

KELSEY PUKELIS

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HARVARD
UNIVERSITY

EDUCATION

Harvard University, Cambridge, MA 2025 (expected)

Ph.D. in Public Policy (Economics Track)

Fields: Public Economics, Labor Economics

Research Interests: Social Safety Net Policy, U.S. Nutrition Assistance Policy

Northwestern University, Evanston, IL 2017

B.A. in Economics, Mathematics, Mathematical Methods in the Social Sciences (triple major)

Interdisciplinary Honors in Economics & Mathematical Methods in the Social Sciences

Cum Laude; Phi Beta Kappa

FELLOWSHIPS & AWARDS

James M. and Cathleen D. Stone Scholar in Inequality, Harvard University 2021 – 2025

National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship 2021 – 2024

Harvard Graduate Prize Fellowship 2019 – 2021

RESEARCH GRANTS

Institute for Quantitative Social Science Graduate Student Research Grant, Harvard University 2024

Malcolm Wiener Center for Social Policy Qualitative Research Grant, Harvard University 2024

Stone Research Grant, James M. and Cathleen D. Stone Program in Wealth Distribution,
Inequality & Social Policy, Harvard University 2023

Division of Social Sciences Fund (with Michael Holcomb), Harvard University 2022

Mind Brain Behavior Graduate Student Award (with Alice Heath), Harvard University 2021

Harvard Center for American Political Studies Graduate Seed Grant (with Alice Heath) 2021

PUBLICATION

“Employed in a SNAP? The Impact of Work Requirements on Program Participation and Labor Supply” (with Colin Gray, Adam Leive, Elena Prager, and Mary Zaki)

American Economic Journal: Economic Policy, 2023, 15(1): 306-341.

Work requirements are common in US safety net programs. Evidence remains limited, however, on the extent to which work requirements increase economic self-sufficiency or screen out vulnerable individuals. Using linked administrative data on food stamps (SNAP) and earnings with a regression discontinuity design, we find robust evidence that work requirements increase program exits by 23 percentage points (64 percent) among incumbent participants. Overall program participation among adults who are subject to work requirements is reduced by 53 percent. Homeless adults are disproportionately screened out. We find no effects on employment and suggestive evidence of increased earnings in some specifications.

WORKING PAPERS

“SNAP Policies and Enrollment following the COVID-19 Pandemic”

Policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic provide a unique opportunity to understand the effects of a more generous and accessible U.S. safety net. This paper investigates the importance of policy changes versus economic conditions in explaining caseload and denial surges following COVID-19 in the context of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). I compile a new dataset on state policy waivers, including unprecedented flexibilities in application and recertification procedures and increases in benefit amounts (Emergency Allotments). In contrast to prior periods, policies—rather than business cycle changes—drove enrollment increases. Among all policies examined, emergency supplemental benefits and recertification waivers policies increased caseloads more than policies that simplified applications and recertifications. Descriptive evidence suggests that application denial rates increased both because recertification waivers cut off the typical flow of approved applications from otherwise churning cases and because relatively higher income households were more likely to apply.

“Stigma and Social Safety Net Program Participation” (with Alice Heath & Michael Holcomb)

Negative social judgements or “stigma” about the receipt of government benefits may discourage participation and impose costs on those already receiving benefits. But who experiences stigma, how it affects participant decisions, and whether it can be reduced remain unclear. In this paper, we use a nationally representative survey experiment to measure levels of stigma across social groups and test whether interventions intended to alleviate stigma may affect participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the U.S.’ largest, means-tested food assistance program. We find that our interventions have polarizing effects: they increase stigma among Republicans and current SNAP participants and decrease stigma among Democrats and non-participants. One intervention that dismantles a common zero-sum concern (that receiving benefits would prevent others from receiving them) increases take-up among eligible non-participants, as measured by completing an online eligibility screener. However, all our interventions decrease support for SNAP spending among Republican respondents. Our findings indicate the importance of both social norms and political orientation for influencing participation in government transfer programs in this context.

“The Impacts of Online Grocery Shopping with SNAP”

Many anti-poverty programs are in-kind rather than cash, and adoption of new technologies can affect program access for participants (the demand side) and potential profits for third-party vendors (the supply side). In this paper, I investigate the growth of online purchasing with public food vouchers across food retailer markets and its effects on low-income consumers (SNAP and Pandemic EBT users). Relative to stores authorized to accept benefits in-person, stores authorized for online purchases were more likely to be large retailers and to be located in advantaged neighborhoods, suggesting that retailers did not target online shopping toward low food access areas (food deserts). Then, using quasi-experimental spatial variation, I find that exposure to online purchasing shifted some benefit spending from in-person to online but had no detectable effect on SNAP enrollment. This project describes a drastic change to the delivery of nutrition assistance programs and has implications for other in-kind benefit programs.

