

COURSE SYLLABUS

AUPY3615: Children at Risk Fall 2024

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Course Description. This course considers how children develop the skills and competencies that will help them thrive throughout their lives. The following are just some of the questions we will consider this semester: How do children become good learners in school? How do they develop what is needed to support healthy social relationships? How do they develop the qualities that promote resilience in the face of adversity including chronic and traumatic stress?

The course is organized developmentally, beginning in the prenatal period and ending in adolescence.

It has been said that it takes a village to raise a child. The course considers how children's development is influenced by their families, communities, and societies and asks you to think like a policy maker.

Children differ from one another in ways that can affect the course of development. Some are more talented musically and others athletically. Some have developmental difficulties; some have easier temperaments than others. How do we create environments that support the healthy development of each and every child—regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, social class, family structure?

Based on what we know about supporting healthy development, how can this information be used to inform social policy and the institutions (e.g., schools) that serve children and their families?

The format of the course will include printed lectures, exercises, and assignments. We expect students to read the materials for the class and complete the assignments in a timely manner. I have included a wide variety of articles to help you develop your policy proposals.

Columbia University Policy on Academic Integrity

As students, you must be responsible for the full citations of others' ideas in all of your research papers and projects; you must be scrupulously honest when taking your examinations; you must always submit your own work and not

that of another student. Failure to meet these standards may lead to a failing grade.

Course requirements: Assignments, due dates and grading

I. Assignments

1. Weekly short exercises (30%; 10 total) connected with weekly readings.
2. Reaction papers (2 pages each) on 5 readings (30%); two of the reaction papers should be on challenging readings; Two papers should be from weeks 1-5 readings; 3 from weeks 5 to 10.
2. One-page proposal for the policy topic; due at the end of Section 1 (5%).
4. TED Talk (5 minutes) and Final class paper (at least 10 pages plus references) which is a report of a policy proposal (35%). Presentations will be on final two class periods. (April 27th and May 4th)

Use American Psychological Association style for references.

II. *Children at Risk Assignment Grading:* I will grade all homework assignments as follows:

S+: Completed all components of assignment (all questions answered) and demonstrates deep/critical understanding of the concept; used for exceptional work

S: Completed all/most components of the assignment; demonstrates basic understanding of the concept; assignment was satisfactorily completed

S-: Missing multiple components of assignment and needs to make more explicit connections to class material and content

NC: No credit (NC) given; assignment was not handed or is missing

III. *When are assignments due?*

- ***Exercises 1 - 2 (Week 2, September 12th)***
- ***Exercise 3-4 (Week 3; September 19th)***
- ***Exercise 5 (Week 4; September 26th)***

- ***1 - page policy proposal idea (Week 4; September 26th)***

- *Exercise 6 (Week 5; October 3rd)*
- *Exercise 7 (Week 6; October 10th)*
- *Exercise 8 (Week 8; October 31st)*
- *Exercise 9a-b (Week 10; November 14th)*
- *Exercise 10 (Week 11; November 21st)*
- *Five reaction papers spread out over the course are required (2 from weeks 1-5; 3 from weeks 6 – 11).*
- *Final Policy Paper due December 5th but can be handed in earlier.*

Class Schedule & Readings/Handouts

Below you will find the list of readings and assignments that you are expected to complete.

Readings/exercises will be provided the week before they are due.

**WEEKS 1- 2 <September 5-12>: Introduction to development in context
(Do readings before exercises and get a sense of the ecological systems model)**

READINGS

- Bronfenbrenner, "Ecological Models of Human Development" (1994) -- see summary
- Shonkoff and Phillips, "Executive Summary", "Introduction" and "The Nature and Tasks of Early Development" from *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*

EXERCISES 1-2 need to be completed.

Exercise 1: NEWSPAPER/TV/MAGAZINE EXERCISE (week 1-2): Find a total of three newspapers, TV programs or magazine articles that are relevant to children. For each news story, write a brief description of the article (one paragraph), and answer the following three questions (for each article): (1) What risk factors are discussed in the article? (2) How do the risk factors fit into the Bronfenbrenner model? (3) What solutions are offered to address the risk factors? Provide a citation for the article/program.

Exercise 2: Interview

Interview 2 or more people about what the president and vice-president should make a priority to improve children's lives.

Ask the following questions: What are the top three actions that the president and vice-president should take to improve children's lives? Why those three? Write a summary of the interviews.

WEEK 3 < September 19th > : Risk and protective factors in children's lives from preconception to adolescence

READINGS

- Cicchetti and Toth, "Zero to Three: The Application of a Transactional Risk Model to Intervention with Multi-risk Maltreating Families"
- About the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study
- Mitchell, Hobcraft, et al., "Social disadvantage, genetic sensitivity, and children's telomere length"
- SAMSA Handout on Adverse Childhood Experiences and risk and protective factors
- What are ACEs?: And How Do They Relate to Toxic Stress?

EXERCISE 3: Identify risk and protective factors in children's lives. Focus on yourself (or someone you know) when you were a child of a particular age.

EXERCISE 4: complete the adverse childhood experiences and resilience questionnaire

WEEK 4 < September 26th>: Preconception to Birth – Preparing for a healthy baby

READINGS

- *Steinmetz, "The World As They See It" (Fetal Alcohol Syndrome)
- *Lumey, "Cohort Profile: The Dutch Hunger Winter Families Study"
- *Shonkoff and Phillips, "Ch. 8: The Developing Brain" and "Ch. 2: Rethinking Nature and Nurture" from *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*
- Braun and Champagne, "Paternal Influences on Offspring Development: Behavioral and Epigenetic Pathways"
- What is Epigenetics?: And How Does it Relate to Child Development?

OPTIONAL: Kundakovic and Champagne, "Early-Life Experiences, Epigenetics and the Developing Brain."

EXERCISE 5: Policy proposal for interventions that prevent fetal alcohol syndrome to class. (described in package). ***You will find instructions for each of the exercises in this packet.***

*****Also, COMPLETE 1-PAGE PROPOSAL IDEA FOR YOUR FINAL PAPER.**

WEEK 5 < October 3rd> Social relationships

READINGS

- Shonkoff and Phillips, "Chapter 9: Nurturing Relationships" from *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*
- The Discipline Dilemma: Guiding Principles for Managing Challenging Behaviors
- 7 things Dads wish you knew about how they really feel about parenting.
- Reaching families where they live: Supporting parents and child development through home visiting.
- London, "Social Causes and Consequences of Rejection Sensitivity"
- Downey, Lebolt, Rincón, Freitas, "Rejection Sensitivity and Children's Interpersonal Difficulties"

Additional Readings on Developing Policy:

- HCDC, Science to Policy and Practice: 3 Principles Policy Practice
- HCDC, Key Concepts - Science of Child Development

EXERCISE 6: *Based on what you have read about stress and support and child temperament and their effect on parenting, write a one-page letter to President Biden and Vice-President Harris about one (or more) concrete thing you would recommend them doing to ensure all children grow up in safe, stable, and nurturing environments. You might want to focus on a particular group of children, such as children of incarcerated parents, children in communities where gun violence is common, children with particular forms of disability. These are just suggestions.*

WEEK 6 < October 10th>: Self-regulation

READINGS

- Shonkoff and Phillips, "Chapter 5: Acquiring Self-Regulation" from *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*
- Mischel, "Introduction" from *The Marshmallow Test*
- American Psychological Association, "Delaying Gratification"
- Konnikova, "The Struggle of a Psychologist Studying Self-Control"
- Tottenham, N. (2013). The importance of early experiences for neuro-affective development. In *The neurobiology of childhood* (pp. 109-129). Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg.
- Ayduk, Mischel, Downey, "Attentional Mechanisms Linking Rejection to Hostile Reactivity: The Role of 'Hot' Versus 'Cool' Focus"
- Bernstein, "Self-Talk': When Talking to Yourself, the Way You Do It Makes a Difference"
- Kross, "Self-Talk as a Regulatory Mechanism: How You Do It Matters"
- Dreyfuss et al. "Teens Impulsively React rather than Retreat from Threat"
- Freitas & Downey, "Resilience: A Dynamic Perspective"

EXERCISE 7: *Develop a Model of how a child can respond well or poorly to going into a situation where he or she may be rejected or otherwise experience a sense of threat about a possible bad encounter with someone in authority (e.g., asking someone out on a date; asking a teacher for a letter of recommendation). (Reread Resilience: A Dynamic Perspective: Cognitive- affective-processing system.) Think about yourself as a parent, teacher, or counselor helping a young person to manage a challenging situation.*

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WEEK 7 < October 17th>: Empathy and perspective taking

READINGS

- Frith and Happé, "Autism Spectrum Disorder"
- "Choosing Empathy: A Conversation with Jamil Zaki"
- Lacoboni, "Imitation, Empathy, and Mirror Neurons"
- Frith, "Mind Blindness and the Brain in Autism"
- Thomas, "What's so Special About Mirror Neurons?"
- Zero to Three. Discipline Do's: An Empathic and Effective Approach to Addressing Challenging Behaviors in Young Children
- Schumann, Zaki, and Dweck, "Addressing the Empathy Deficit: Beliefs about the Malleability of Empathy Predict Effortful Responses when Empathy is Challenging."

*****No class October 24th*****

WEEK 8 <October 31st >. Understanding how stress gets under the skin and affects health and why it matters for children and parents

READINGS

- Pennebaker et al. "Disclosure of Traumas and Immune Function: Health Implications for Psychotherapy"
- LeDoux, "Emotion, Memory, and the Brain: The neuronal routes underlying the formation of memories about primitive emotional experiences, such as fear, have been traced"
- Pennebaker, "Writing to Heal"
- Pennebaker, "Writing about Emotional Experiences as a Therapeutic Process"
- Lenore Terr, Childhood Traumas: An outline and overview.

EXERCISE 8: Writing Exercise: Writing to Heal

Do the Pennebaker writing exercise following the instructions below. After completing the exercise write a one to two page reaction to the exercise. What did you learn from it? (You do not need to return the writing assignment -- just your reaction to it.) (Turn in your one to two page reaction to the exercise, not the exercise itself)

INSTRUCTIONS FOR EXERCISE: *Over the next 4 days write about an emotional upheaval that has been influencing your life. In your writing, really let go and explore the event and how it has affected you. You might tie this experience to your childhood, your relationship with your*

parents, people you have loved or love now or even your career. Write continuously for 20 minutes.

WEEK 9 <November 7th>: Understanding how stress affects learning and attention and why it matters for children and parents

READINGS

- Wikipedia, "Stereotype Threat"
- Steele, C. M. (1997). A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance. *American Psychologist*, 52(6), 613-629.
- Sered, "Young Men of Color and the Other Side of Harm: Addressing Disparities in our Responses to Violence"
- Ruiz, Rebecca (2014). How childhood trauma could be mistaken for ADHD. *The Atlantic*.

WEEK 10 <November 14> Mindsets that support resilience

READINGS

- Dweck, "The Power of Yet"
- Dweck, "Can Personality Be Changed?"
- Dweck, "The Secret to Raising Smart Kids"
- Underhill, S. "Did the man I sentenced to 18 years deserve it?"
- Oettingen, "The Problem With Positive Thinking"
- Hock, Brasseur and Deshler, "Possible Selves"
- InBrief: The Science of Resilience

Optional

- Dweck, "Chapter 2: Inside the Mindsets" from *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*
- Dweck, "Chapter 8: Changing Mindsets" from *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*
- Markus and Nurius, "Possible Selves"

EXERCISE 9a: Possible Selves

EXERCISE 9b: Value Affirmation Exercise

WEEK 11 <November 21> Using what we know from psychology to develop interventions and policies that foster the development of resilient children

READINGS

- Daniels, Burrows, Starks-Tanksley and Downey "Social Rehabilitation through Collaborative Education"

EXERCISE 10: Each day for 2 days (it can be any 2 days over the next week) keep a record of the following:

1. Identify a challenge you faced (it can be big or small).

2. Describe how you handled the challenge.

Identify any of the “tools” you read about in this class [for example: adopted a growth mindset, took the other person’s perspective, reframed the challenge, engaged in self-talk; used a cool rather than hot way of thinking about the problem, affirmed your values as you faced a stressful situation, sought social support, thought about the Bronfenbrenner ecological systems model to understand the challenge. What tools did you use or could have used to support a resilient outcome?

4. *Did the tool help? If so, how did it help? How could it help others?*

WEEK 12 <December 5th >

Presentations

WEEK 13 <December 12th>

Presentations

TED Talks will take place on Weeks 12 and 13 <December 5th and December 12th>