NEIVA J. FORTES

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Department of Economics, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY 13244

EDUCATION

Syracuse University 2022–Present
Ph.D. in Economics, expected May 2027
Dissertation: Essays in the Economics of Education and Health
Dissertation Committee: Monica Deza (Chair), John Cawley, Maria Zhu, and Ying Shi

Hartwick College 2018–2022
B.A. in Mathematics and Economics, summa cum laude

RESEARCH FIELDS

Economics of Education, Health Economics, Labor Economics, Economics of Crime

WORKING PAPERS

"School Recess Policy and Discriminatory Bullying: Evidence from Rhode Island" (Job Market Paper)

School recess has historically lacked legal protection, leaving it subject to discretionary restrictions that fall disproportionately on minority and low-income students. In 2016, Rhode Island became an early adopter of legally mandated recess, converting it from a privilege into a right. I exploit this policy change to estimate the causal effect of an enforceable recess law on discriminatory bullying allegations, harassment that targets a student's race, sex, or disability and implicates schools' civil rights obligations, using synthetic control methods applied to nationwide school-level administrative data. Sex-based bullying allegations rose by an estimated 296 percent relative to a very low pre-treatment baseline of 0.084 allegations per 100 students, equivalent to approximately 182 additional allegations statewide by 2018, while race- and disability-based allegations remained unchanged. Consistent with documented disparities in pre-mandate recess access, the effect is concentrated in high-poverty and high-minority schools, where it is roughly five to seven times larger. An independently constructed measure of reported bullying victims corroborates this finding and shows it is driven disproportionately by female victimization.

"The Effect of Height on Adolescents' Body Image Perceptions and Behaviors"

with Monica Deza and Maria Zhu
NBER Working Paper No. 35293, June 2026. NBER page
Under review at the Journal of Health Economics

This paper estimates the causal effect of height on adolescents' body image, encompassing self-perceptions of weight, the accuracy of those perceptions, and weight-management aspirations. Using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97), we leverage within-individual variation in height during adolescence and condition on body mass index (BMI) to isolate the effects of height on body image outcomes. We find that taller adolescents are more likely to perceive themselves as overweight, even holding BMI constant, and are less likely to underestimate their weight category. However, the direction of misclassification diverges by gender: taller boys are more likely to correctly assess their weight category, while taller girls are more likely to overestimate it. These perception shifts translate into behavioral responses for girls but not for boys. A one-inch increase in height raises the probability that a girl reports wanting to lose weight by 3.0 percentage points (6.2 percent), with effects concentrated among girls in the normal weight range. Taken together, these findings establish height as a salient determinant of body image in adolescence, operating independently of body mass.

WORK IN PROGRESS

"Sibling Spillover Effects of Chronic Illness on Educational and Labor Market Outcomes"

This paper examines how the onset of a sibling's chronic health condition affects the behavioral, academic, and long-run outcomes of children without chronic conditions. Using longitudinal data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics–Child Development Supplement, I employ a within-child fixed-effects design that compares the same child before and after a sibling develops a chronic condition. I find little evidence of broad behavioral harm on average, but meaningful heterogeneity emerges. Siblings exhibit improved emotional regulation, including reductions in stubbornness and anxiety, alongside a modest increase in peer-relationship difficulties. These effects are concentrated primarily among girls in higher-income households, a pattern consistent with adaptive parentification

supported by greater family resources. A planned extension will use sibling and genome-wide data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health. By using a sibling's polygenic risk for chronic illness as an instrument for illness onset, the analysis aims to strengthen causal identification, examine mechanisms such as parental time allocation and peer-network formation, and determine whether spillover effects persist into adulthood.

"Standing Out and Bullying: Relative Height, BMI, and Adolescent Bullying Victimization"

This paper examines whether adolescents' physical characteristics relative to their peer group, rather than in absolute terms, predict bullying victimization at school. Using Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) district-level data from 2009 to 2021, I construct peer-relative measures of height and BMI within school district, grade, year, and sex cells, and estimate their association with self-reported bullying victimization using a linear probability model with district and grade-specific time trends. I find that being taller than one's peer group is protective for boys but a risk factor for girls, while being heavier than peers is associated with higher bullying risk for both sexes, with a penalty nearly three times larger for girls. Heterogeneity analysis by weight category reveals that this weight penalty reverses among underweight students and compounds among already-overweight students, suggesting that the relevant mechanism is distance from the perceived peer norm rather than absolute body size.

"The Effects of High School Students' Class Choices on College Outcomes"

This paper investigates whether the rigor of high school coursework, specifically, enrollment in Advanced Placement and honors courses relative to general academic tracks, affects the selectivity of the four-year colleges students attend. While prior research establishes a relationship between advanced coursework and the extensive margin of college enrollment, evidence on whether such coursework improves access to more selective institutions remains limited. Using the High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 (HSLS:09), a nationally representative cohort followed from ninth grade through postsecondary entry, the planned analysis will address the endogeneity of course selection using instrumental variables and regression discontinuity designs. The instrumental-variables approach will leverage variation in school-level access to advanced courses, while the regression-discontinuity design will exploit GPA-based eligibility thresholds for enrollment in these courses. By separating curricular rigor from underlying academic ability and family background, the study aims to estimate its effect on postsecondary selectivity and contribute to the literature on human capital signaling and college match.

CONFERENCE AND INVITED PRESENTATIONS

** Scheduled*

Southern Economic Association 96th Annual Meeting, Houston, TX — Nov. 2026*
"School Recess Policy and Discriminatory Bullying: Evidence from Rhode Island"

APPAM Annual Fall Research Conference — Nov. 2026
"School Recess Policy and Discriminatory Bullying: Evidence from Rhode Island" (poster; First Place Poster Award)

Center for Aging and Policy Studies 2026 Annual Conference, Syracuse University — 2026
"Recess Rights, Civil Rights: Mandatory Recess and Discriminatory Bullying in Rhode Island" (poster; Best Poster Award)

Maxwell School USA 250 Event, Syracuse University — 2026
"Recess Rights, Civil Rights: Mandatory Recess and Discriminatory Bullying in Rhode Island" (poster)

FLX Economics of Education Workshop, Syracuse, NY — May 2026
"School Recess Policy and Discriminatory Bullying: Evidence from Rhode Island"

Center for Policy Research Poster Reception, Syracuse University — 2026
"School Recess Policy and Discriminatory Bullying: Evidence from Rhode Island"

Center for Policy Research Poster Reception, Syracuse University — 2025
"The Effects of State-Mandated Recess Laws on Youth Crime"

Invited Seminar, Hartwick College, Oneonta, NY — 2025
"School Recess Policy and Discriminatory Bullying: Evidence from Rhode Island"

AWARDS, FELLOWSHIPS, AND HONORS

First Place Poster Award, Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management (APPAM) — 2026

Best Poster Award, Center for Aging and Policy Studies Annual Conference, Syracuse University — 2026

NIA T32 Predoctoral Fellowship, Syracuse University — 2026–Present

Selected Participant, NBER Summer Institute – Economics of Crime, Cambridge, MA — July 2026
Chicago Price Theory Summer Camp, University of Chicago — June 2026
Roscoe Martin Fund for Dissertation and Thesis Research — 2025–2026
Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award, Syracuse University — 2023–2024
McNair Fellowship, Syracuse University — 2022–2023
John Christopher Hartwick Scholarship, Hartwick College — 2021–2022
Robert E. Newnham ’50, H’96 Mathematics Scholarship, Hartwick College — 2021–2022
Faculty Scholar, Hartwick College — 2021–2022
Andrew B. Saxton Fellowship in Economics and Mathematics, Hartwick College — 2020–2022
Hartwick College Honors Program — 2020–2022
Kappa Mu Epsilon, American National Mathematics Honor Society — 2020–2022
National Society of Leadership and Success — 2018–2022

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Graduate Research Assistant, Center for Policy Research, Syracuse University — 2026–Present
NIA T32 Predoctoral Training Program in Policy, Place, Population Health, and Aging (P3HA) Trainee
Faculty supervisor: John Cawley

Graduate Research Assistant, Department of Economics, Syracuse University — 2025–2026
Faculty supervisor: John Cawley

Graduate Research Assistant, Department of Economics, Syracuse University — 2024–2025
Faculty supervisors: Monica Deza and Yulya Truskinovsky

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Instructor of Record, Principles of Microeconomics (ECN 101), Syracuse University — Summers 2024–2026
Enrollment: 12 students (2024), 22 students (2025), and 6 students (2026)

Teaching Assistant, Intermediate Microeconomics (ECN 301), Syracuse University — 2023–2024
Enrollment: Approximately 50-60 students

Teaching Assistant, Diversity and Democracy, Hartwick College — Jan. 2022
Enrollment: Approximately 15–20 students

ADDITIONAL PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Assistant Director of Admissions, Hartwick College — Jan. 2022
Small Business Coordinator, National Development Council — 2021–2022

LANGUAGES

English (fluent) | Cape Verdean Creole (fluent) | Portuguese (fluent) | Spanish (intermediate)

REFERENCES

Monica Deza (Chair), Syracuse University — mdeza@syr.edu
John Cawley, Syracuse University — jhcawley@syr.edu
Maria Zhu, Syracuse University — mzhu33@syr.edu
Ying Shi, Syracuse University — yshi78@syr.edu