



# Robert M. and Natalie Reid Dorn Endowed Chair on Infancy

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**College Celebration**

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**Friday**  
**OCTOBER**  
**14**  
**2016**

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**5:30 - 8:00 p.m.**

**Pavilion**  
**UC Davis**

**We hope you will be able to join us.**

## 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

I taught an undergraduate course on social and personality development and the foundational graduate course for new graduate students on early child development. 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 supported one undergraduate student who is planning an honor's thesis on the experience of birth mothers who engage in "open adoption" and thus are in position to know the family that adopts their newborn child, as well as the child as s/he develops.

Funds were also used to support a graduate student (from China) who is working on a doctoral dissertation focused on how exposure to a (1) harsh and/or (2) unpredictable family environment in the opening years of life affects the child's socioemotional and cognitive functioning at the start of school, taking advantage of a nationally representative longitudinal data set.

### **OUTREACH**

I contributed to several internet blogs and stories about diverse subjects related to early child development, focused on effects of day care, parenting and the role of genetics and temperament in affecting which children are more and less affected by their early-life developmental experiences and environmental exposures.

### **NEW AND UNIQUE ENDOWMENT USE**

One of my students is finishing up a most exciting study—using an animal model—examining how exposure to prenatal stress affects whether or not the organism is more or less affected by how it is reared postnatally. What is new and exciting is that the findings support a hypothesis I advanced a number of years ago in showing that exposure to prenatal stress makes the infant animal more susceptible to both supportive and unsupportive rearing experiences. These results hold the promise of radically changing the way we think about prenatal stress and how it affects development. This is not work that could be done with humans—because it would be unethical to assign fetuses to a prenatal condition that stressed them or to a postnatal condition that was unsupportive.

### **THANKS**

Everytime I send an email or give a talk—which I do very often—I herald the support I receive from the endowment, not just financially, but in terms of status and reputation. I think often of Robert whom I only got to know in the last two years of his life and how what I do contributes to his legacy. I am proud of the fact that my work remains cutting edge, leading in new and non-conventional directions when it comes to thinking about whether and how early-life experiences shape the kind of people children become.