RESEARCH PAPERS IN PROGRESS

“Dynamic Enrollment in Transfer Programs: Evidence from Disaster SNAP” (with Laura Blount Carper)

“SNAP Benefit Changes and Household Grocery Purchases”

“Automatic Enrollment in Transfer Programs” (with Claire Leroy)

“The Health Impacts of SNAP Work Requirements” (with Bradley Katcher)

POLICY WRITING

- Public comment to the U.S. Food and Nutrition Service’s Proposed Rule: “Establishing the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer Program and Rural Non-Congregate Option in the Summer Meal Programs” (FNS-2023-0029). Submitted on [Regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov), August 27, 2024.
- Public comment to the U.S. Food and Nutrition Service’s Proposed Rule: “Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Program Purpose and Work Requirement Provisions of the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023” (FNS-2023-0058). Submitted on [Regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov), June 14, 2024.
- Public comment to the U.S. Food and Nutrition Service’s Proposed Rule: “Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children: Online Ordering and Transactions and Food Delivery Revisions to Meet the Needs of a Modern, Data-Driven Program” (FNS-2022-0015-0001). Submitted on [Regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov), May 26, 2023.
- “SNAP work requirements don’t actually get more people working — but they do drastically limit the availability of food aid.” *The Conversation*, April 2023.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

- “SNAP Benefit Changes and Household Grocery Purchases” November 2024 (planned)
Association for Public Policy Analysis & Management Research Conference, National Harbor, MD
- “Benefit Changes in SNAP and Household Grocery Purchases” November 2024 (planned)
Southern Economic Association Annual Meeting, Washington, DC
- “The Impacts of Online Grocery Purchasing on SNAP Households” July 2023
Agriculture & Applied Economics Association Annual Conference, Washington, DC
- “SNAP Application Policies and Enrollment during the COVID-19 Pandemic” July 2022
Western Economic Association International Annual Conference, Portland, OR

TEACHING

- Harvard Kennedy School**, Cambridge, MA Spring 2023
Quantitative Analysis and Empirical Methods II (Master of Public Policy course)
Teaching Fellow for Michela Carlana, Benjamin Schneer & Teddy Svoronos
- Harvard Kennedy School**, Cambridge, MA Spring 2022
Resources, Incentives, and Choices II: Analysis of Public Policy (Master of Public Policy course)
Teaching Fellow for Mark Shepard
- University of Virginia**, Charlottesville, VA Fall 2018
Advanced Topics in Impact Evaluation (Master of Public Policy course)
Teaching Assistant for Sally Hudson

MENTORING

- Invited Panel Speaker**, Northwestern University’s Womxn in Economics Student Group Fall 2023
- Mentor**, Harvard Undergraduates for Inclusion in Economics 2022
- Mentor**, MIT / Harvard Economics Application Assistance and Mentoring Program 2021 – 2022
- Peer Mentor**, Harvard Public Policy PhD Program 2020 – 2022
- Classroom & Language Consultant**, University of Virginia 2018 – 2019

ACADEMIC SERVICE

Referee, *Quarterly Journal of Economics*

Referee, *Agriculture & Applied Economics Association Annual Meeting*

Student-Faculty Engagement Co-Chair, Harvard Kennedy PhD Student Association 2022 – 2023

Social Committee Co-Chair, Harvard Kennedy PhD Student Association 2021 – 2022

Student Organizer, Harvard Econometrics Reading Group 2020

AFFILIATIONS

Social Economics Lab, Harvard University, Affiliate

Institute for Quantitative Social Science, Harvard University, Affiliate

Mosaic Economic Project, Progressive Policy Institute, Alumna

American Economic Association, Member

Agricultural & Applied Economics Association, Member

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Microsoft Research New England, Cambridge, MA Summer 2020
Research Intern with Eleanor Dillon

University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA 2017 – 2019
Frank Batten School of Leadership & Public Policy
Research Specialist Intermediate to Jennifer Doleac, Sally Hudson, and Adam Leive

Northwestern University, Evanston, IL 2014 – 2017
Two-Generation Educational Research Team, Institute for Policy Research
Research Assistant to Lindsay Chase-Lansdale and Teresa Sommer

SKILLS

Computer Proficient in Stata, R, \LaTeX , Git/GitHub, Microsoft Office
Experience with Python, HTML, BASH, ArcGIS, Matlab

Language English (native), Spanish (fluent), Mandarin Chinese (basic)

REFERENCES

Professor Marcella Alsan
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Last Updated: September 2024