<th>Introduction (Skinner, Aratani and Smith)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Understanding Child Poverty: History, Theory and Measurements (Skinner)</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. 20</td>
<td><strong>Learning Objectives:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Describe the “three-legged stool” of child development, supported by family economic security, early child education, and access to quality health care</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Describe important socioeconomic factors associated with child poverty in the United States and the recent trend in U.S. poverty rates</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Identify the costs of childhood poverty and the personal, social, and economic returns to investing in children and families</td>
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<td>4. Describe holistic policy approaches to child development</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5. Compare the strengthens and weaknesses of alternative measures of poverty</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Reading:</strong></td>
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</table>
Session 2  Family Economic Security and Welfare Policy  (Skinner)

Jan. 27  Learning Objectives:

1. Describe the public safety net—income and work supports—for low-income families in the U.S.; identify strengths and weaknesses in the net; describe evolution of the safety net over time; compare key differences with European policies
2. Evaluate labor market policies and poverty reduction
3. Evaluate asset development policies and poverty reduction
4. Use NCCP’s Family Resource Simulator to model safety net effectiveness and policy change

Reading:


Assignment:

A short paper due for students who signed up on this topic
In-class group exercise
# Session 3  Social Determinants of Child Health and Mental Health (Aratani)

**Feb 3**  

**Learning Objectives:**

1. Identify key social factors that affect child health and mental health and the causes of health disparities  
2. Explain the current strengths and weaknesses of the major children’s public health policies and programs in addressing disparities in child health and mental health  
3. Apply knowledge about the social determinants of child health and mental health and the status of current children's public health policies and programs for formulating recommendations for new or enhanced initiatives that reduce disparities in child health and mental health

**Reading:**


**Assignment:**

A short paper due for students who signed up on this topic  
In-class group exercise
### Session 4  Early learning and development: Promoting long-term health and education outcomes (Smith)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feb 10</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Risk and protective factors in early development</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Early experiences and their contribution to later education and health outcomes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Children at exceptional risk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Overview of key policies and programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Learning Objectives:**

1. Identify key elements of children’s experiences and environments in the first five years that are essential to optimal development and major risk factors that impede positive outcomes;
2. Explain the contribution of early learning and development in the first five years of life to health outcomes during adolescence and adulthood;
3. Describe the specific goals and groups of children targeted by major programs and policies designed to support the healthy development and school readiness of young children growing up in poverty;

**Reading:**


Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2010) The Foundations of Lifelong Health are Built in Early Childhood. Available at: [http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu](http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu)


**Assignment:**

A short paper due for students who signed up on this topic

In-class group exercise
Session 5 Early Learning and Development: Programs and Policies (Smith)

Feb 17

- The early care and education “system”
- New strategies for improving the quality of early care and education: Quality Rating Improvement Systems
- Home visiting
- Reaching the most vulnerable children: Part C Early Intervention; Child Abuse Protection and Treatment Act; McKinney-Vento

Learning Objectives:

1. Describe the specific goals and groups of children targeted by major programs and policies designed to support the healthy development and school readiness of young children growing up in poverty (cont.);
2. Explain the current strengths and weaknesses of these policies and programs including their reach and quality;
3. Apply knowledge about the needs of young children and the status of current policies and programs to formulate recommendations for new or enhanced initiatives that can better ensure positive outcomes for specific groups of vulnerable children.

Reading:


Assignment:
A short paper due for students who signed up on this topic
In-class group exercise

Session 6 Housing, Neighborhood and Child Development (Aratani)
Feb 24 Learning Objectives:

1. Identify key conceptual framework in understanding how living environment affects child development.
2. Describe key policies and programs that address improving the quality of housing and neighborhood for families with children.
3. Identify current housing policy and program challenges including their reach and quality.
4. Apply knowledge about key conceptual frameworks and formulate recommendations for new or enhanced initiatives that improve the quality of living environment that promotes positive child development.

Reading:


Assignment:

A short paper due for students who signed up on this topic
In-class group exercise

Session 7   Student Policy Paper Presentations and Discussion and Concluding Thoughts
(Skinner, Smith and Aratani)

Mar 3   Learning Objectives:

1. Identify the major child policy issues at the federal, state, and local level
2. Examine and critically assess the link between public policy and child health and well-being
3. Organize information and relevant research to articulate and advocate policy positions through written submissions and verbal presentations.

Reading:

None

Assignment:

Group project presentations