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 focus mostly, even if not exclusively, on for whom and how developmental experiences in and outside the family 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 a graduate seminar on childhood experience, reproduction and health. One of the students in my graduate course was supported by endowment funds; and this same student, Sarah Hartman, also served as a teaching assistant in my undergraduate course. Ms. Hartman has worked on research examining how a child’s genotype moderates or influences whether or not s/he is more vs. less influenced by developmental experiences long thought to influence all children.

OUTREACH

My outreach activities have involved providing consultation to a Stockton-based service providing support for low-income mothers of infants. This was not directly supported by the endowment funds.

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

I have recently submitted a grant proposal to follow some 250 children from birth to age 2.5 years, as the first phase of a longitudinal study to see how adverse developmental experiences (e.g., poverty, maternal depression, household chaos) affected a process that has come to be known as "accelerated aging", as indexed...
by the erosion of the ends of chromosomes, that is, telomeres; and whether some children are more susceptible to this anticipated effect than others; and whether sensitive-supportive mothering can buffer or protect the child from the anticipated effects. Should this grant be funded, endowment funds will be used to further support and expand the research, most notably, perhaps, by extending the range of biological measurements to be made. Endowment funds are also being used to measure inflammation in a sample of infants growing up under stress who have been followed across the first several years of life to see if adversity results in greater inflammation, as it does at older ages and, again, whether high-quality mothering buffers infants from the anticipated untoward effects of adversity.

THANKS
I only came to UC Davis because of the endowment and am very glad that I did—because I like the university, I enjoy the new work that I am planning, which I would not be able to undertake had I not come to Davis (i.e., looking at the "biological embedding" of developmental experiences which are thought to shape later psychological and behavioral development), and I like living in California (even after living in London). My long-term hope is that my work will honor the lives of the donors.