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# Yilun (Hanna) Cao

Department of Economics
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## Education

**Vanderbilt University**
Ph.D. in Economics — Expected May 2029
Dissertation Advisor: Analisa Packham
M.A. in Economics — 2025

**Ohio Wesleyan University**
B.A. in Mathematics & B.A. in Economics (*Summa Cum Laude*) — 2022

## Research Fields

Public Economics, Health Economics, Applied Microeconomics

## Works in Progress

How Resilient Is the Family Planning Safety Net to Federal Funding Loss? Evidence from the 2019 Title X Final Rule

Shorter Sentences, Safer Streets? Evidence from South Carolina's 2010 Prison Reform (with Alexander Ahammer and Analisa Packham)

*Supported by Russell Sage Foundation Presidential Grant and Vanderbilt CRIH Grant ($80,654)*

## Research Presentations

Vanderbilt Empirical Applied Microeconomics Seminar; American Society of Health Economists Conference*; Southern Economic Association Annual Meeting* — 2026

Arnold Ventures Criminal Justice & Public Safety Workshop — 2025

Agricultural & Applied Economics Association Annual Meeting; Midwest Economic Association Annual Meeting; Ohio Wesleyan University Norman Gharrity Lecture — 2022

** denotes planned*

## Research Experience

**Vanderbilt University**, Research Assistant (Economics) — May 2025 – present
*Prof. Analisa Packham*

**Ohio State University**, Research Assistant (Economics) August 2022 – February 2023
*Prof. Mark Partridge*

**Ohio Wesleyan University**, Research Assistant (Economics) June 2021 – May 2022
*Prof. Bob Gitter*

**Ohio Wesleyan University**, Research Assistant (Mathematics) May 2020 – August 2020
*Prof. Scott Linder*

## Grants and Awards

Kirk Dornbush Summer Research Grant ($2,500), Vanderbilt University 2026

Building the Pipeline Grant ($2,250), Agricultural & Applied Economics Association (CWAE and COSBAE) 2022

Norman Leonard Research Grant ($2,000), Ohio Wesleyan University 2021

Theory-to-Practice Grant ($19,000), Ohio Wesleyan University 2020

Baran Fellowship ($5,000), Ohio Wesleyan University 2020

## Teaching Experience

**Instructor**, Vanderbilt University
Principles of Microeconomics Summer 2026

**Lab Instructor**, Vanderbilt University
Economic Statistics Spring 2025

**Teaching Assistant**, Vanderbilt University
Macroeconomics Fall 2025, Spring 2026
Environmental and Natural Resource Economics Spring 2025
Public Finance Fall 2024

## Completed Ph.D. Coursework

**Core:** Mathematics for Economists; Microeconomic Theory I–II; Macroeconomic Theory I–II; Statistical Analysis; Econometrics I.

**Field Classes:** Topics in Microeconomics; Health Economics; Applied Microeconomic Research and Methods; Labor Economics; Public Economics; Economics of Education; Introduction to Economic History.

## References

Analisa Packham, Associate Professor of Economics, Vanderbilt University
Email: analisa.packham@vanderbilt.edu

# Statement of Research Interests and Motivation

Yilun (Hanna) Cao, Vanderbilt University

I am a third-year Ph.D. student in economics at Vanderbilt University, working with Analisa Packham. I am applying to the NBER Mentoring Program on Aging and Health Economics Research because I am at the point of choosing my job market paper, and I want to develop a project that sits squarely within current health economics research on safety-net design, provider participation, access to care, and the allocation of unmet need, including among older and other high-need populations.

My current research has made me especially interested in the regulatory architecture of publicly funded health programs: what happens when a federal rule changes which providers can participate, how patient access reshuffles when the supply side contracts, and which subgroups absorb the cost. My main health economics project studies the 2019 Title X Final Rule, which led a substantial share of Title X providers, including Planned Parenthood affiliates, to exit the federal family planning program. I study how patients redistributed across the clinics that remained and what happened downstream to reproductive health access and birth outcomes. A separate project with Alexander Ahammer and Analisa Packham on South Carolina's 2010 sentencing reform has also been useful training in administrative data and the challenge of measuring realized policy effects when institutions mediate the relationship between formal rules and individual outcomes.

This work has clarified both what I find interesting and where I need guidance. The Title X project taught me that the most important empirical decision is often not the estimator, but the question: whether it is framed broadly enough to contribute to an active literature, while still being concrete enough to answer credibly. The version of safety-net research I am most drawn to is not limited to reproductive health. I am interested in Medicaid, provider composition, behavioral health care and emergency care access, and the administrative design of publicly funded programs that determine who is served, who is not, and which burdens are shifted onto families or other parts of the safety net. At this stage, I would value specialized mentorship from scholars whose work centers on health care access and the data infrastructure these questions require.

The guidance I would most value from the workshop is help choosing among possible directions as I develop a job market paper topic. If selected, I would arrive with several concrete job market paper ideas and would value feedback on which are most promising, feasible, and well-positioned within health economics, including where my interests in Medicaid, provider markets, and safety-net access could speak most directly to aging-related concerns. I would also appreciate advice on data infrastructure, especially Medicaid administrative files, claims data, hospital and emergency department data, provider directories, and linked administrative sources that I have read about but not yet had to navigate. Early guidance on access pathways, data limitations, and common pitfalls would make a meaningful difference in whether a project is feasible before I commit months to developing it.

The workshop would also give me the opportunity to build a broader field-specific community of scholars and peers working directly on these issues. Spending a day with senior researchers studying health and aging, and with doctoral students facing similar project-development decisions, would help me place my interests within the field more deliberately. I would be grateful to participate and to use the workshop as a foundation for developing a job market paper and broader dissertation agenda that contribute directly to health economics and to the study of how publicly funded health systems serve vulnerable and aging populations.