

ECON B314 The Economics of Social Policy

Writing Intensive Seminar

Bryn Mawr College, Department of Economics

Professor Jiyeon (June) Kim

Class time and location: MW 11:40 – 1, Dalton 10

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Office Hours: MW 10:30-11:30 am (walk-in) or by appointment (zoom)

Course Prerequisites: Intermediate Micro (Econ B200 or Econ H300) AND either Intro to Econometrics (ECON B253 or ECON H203 or ECON H204) or Econometrics (Econ B304 or Econ H304)

Course Description:

Welcome to the Economics of Social Policy! The goal of this course is to think about social policy issues through an economic lens. We will read and discuss articles presenting empirical evidence on questions relating to unemployment, public health, social insurance, education, and safety net programs. We will use economic analysis to evaluate how these policies achieve their intended goals and predict how they might influence behavior in an unintended way. By the end of the course, you will produce a research proposal on important and interesting public policy questions, with an emphasis on empirical evidence.

Course Objectives:

1. To develop your skills in thinking critically about incentives and consequences of social policies.
2. To enable you to understand and discuss economics research articles and causal inference methods.
3. To develop the skills necessary to formulate an economics research paper that could be completely executed in the future, perhaps as a senior thesis.
4. To improve economic-related writing skills through both peer reviews and professor review.
5. By the end of this course, to be able to explain your perspective on social policy issues in the U.S.

Course Materials:

- Jonathan Gruber, Public Finance and Public Policy, Sixth Edition, Worth Publishers. Any edition works.
- Angrist, Joshua D., and Jörn-Steffen Pischke. Mastering 'Metrics: The Path from Cause to Effect. Princeton University Press, 2014. ISBN: 9780691152844. (Free online resources: <https://mru.org/mastering-econometrics-joshua-angrist>)
- Cunningham, S. Causal Inference: The Mixtape. ISBN: 978-0300251685 (Free online version is available here: <https://mixtape.scunning.com/index.html>)

Textbooks are not required but highly recommended. Your own class notes are a critical reference for you during this course.

Statistical Software:

A portion of the class will use computers/laptops. The software package we will be using in this course is **Stata**. Students should have access to Stata on public lab computers in libraries and all classrooms. If students wish to access Stata on their personal computers, they can do so remotely by connecting to them virtually using LabStats or Apporto. Here are the instructions to access [Labstats](#) and/or [Apporto](#). Or you can purchase Stata/BE 6-month license (\$48)
<https://www.stata.com/order/new/edu/profplus/student-pricing/>

Moodle:

Check our Moodle course site as frequently as possible. You can find the syllabus, important class announcements, class slides, research articles and supplemental readings, audio/video/podcast clips.

Course Grades

Research paper summary presentation = 15%

Stata works or Response papers or Referee reports = 30%

Research Proposal = 55%

a. Presentations of research papers summary (15%)

- **Two research paper summaries (10%=5%*2):** Each of you will be assigned two papers throughout the course to summarize and lead the class discussion. You can prepare a handout (2 pages max) for class to facilitate discussion. In your presentation, you need to talk about i) background and research question; ii) data; iii) methodology; iv) results; and v) discussion and questions.
- **Social Policy of your choice (5%):** Each student will choose a social policy of interest and introduce the policy to the class in week 14 by overviewing the policy in general and by leading a discussion with one or two chosen economics paper.

b. Stata work/Response papers/Referee report (30% = 5% * 6)

You will be asked to pick six topics covered and submit i) Stata work; OR ii) a response paper; OR iii) a referee report.

Stata Work

Occasionally, we will have Stata labs, where you are asked to perform statistical analysis using Stata and submit your log file for at-home practice questions.

Grading scale:

- 5 points: Correct and Perfect answer
- 4 points: Good try and close, but with minor mistakes
- 3 points: Okay try, but with major mistakes
- 2 points: Incomplete work but an attempt nonetheless
- 1 point: Late submission (submitted within 24 hours from the due)
- 0 points: No work toward the answer (e.g., completely blank or no clear attempt to solve) or submitted after 24 hours from the due.

Response Paper

A single-spaced 1-2 pages-response paper will focus on generating potential research questions related to social policy. Each response should include:

- 1) Lessons gained from class readings and discussion. No need to summarize the papers! (less than half of a page).
- 2) One to two potential research ideas and an explanation of your hypothesis. You should also connect your research idea to existing academic articles or current policies to show how they could fit into the existing economic literature (at least 0.5-1 page).

Grading scale:

- 5 points: Potential research ideas are feasible, creative, and novel with a thorough literature review and a clear contribution to the existing literature
- 4 points: Potential research ideas are feasible and interesting, but not clear how it connects to/contributes to existing academic articles
- 3 points: Potential research ideas are okay, with a high possibility that they have been studied before
- 2 points: Incomplete work but an attempt nonetheless
- 1 point: Late submission (submitted within 24 hours from the due)
- 0 points: No work or submitted after 24 hours from the due.

Referee Report

For some policy topics, a working paper will be posted and you will be asked to evaluate the paper's suitability for publication as a referee. The referee report should have three components:

- 1) Summary and Overview
- 2) Comments and suggestions
- 3) Make a recommendation

The referee report should be no longer than single-spaced 2-3 pages.

Grading scale:

- 5 points: Fully understood the research question and empirical strategy. Comments and feedbacks are constructive, sharp, and critical, guiding authors to improve their paper significantly better.
- 4 points: Understood the research question and empirical strategy. Comments and feedbacks are mostly marginal and minor, guiding authors to improve their paper slightly better.
- 3 points: Did not fully understand the research question and/or empirical strategy. Comments and feedbacks are marginal and minor.
- 2 points: Incomplete work but an attempt nonetheless
- 1 point: Late submission (submitted within 24 hours from the due)
- 0 points: No work or submitted after 24 hours from the due.

c. Research Proposal (55%)

You will write a research proposal on a social policy topic of your choice. The proposal should include your research question, a literature review of the research question, the data you plan to use, the methodology you plan to implement, and any results you are able to produce. Ideally, this research proposal could be the basis of your senior thesis. The proposal should be about 15-20 pages long and should be double spaced. Other aspects of this research proposal include:

- 1) Research Proposal Meetings: You should meet with me twice over the course of the semester to discuss your project. The first meeting should be scheduled during week 11. The second meeting will happen before the final week.
- 2) Research proposal ideas *outline* (5%)
- 3) Research proposal *draft* (10%) and Research Proposal *Peer Review* (10%): In early December, you should have a draft of your research proposal. You will exchange this draft with a randomly assigned peer to receive feedback on your proposal. Your peer will write a two-page referee report on your paper (and you write the same for them).
- 4) Final Research Proposal (30 %)

Course Policies

a. Academic Honesty:

Students are responsible for knowing and adhering to the Bryn Mawr Honor Code. Plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty are clear violations. If you have any questions about expectations or about how to avoid plagiarism in your assignments, please ask.

b. Special Needs:

Bryn Mawr College is committed to providing equal access to students with a documented disability. Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first speak with Access Services. Students can email accessservices@brynmawr.edu to request an appointment to begin this confidential process. If eligible for accommodations as per Access Services, students should schedule an appointment with the professor as early in the semester as possible to share their verification form and make appropriate arrangements. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and require advance notice to implement. More information can be obtained at the Access Services website. (<http://www.brynmawr.edu/access-services/>) Any student who has a disability-related need to record this class must first be found eligible to do so by Access Services and must share this eligibility with me, the instructor. Class members need to be aware that this class may be recorded.

c. Title IX:

Bryn Mawr College and Haverford College are committed to ensuring that all members of the College community have a learning and working environment that is free from sexual misconduct. All forms of sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking, are violations of Bryn Mawr/Haverford's policies, whether they occur on or off campus. Bryn Mawr/Haverford faculty are committed to helping to create a safe learning environment for all students and for the College community as a whole. If you have experienced any form of sexual misconduct or other gender-based misconduct, know that help and support are available. Staff members are trained to support students in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, and more. The College strongly encourages all students to report any incidents of sexual misconduct. Please be aware that all Bryn Mawr/Haverford employees (other than those designated as confidential resources such as counselors, clergy, and healthcare providers) are required to report information about sexual misconduct to the to their respective Title IX Offices.

d. Religious Observances:

I respect students' religious identities and commitments and that any student who is unable to attend classes, exams or work due to a religious observance may be excused and given an

opportunity to make up missed work without penalty. You need to inform me *ahead of time* regarding the religious observance and missing classes/work.

e. Use of Generative AI for this course:

Use of any text-generating software (such as ChatGPT, iA Writer, Marmot or Botowski) is not permitted, and use of this software on graded assignments will be treated as plagiarism.

Class Schedule and Reading Lists

Note that the course outline and exam dates are subject to change at the instructor's discretion. Reading lists and podcasts will continue to be updated throughout the semester.

[Week1: Aug 31] Introduction to Economics of Social Policy

- Introduction to Experiments, econometrics, and social science
- What makes convincing statistical research?

Readings

- Belluz, J. 2018. "Is One Drink Per Day Really Unsafe? That New Alcohol Study, Explained," *Vox.com*. <https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2018/8/29/17790118/alcohol-lancet-health-study>
- Cunningham, S. Causal Inference: The Mixtape. 1. Introduction: <https://mixtape.scunning.com/01-introduction>

[Week 2: Sep 2, 9] Regression Review and Stata Lab (No Class on Labor day, Sep 7)

- Reading in data
- Writing/running do-file
- Stata Commands and interpretation of results

☺ Optional Stata work due Sep 13, Sunday

[Week 3: Sep 14, 16] Minimum Wages, Difference-in-Differences (DD)

Readings

- Card, D. and A. B. Krueger, 1994. "Minimum Wages and Employment: A Case Study of the Fast Food Industry in New Jersey and Pennsylvania" *American Economic Review*, Vol. 84, No. 4, pp. 772-793

Podcasts

- "Does Raising the Minimum Wage Kill Jobs?" *Planet Money the Economy Explained*, March 6, 2014.
- "Episode 562: A Mall Divided." *Planet Money the Economy Explained*, August 22, 2014.

☺ Optional Response Paper due Sep 20, Sunday

[Week 4: Sep 21, 23] SNAP (a.k.a. Food Stamps), Quasi-natural experiment and DD

Reading

- Almond, D., H. Hoynes and D. Schanzenbach. 2011. "Inside the War on Poverty: The Impact of Food Stamps on Birth Outcomes" *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 93 (2): 387–403.
- Kim, J. and B. Katare. 2017. Effects of the 2013 SNAP Benefit cut on Food Security, *Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy* 39(4): 662-681.
- Carr, J. and A. Packham. 2019. "SNAP Benefits and Crime: Evidence from Changing Disbursement Schedules" *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 101(2): 310-325.

Podcasts

- "Episode 665: The Pickle Problem." *Planet Money the Economy Explained*, November 25, 2015.
- "Episode 494: What Happens When You Just Give Money To Poor People?" *Planet Money the Economy Explained*, November 8, 2013.
- "Episode 28: Jillian Carr on SNAP benefit distribution and crime" *Probable causation*, April 28, 2020.

☺ Optional Response Paper due Oct 4, Sunday

[Week 5: Sep 28, 30] Paid Family Leave, DD and DDD (Triple Differences)

Readings

- Stanczyk, A. B. (2019). Does paid family leave improve household economic security following a birth? Evidence from California. *Social Service Review*, 93(2), 262–304
- Lenhart, O. (2021). "The effects of paid family leave on food insecurity —evidence from California" *Review of Economics of the Household*, 19: 615-639.
- Data Replication Stata Lab
- Kim, J and Lenhart, O. (2024). "Paid Family Leave and the Fight against Hunger: evidence from New York" *Health Economics*, 33(7): 1503-1527.

☺ Mandatory Referee report due Oct 25, Sunday

[Week 6: Oct 5, 7] Gender gap in Labor market, Event-study analysis

Readings

- Kleven et al. (2019). "Child Penalties across Countries: Evidence and Explanation" *AEA Papers and Proceedings*, Vol 109. 122-126
- Jones, K and Wilcher, B. (2025). "Reducing Maternal Labor Market Detachment: A role for Paid Family Leave" *Labour Economics*, 87, 102478
- Price, B. and Wasserman, M. (2026). The Summer Drop in Female Employment. *Review of*

Economics and Statistics, forthcoming

☺ Mandatory Referee report due Nov 15, Sunday

[Week 7: Oct 12, 14] Fall break ☺

[Week 8: Oct 19, 21] Education, Regression Discontinuity

Readings

- School starting age
 - Arnold, G., and B. Depew, 2018. "School starting age and long-run health in the United States", *Health Economics*, 27(12): 1904-1920.
- Returns to Economics major
 - Bleemer, Z, and A. Mehta. 2022. "Will Studying Economics Make You Rich? A Regression Discontinuity Analysis of the Returns to College Major." *American Economic Journal: Applied Economic*, 14 (2): 1-22.
- Head Start
 - Jens Ludwig & Douglas L Miller, 2007. "Does Head Start Improve Children's Life Chances? Evidence from a Regression Discontinuity Design," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 122(1), 159-208.

☺ Optional Response Paper due Oct 25, Sunday

[Week 9: Oct 26, 28] Fetal Origin Hypothesis

Readings

- Almond, D. and J. Currie. 2011. "Killing me softly: The Fetal Origins Hypothesis" *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 25(3):153-72.
- Almond, D. and B. Mazumder. 2005. "The 1918 Influenza Pandemic and Subsequent Health Outcomes: An Analysis of SIPP Data" *American Economic Review* 95(2): 258–262.
- Currie, J., M. Mueller-Smith, and M. Rossin-Slater. 2020. "Violence while in utero: the impact of assaults during pregnancy on birth outcomes" Forthcoming at *Review of Economics and Statistics*

Supplemental Reading

- [Small and Thin, The New Yorker 2007.](#)

Podcasts

- "Episode 18: Maya Rossin-Slater on the effects of violent assault during pregnancy" *Probable causation*, December 10, 2019.

☺ Optional Response Paper due Nov 1, Sunday

[Week 10: Nov 2, 4] Climate Change, Fixed Effects

Readings

- Deschenes, O, M. Greenstone, and J. Guryan, 2009. "Climate Change and Birth Weight" *American Economic Review* 99(2): 211–217.
- Park, R. Jisung, Joshua Goodman, Michael Hurwitz, and Jonathan Smith. 2020. "Heat and Learning." *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 12 (2): 306-39.

Podcasts

- ["Impacts of Rising Heat on Labor Markets and Public Education with Dr. Jisung Park of UCLA"](#) *American Adapts*, March 10, 2020.

☺ Research Ideas and Outline (no page limit, should include research questions, data, literature review, methods) due Nov 8, Sunday

[Week 11: Nov 9, 11] Data replication Stata Lab (practice Fixed Effects, Event-study analysis)

- Cil, G. and Kim, J. 2022. "Extreme Temperatures during Pregnancy and Adverse Birth Outcomes: Evidence from 2009-2018 U.S. National Birth data" *Health Economic* 31(9): 1993–2024.
- One-to-one meeting with Prof Kim to review research outlines and discuss final research proposal

☺ Optional Stata work due Nov 15, Sunday

[Week 12: Nov 16, 18] Disability and Supplemental Security Income

Readings

- Duggan, M. and G. Goda, 2022. "The Minimum Wage and Social Security Disability Insurance" NBER Working paper w28329.
- Deshpande, M. and M. Mueller-Smith, 2022. "Does Welfare Prevent Crime? The Criminal Justice Outcomes of Youth Removed from SSI" Forthcoming at *Quarterly Journal of Economics*.
- Guldi, M., A. Hawkins, J. Hemmeter, and L. Schmidt. 2022. "Supplemental Security Income for Children, Maternal Labor Supply, and Family Well-Being: Evidence from Birth Weight Eligibility Cutoffs" Forthcoming at *Journal of Human Resources*

Podcasts

- "Trends with Benefits" *This American Life*, March 22, 2013.
- ["Episode 72: Manasi Deshpande on SSI benefits and crime"](#) *Probable causation*, May 24, 2022.

☺ Optional Response Paper due Nov 22, Sunday

[Week 13: Nov 23, 25] Thanksgiving break: NO CLASS

- Work on developing your final research proposal
- Think about topics of your choice presentation for the following week. Post your discussion paper on Moodle by Nov 25 so that classmates can read them prior to the class next week.

[Week 14-15: Nov 30, Dec 2, 7] Topics of your choice

Please bring the social policy of your choice, one or two published ECONOMICS papers related to the policy, and introduce the policy to the class by presenting with slides. This social policy of your choice should be one that we have not discussed in class. Examples below:

Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security (retirement), housing subsidies, unemployment insurance, childcare policies, immigration policies, gun control, etc.

Abortion Laws (Regression discontinuity)

- Miller, S., L. R. Wherry and D. G. Foster, 2020. "The Economic Consequences of Being Denied an Abortion" *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, Forthcoming.

Plastic Bag Usage (Natural experiment)

- Homonoff, T, 2018. "Can Small Incentives Have Large Effects? The Impact of Taxes versus Bonuses on Disposable Bag Use" *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 10(4): 177-210.

Health Insurance in the U.S.

- Aviva Aron-Dine, Liran Einav, and Amy Finkelstein, "The RAND Health Insurance Experiment, Three Decades later," *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 27(1), 2013, pp. 197-222.
- Finkelstein, A, Taubman, S., Wright, B., Bernstein, M., Gruber, J., Newhouse, J.P., Allen, H., Baicker, K., & Oregon Health Study Group. 2012. "The Oregon Health Insurance Experiment: Evidence from the First Year," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 127(3): 1057-1106.
- Miller et al. 2024. "Medicaid and Mortality: New Evidence from Linked Survey and Administrative data" *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. 136 (3), 1783-1829.

Access to Public Insurance for Immigrants

- Sarah Miller and Laura Wherry. 2022. "Covering Undocumented Immigrants: The Effects of A Large-Scale Prenatal Care Intervention," *NBER Working paper*

☺ Research Proposal **Draft** Due Dec 6, Sunday

- Follow the research proposal template
- It is a "draft", so you should write up a rough draft for each section and will continue to beef it up until you submit the final version in December.
- Email to your peer reviewer AND upload it onto Moodle

[Week 15: Dec 9]

- One-on-one Zoom Meetings with Prof Kim to discuss research proposal draft

☺ Peer Review Report Due Dec 13, Sunday

- A 2-page report to give constructive feedback on your peer's research proposal
- It is similar to the referee report, however, remember that what you are reviewing for is NOT a complete paper, but a *proposal* for a complete paper!
- Email to your peer AND upload it onto Moodle

Final Research Proposal Due: TBA