Robert M. and Natalie Reid Dorn Endowed Chair on Infancy
Dr. Jay Belsky, Professor
Human Ecology
humanecology.ucdavis.edu • jbelsky@ucdavis.edu

ENDOWMENT PURPOSE
The Robert M. and Natalie Reid Dorn Endowed Chair on Infancy was established in 2008 by Robert Dorn. Dr. Dorn created this chair to enable the university to strengthen its research, teaching and outreach service focused on the importance of infancy to human development. Specifically, Dorn’s intention was to support faculty members with notable achievements in the areas of early socio-emotional development, mental health, and/or family-based interventions.

RESEARCH
My research these days focuses mostly, even if not exclusively, on for whom and how developmental experiences in and outside the family early in life shape human development. Support has been used to fund graduate students and plan research, as well as cover some travel for collaborative work related to my "endowed mission".

TEACHING
Once again I taught an undergraduate course on social and personality development and a graduate seminar on childhood experience, reproduction and health. Both classes place special emphasis on the developmental experiences and childhood exposures of children and not simply whether and/or how these affect them, but through what behavioral, emotional, cognitive and/or physiological mechanisms. Additionally, both courses highlight intervention efforts designed to enhance human development or remediate or prevent problems from developing. Also noteworthy is that my teaching is strongly informed by an evolutionary-biological perspective in addition to a more traditional mental/physical health one.
STUDENTS
Endowment funds have been used to support my two graduate students. Zhi Li, a second year student from China, had her non-resident tuition paid for and also had her trip to the major, biennial child development conference covered by endowment funds. The focus of Zhi’s research is on how early environmental harshness and unpredictability separately and interactively influence early child development. Additionally, funds were used to cover some of the costs of another second year student, Sarah Hartman, to enable her to conduct an animal-model study examining effects of prenatal stress on the emotional and reproductive development of the child. Sarah’s work focuses on how early temperament plays a role in determining which infants prove most susceptible to (positive and negative) early-rearing conditions. The animal study is designed to test the prenatal-programming-of-post-natal-plasticity proposition that by fostering negative emotionality in infancy, prenatal stress makes offspring more susceptible to environmental influence.

NEW AND UNIQUE ENDOWMENT USE
I was able to spend time preparing and revising a NYT op-ed (published on November 28, 2014), revise a grant application that I made reference to last year examining how early life adversity may accelerate biological aging— in the opening years of life, and devote time to writing/publishing multiple articles based on research I do with students at Davis, and collaborators in Norway, Portugal, England and China.

LEVERAGING ADDITIONAL FUNDING
My hope is that the work I have done and made clear in the grant application referred to above on accelerated aging will lead to its funding. Should that be the case, I plan to use endowment funds to supplement the work proposed.

THANKS
My work on "differential susceptibility" to environmental influences is challenging standard ways of thinking about how early experience influences human development. And the best evidence of this is how much research by others is pursuing my theoretical and empirical leads, very frequently confirming my novel ideas. The endowment has enabled me to continue my program of research in this area, leading not only to the aforementioned NYT editorial, the research by my students, but also the publication of a brand new set of papers in a leading journal, all testing ideas based on my theorizing—and finding empirical support for them.