Wenjie Zhan

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RESEARCH INTEREST
Primary: Food, Nurtition, and Health Economics
Secondary: Applied Econometrics

CURRENT POSITIONS
Graduate Student Researcher, University of California, Davis, 2022-

PREVIOUS POSITIONS
Research and Policy Engagement Intern, Resources for the Future, Washington, DC, 2022
Intern in Economic Affairs, United Nations ESCAP, Bangkok, Thailand, 2019
Research Assistant, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing, China, 2017-2018

EDUCATION
Ph.D. Agricultural and Resource Economics, University of California, Davis, 2025 (Expected)
M.Sc. Agricultural and Resource Economics, University of Tokyo, 2020
B.Mgmt. Financial Management, Sun Yat-sen University, 2018
Semester Abroad, Seoul National University, 2017

REFERENCE

Timothy K.M. Beatty *(Chair)*
Professor
Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics
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Marianne P. Bitler
Professor
Department of Economics
University of California, Davis
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Richard J. Sexton
Distinguished Professor
Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics
University of California, Davis
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Stephen A. Vosti
Adjunct Professor Emeritus
Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Institute for Global Nutrition
University of California, Davis
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WORKING PAPERS

"Long Run Effects of Folic Acid Fortification,"
Job Market Paper, 2025

Folate is a crucial micronutrient for neurodevelopment of children. Folate deficiency is associated with cognitive impairment and severe folate deficiency can lead to birth defects and fetal death. To prevent adverse effects of folate deficiency, in March, 1996, U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) mandated fortification of enriched grain products, including flour, pasta, rice, and breakfast cereals, with folic acid, a synthetic form of folate. Folic acid fortification sharply increases folate access and decreases birth defects. In this paper, I combine spatial variation in pre-existing folate deficiency and timing of fortification mandate to identify effects of access to folate. I link data on birth defects associated with folate deficiency from vital statistics data to outcome data from American Community Surveys via place and time of birth

so I can compare cohorts exposed and unexposed to folic acid fortification across regions with different pre-existing folate. I find that, in the short run, folic acid fortification increases shares of births given by disadvantaged mothers, likely through improved fetus survival rate. In the long run, maternal exposure to folic acid fortification increases probability of young adults enrolling in college or graduate/professional schools by 0.62-0.78 percentage points. This paper suggests that maternal nurtition has broad and long-lasting effects on children and reformulation such as fortification can play a bigger role in food assistance policy portfolio.

"The Impact of Electronic Benefit Transfer on WIC Participation: Evidence from Natality Data,"
with Charlotte Ambrozek, and Timothy K.M. Beatty

Policymakers have an interest in ensuring participation in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) – WIC has been shown to increase birthweight for participating mothers and improve long-run outcomes for children who participate in the first years of life. Between 2002 and 2022, WIC transitioned from paper vouchers to electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cards. This payment reform was expected to encourage WIC participation by reducing transaction costs and welfare stigma. Empirical studies of the effects of WIC EBT on participation have found mixed results, with studies often limited to one or a few states. Without detailed WIC participation data on a large scale, results are not generalizable. In this paper, we evaluate the impact of WIC EBT implementation on WIC participation nationwide by linking the WIC EBT roll-out schedule to natality data across virtually all counties in the U.S. We document a significant increase in WIC participation among births that are most likely eligible for WIC. After the implementation of EBT, WIC participation among the births of less educated and unmarried mothers increases by 9.18%, and by 14.82% if the mothers are also black or Hispanic. Our results are robust to sample selection, estimation methods, timing of exposure, and definitions of likely eligible sub-population. Our findings are consistent with WIC EBT reducing barriers to WIC participation.

In Progress

"Does Food Distribution Still Work? Evidence from Commodity Supplemental Food Program."

"Consumer Welfare and Dietary Impacts of Food Price Inflation,"
with Julian M. Alston, Timothy K.M. Beatty, and Abigail M. Okrent

"Does Electronic Benefit Transfer Reduce Fraud? Evidence from SNAP and WIC,"
with Charlotte Ambrozek, and Timothy K.M. Beatty

"Arsenic in Drinking Water and Infant Health,"

Other Publications

"Input-Output Efficiency Evaluation of Technological Innovation Funds in the Universities, Scientific Research Institutions, and Enterprises in China,"
with Weiguo Qiao, *Science & Technology Progress and Policy*, 2022. (in Chinese, CSSCI)

"Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2020: Towards Sustainable Economies,"
with United Nations ESCAP, *United Nations ESCAP Flagship Publication*, 2020.

"Is Governmental Appropriation the Best Way to Finance Top Universities? Lessons from the U.S.,"
with Weiguo Qiao, and Juan Zhou, *Study & Exploration*, 2019. (in Chinese, CSSCI)

Presentations

2025 ASSA Annual Meeting, San Francisco, CA (scheduled)
2024 UC Davis-University of Gottingen Joint Research Symposium, Davis, CA; Giannini ARE Student Conference, Berkeley, CA; AAEA Annual Meeting, New Orleans, LA (scheduled)
2023 Giannini ARE Student Conference, Davis, CA

Teaching Experience

Instructor

Introduction to Mathematics in Economics, UC Davis, Summer 2023

Teaching Assistant

ARE 173 Capital Markets, UC Davis, Spring 2023
ARE 107 Econometrics for Business Decision, UC Davis, Winter 2023
ARE 171 Principles of Finance, UC Davis, Winter 2022
ARE 176 Environmental Economics, UC Davis, Fall 2021
ARE 155 Operation Research & Management Science, UC Davis, Winter 2021

Honors and Awards

Summer Research Fellowship, UC Davis, 2024
Travel Grant for Behavioral Obesity Research Workshop, Indiana University Bloomington, 2023
Tuition Supplemental Fellowship, UC Davis, 2020
Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO) Honor Scholarship, JASSO, 2018 – 2019
Yamamoto Foundation Allowance, University of Tokyo, 2018
Hong Kong Ho's Foundation Scholarship, Sun Yat-sen University, 2018

Services and Leadership

Coordinator, Student Café, Diversity and Inclusion in Research, Education, and Career Program (DIRECT), UC Davis, 2022
Co-organizer, Development Tea, UC Davis, 2021 – 2022
Secretary of Academic Affairs, Student Union, Sun Yat-sen University, 2015 – 2018

Skills and Languages

Programming Languages: R, Stata, Latex, Matlab, Python
Languages: English (Fluent), Mandarin (Native), Cantonese (Fluent), Japanese (Intermediate)