Zhichun Chai

First-Year Ph.D. Student in Economics
University of Delaware
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Education

Ph.D. in Economics, University of Delaware, Newark, DE 2025–present
First-Year Ph.D. Student
Primary dissertation supervisor: Not yet assigned

M.S. in Economics, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 2024

Research Interests

Health Economics; Labor Economics; Applied Microeconomics

Completed Ph.D.-Level Coursework

University of Delaware

- Microeconomic Theory II, Spring 2026
- Macroeconomic Theory II, Spring 2026
- Econometric Theory II, Spring 2026
- Microeconomic Theory I, Fall 2025
- Macroeconomic Theory I, Fall 2025
- Econometric Theory I, Fall 2025

Northeastern University

- Advanced Microeconomic Theory, Fall 2024
- International Economic Development, