

Psychology 365/Spring 2009

CHILDREN, SCIENCE, AND POLITICS

Wednesdays 8:50-11:30 am (WGR 213)

Prerequisites: Psyc-001 and permission of the instructor. Preferably a course on child, adolescent, or life-span development (i.e., Psyc-160, 161 or 162).

Instructor: Prof. Deborah Phillips (deborah.dap4@gmail.com)

Office Hours: Fridays 9:30-12:00 or by appointment

Course Description: To what extent do governmental policies that affect children and families reflect the knowledge developmental scientists have about factors influencing child development? To what extent should policy be influenced by empirical findings? Should psychologists make efforts to influence public policy so it better reflects facts rather than fictions or myths? How do scientists walk the ethical line between informing policy makers about scientific findings and advocating positions that may exceed scientific boundaries? In this seminar, students will (1) become familiar with the policy-making process and the ways in which developmental scientists have influenced or failed to influence policy decisions, and (2) consider the ethical, political, and practical dilemmas involved in bringing science, politics, and policy together. Through readings, discussion, and role playing, students will gain an understanding of the federal policies that affect children and families and the different perspectives that developmental scientists and policy makers bring to these issues.

Objectives

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to demonstrate:

1. An understanding of the policy process and its mechanisms for encouraging social change.
2. Critical thinking about the intersection of psychological research and public policy, including acquiring a realistic set of expectations about the contribution of research to public policy
3. An ability to review research for its policy implications and to consider how to ask research questions that will be relevant to public policy.
4. An in-depth understanding of several contemporary policy issues and the contributions that psychological science can make to address them.
5. The ability to develop and express (orally and in writing) clear, logical arguments to policymakers regarding links from research to current policy issues.

Course Requirements

- (1) **Readings and Bi-weekly discussion seminar.** Students are expected to complete all assigned readings prior to class and to participate actively in class discussions. I approach my classes as communities of scholars with inquiring and open minds. The success of the class will depend heavily on the extent to which each of you takes responsibilities for contributing actively to the goals of the course. Lack of participation and attendance will affect final grades.

- (2) **Reaction pieces.** Each student will write **6** reaction pieces. Each reaction piece is based on the readings and should consist of your thoughts about them, i.e., what issues are raised by the readings, what unanswered questions did they raise for you, what dilemmas are posed, what did the readings make you ponder, did they link with other articles you've read or experiences you've had? Each reaction piece will be posted on Blackboard (see Discussion Board) and should be no longer than 2 double-spaced pages. They are due by 7 pm on the evening prior to class (e.g., 7 pm on Jan. 13 for Jan 14 class). Class discussion will incorporate the ideas and questions raised in these pieces and, each week, students will be called upon to summarize their reactions for the class.
- (3) **Individual briefing memo.** Each student will select a current child and family policy issue from the list below (or another topic that is negotiated with Prof. Phillips) on which to prepare a briefing memo for a Member of Congress or State Legislator. Students will also prepare a memo that makes research recommendations so that future policy on the selected topic will be better informed by scientific evidence. Topics and the specific recipient of the memo must be handed in during class on **January 28**.
Annotated Bibliography: Each student will select a minimum of 6 relevant research articles from scientific sources (no more than 3 may be from class readings) supplemented by policy references when relevant and prepare an APA-style bibliography (details will be discussed in class). These will form the basis of a briefing memo for the candidate, research recommendations for scientists, and a class presentation. Annotated bibliographies are due in class on or before **February 11**.
Briefing memo: Briefing memos are a primary means by which staffers communicate with decision-makers of various kinds. In this class, you will be preparing a memo for a Member of Congress or State Legislator of your choice. A briefing memo summarizes a current policy issue addressing various points of view and providing recommendations for policy action. Based on the annotated bibliographies and other specialized readings, each student will prepare a briefing memo. The assignment will provide practice in preparing succinct, decisive summaries of information for policy makers. The entire memo is no more than 5 typed, double-spaced, pages. Final versions of the briefing memo are due in class on or before **Feb. 25**.
Class Presentation: Beginning on **Feb. 25**, each class member will present his or her briefing memo and research recommendations (10 minutes). In addition, each class member will serve as a discussant for a classmate's presentation. A copy of the briefing memo and research recommendations must be provided to the discussant 48 hours before the scheduled class presentation. Both the presentation and the discussant's remarks will be graded.
- (4) **Mock hearing.** The class will plan and hold 3 mock legislative hearings (to accommodate the large size of this seminar) on two of the topics below. The

hearings will take place on **April 8, 15, and 22**. Details will be discussed in class. As part of preparation for the hearing, students will attend at least one Congressional hearing (further details provided in class).

- (5) **Final Essay.** After the second hearing on **April 22** two essay questions will be distributed for completion by **May 1**. The essays will enable you to put the group effort on the hearing into the broader context of the course. One essay will ask you to apply the framework from Making Policies for Children (see Jan. 28th class) to the hearing topic and the other will ask you to write about how you now view the intersection of developmental science and public policy.
- (6) There are no examinations

Briefing Memo Topics:

- TANF/Welfare Reform
- Child Support
- Child Welfare Services
- Tax Policies
- Children with Disabilities
- Food and Nutrition
- Child Health
- Parental Leave
- Early Childhood Education
- Mental Health (child or parent)
- Elementary Education (NCLB Act)
- Teen Pregnancy
- Juvenile Justice

Topics for Mock Hearing:

1. In response to violence in schools, the Department of Education requires that schools institute “zero tolerance” policies in order to receive federal education dollars. These policies allow no exceptions for extenuating circumstances and have resulted in unintended consequences, such as a Kindergarten student being expelled when his grandmother packed a butter knife in his lunch and a first grader being expelled for leaving a water pistol in his back pack. Some educators believe that these policies need to be revised to allow more discretion in individual cases. Others feel that allowing flexibility will leave the door open for truly violent school children to slip through the cracks. Pros and cons?
2. The No Child Left Behind Act is aimed at reducing the achievement gap between minority children and those living in poverty and their more advantaged peers. It is currently up for reauthorization. Frequent, standardized testing of students and holding individual schools accountable for their aggregate scores is a central mechanism for closing the gap. Pros and cons?

3. In response to the national epidemic of obesity, several policy proposals have been made to ensure that school lunch and breakfast programs, as well as vending machines in schools, comply with federal nutrition regulations. Others feel that this is a case of unwarranted federal intervention in state and local education policy. Pros and cons?
4. The number of US families and individuals without health care coverage continues to increase. Inadequate health care can have life-long deleterious effects on young children. In response, some legislators have proposed increasing federal payments to states to allow them to provide health insurance to all children aged 5 and younger, regardless of family income. Others fear that this starts the country down the slippery slope of government health care. Pros and cons?
5. The Department of Health and Human Services requires that states include abstinence education programs as part of their teen pregnancy prevention efforts in order to receive full federal funding through the welfare reform law (TANF). Pros and cons?

Course Grade

Each student's grade will be determined on the basis of:

- (1) Class participation and reaction pieces. Unexcused absences will count against your grade, and participation really does matter. The reaction pieces will be graded as acceptable or unacceptable based on how substantive and thought-provoking they are. They must be posted on Blackboard on time (7 pm the night before they are due) in order to be considered acceptable (10%)
- (2) Briefing memo, presentation, and response to 2nd briefing memo. Any memos that are turned in after the beginning of class on the due date will be reduced by one grade per day (e.g., B on March 17 = B- on March 17 after class, C+ on March 18, etc.). I do not accept electronic/computer screw-ups as an excuse for a late paper. (Memo: 20%; Presentation: 15%; Response: 5%)
- (3) Materials prepared for, and participation and performance in, the mock hearing. (25%)
- (4) Final essay (25%)

Books for Purchase

Aber, J.L., Bishop-Josef, S.J., Jones, S.M., McLearn, K.T. & Phillips, D. (2007). *Child development and social policy: Knowledge for action*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Kotlowitz, A. (1992). *There Are No Children Here: The Story of Two Boys Growing Up in the Other America*. NY: Anchor Books.

Sawhill, I. (Ed). *One percent for the kids*. Washington, DC: Brookings

Zigler, E.G., & Hall, N.W. (2000). *Child Development and Social Policy: Theory and Applications*. Boston: McGraw-Hill.

All other readings will be available electronically on Blackboard or website will be provided.

COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS

I. Introduction

January 7 Introduction to Course

January 14 Demographic and Historical Overview of Children, Science, and Policy

Reaction Piece #1: Post on Blackboard Discussion page your thoughts about the assigned readings, i.e., what issues are raised by the readings, what unanswered questions did they raise for you, what dilemmas are posed, what did the readings make you ponder, did they link with other articles you've read or experiences you've had? This piece should be no longer than 2 double-spaced pages. It is due by 7 pm on Tuesday, January 13. Come to class prepared to share your reaction piece.

Here are some guiding questions for this first reaction piece:

1. Did anything in the demographic or historical trends surprise you?
2. What do you think accounts for the trends?
3. Have you experienced any of these trends in your own life?
4. What do you expect will happen over the next decade?
5. What information would you like to know that is not there?

Zigler and Hall, Chp. 1. (*course text – in bookstore*)

America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2008. Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. <http://www.childstats.gov> (Click on *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being*)
 READ: All chapters

Guzman, L., Lippman, L., Moore, K.A., & O'Hare, W. (July 2003). *How children are doing: The mismatch between public perception and statistical reality.* Child Trends Research Brief #2003-12. Washington, DC: Child Trends, Inc. <http://www.childtrends.org> (Click on Publications and then Indicators and you'll see this brief)

Phillips, D., & Styfco, S.(2007). Child development research and public policy: Triumphs and set-backs on the way to maturity. In Aber, J.L, Bishop-Josef, S.J., Jones, S.M., McLearn, K.T., & Phillips, D.A. (Eds.), *Child development and social policy: Knowledge for action.* (pp. 11-28). Washington DC: American Psychological Association. (*course text – in bookstore*)

Hernandez, D. (Spring 1994). Children's Changing Access to Resources: A Historical Perspective. *SRCD Social Policy Report*, Volume VII, Number

1. <http://www.srcd.org> Click on Publications (on top bar) and then on Social Policy Reports and search for this title under 1994 reports.

**January 21 The Federal Policy Process and How It Is Influenced
Reaction Piece #2**

TOUR OF GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS LIBRARY

Zigler and Hall, Chps. 2 and 3

Elmore, R.F. (1983). Social policymaking as strategic intervention. In E. Seidman (Ed.), *Handbook of social intervention* (pp. 212-236). Beverly Hills: Sage.

Birkland, T.A. (2001). *An introduction to the policy process: Theories, concepts, and models of public policymaking*. Chps. 2, 3, and 4. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.

National Research Council (1982). *Making Policies for Children: A Study of the Federal Process*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
Chapter 3: Components of the policy formation process (pp. 38-57)
Chapter 4: A policy framework: Three levels of decision-making (pp. 58-71)
WIC Case Study (pp. 85-148)

**Jan 28 The Science-Policy Interface
Reaction Piece #3**

TOPIC FOR BRIEFING MEMO DUE

Aber, et al., chp. 2 (Golden, O: Policy Looking to Research)

Huston, A.C. (2005). Connecting the science of child development to public policy. *Social Policy Report, Vol. XIX*, Number 4. Washington, DC: Society for Research in Child Development.
<http://www.srcd.org> Click on Publications (on top bar) and then on Social Policy Reports and search for this title under 2005 reports.

March, J. (1976). Science, politics, and Mrs. Gruenberg. From the *National Academy of Sciences Annual Report: 1976*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1974). Developmental research, public policy, and the ecology of childhood. *Child Development, 45*, 1-5.

Greenberger, E. (1983). A researcher in the policy arena: The case of child labor. *American Psychologist*, 104-111.

Shonkoff, J.P. (2000). Science, policy, and practice: Three cultures in search of a shared mission. *Child Development*, 71(1), 181-187.

Feb 4 **Communicating Science to Policy Makers**
Reaction Piece #4

Aber, et al., Chp 3 (Gruendel & Aber: Bridging the gap between research and child policy change: The role of strategic communications in policy advocacy)

Weiss, J.A., & Weiss, C.H. (1981). Social scientists and decision makers look at the usefulness of mental health research. *American Psychologist*, 36, 837-847.

Welch-Ross, M.K., & Fasig, L.G. (2007). Introduction. In M.D. Welch-Ross & L.G. Fasig (Eds.). *Handbook on communicating and disseminating behavioral science*. (pp. 1-14) Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Stocking, S.H. & Sparks, J.V. (2007). Communicating the complexities and uncertainties of behavioral science. In M.D. Welch-Ross & L.G. Fasig (Eds.). *Handbook on communicating and disseminating behavioral science*. (pp. 73-92) Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

READ ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

Gitow, A. (2007). Reporting on behavioral science: A glimpse inside the television news business (pp. 131-14)

Jones, R. (2007). National Public Radio (pp. 141-150)

Siegfried, T. (2007). Newspapers (pp. 151-160)

Lehrman, S. (2007). Magazines (pp. 161-171).

All in M.D. Welch-Ross & L.G. Fasig (Eds.). *Handbook on communicating and disseminating behavioral science*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Feb. 11 **Basic Rights and Benefits for Children**
Reaction Piece #5

BRIEFING MEMO ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHIES DUE

SELECT TOPICS AND GROUPS FOR MOCK HEARINGS

Limber, S.P., & Glekkoy, M.G. (1995). The U.N. Convention on the rights of the child: Its relevance for social scientists. *SRCD Social Policy Report*, Volume IX, Number 2.

<http://www.srcd.org> Go to Publications and then to Social Policy Reports and scroll to this report.

Kammerman, S., & Kahn, A. (1995). *Starting Right: How America neglects its youngest children and what we can do about it*. NY: Oxford University Press. Chps. 1, 2, and 3.

Sawhill, I.V. (2003). Introduction. In I.V. Sawhill (Ed.) *One percent for the kids*. (pp. 1-15) Washington, DC: Brookings.

Sawhill, chp. 2 (Duncan & Magnuson: Promoting the healthy development of young children)

OPTIONAL: Sawhill, chp. 9 (Hills: The Blair government and child poverty: An extra one percent for children in the United Kingdom)

February 18 **Poverty and Welfare Reform Reaction Piece #6**

Kotlowitz, A. (1992). *There Are No Children Here: The Story of Two Boys Growing Up in the Other America*. NY: Anchor Books

Boo, K. (April 9, 2001). After welfare. *The New Yorker*, pp. 93-107.

Aber et al., (2006), chp. 9 (Aber, Jones & Raver: Poverty and child development: New perspectives on a defining issue).

Sawhill, chp. 3 (Haveman: When work alone is not enough)

Zaslow, M.J., Moore, K.A., Brooks, J.L., Morris, P.A., Tout, K, Redd, Z.A., & Emig, C.A. (2002). Experimental Studies of Welfare Reform and Children, *The Future of Children*, 12(1), 79-95.

February 25 **Head Start, Child Care, and Pre-K: Early Education Policy Briefing Memo Presentations I**

**ALL BRIEFING MEMO AND RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS
DUE IN CLASS**

SELECT ROLES FOR MOCK HEARINGS

Aber et al., chp 7 (Love, Chazan-Cohen, & Raikes: Forty years of research knowledge and use: From Head Start to Early Head Start and beyond)

Aber et al., chp 6 (Muenchow & Marsland: Beyond baby steps: Promoting the growth and development of U.S. child-care policy)

Aber et al., chp 7 (Barnett, Brown, Finn-Stevenson, & Henrich: From vision to systems of universal pre-kindergarten)

Sawhill, chp. 7 (Wolfe & Scrivner: Providing universal preschool for four-year olds)

Brauner, J., Gordic, B., & Zigler, E. (2004). Putting the child back into child care: Combining care and education for children ages 3-5. *Social Policy Report*, 18(3).

March 4 Marriage and Public Policy Briefing Memo Presentations II

Nock, S. (2005). Marriage as a public issue. In *The Future of Children*, 15(2), 13-32.

Haveman, R., Wolfe, B., & Pence, K. (2001). Intergenerational effects of nonmarital and early childbearing. In L.L. Wu & B. Wolfe (Eds.), *Out of wedlock childbearing: Causes and consequences of nonmarital fertility* (pp.287-316). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2006). The Oklahoma Marriage Initiative. *ASPE Research Brief, December 2006*. Washington, DC: Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, Office of Human Services Policy, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Dion, R.M. (2005). Healthy marriage programs: Learning what works. In *The Future of Children*, 15(2), 139-156.

Amato, P.R., & Maynard, R.A. (2007). Decreasing Nonmarital Births and Strengthening Marriage to Reduce Poverty. In *The Future of Children*, 17(2), 117-141.

March 18 Foster Care Policy Briefing Memo Presentations III

Testimony for Hearing I due

Aber et al., chp. 12 (Pinderhughes, Harden & Guyer: Children in foster care)

Bass, S., Shields, M.K., & Behrman, R.E. (2004). Children, Families, and Foster Care: Analysis and Recommendations, *The Future of Children*, 14(1), 5-29.

Allen, M, & Bissell, M. (2004). Safety and Stability for Foster Children: The Policy Context, *The Future of Children*, 14(1), 49-73

Massinga, R., & Pecora, P.J. (2004). Providing Better Opportunities for Older Children in the Child Welfare System, *The Future of Children*, 14(1).

March 25 OPEN FOR TOPIC SELECTED BY STUDENTS

April 1 GUEST LECTURE

**April 8 Mock Hearing I
Testimony for Hearing II due**

- Opening statements of Members of Congress (written statement to be turned in)
- Testimony of witnesses
- Q&A from Members of Congress
- Interview with the Press

**April 15 Mock Hearing II
Testimony for Hearing III due**

- Opening statements of Members of Congress (written statement to be turned in)
- Testimony of witnesses
- Q&A from Members of Congress
- Interview with the Press

Press article from hearing 1 due—post on Blackboard

April 22 Mock Hearing III

- Opening statements of Members of Congress (written statement to be turned in)
- Testimony of witnesses
- Q&A from Members of Congress
- Interview with the Press

Press article from hearing 2 due—post on Blackboard

May 1 FINAL ESSAY DUE

Press article from hearing 3 due—post on Blackboard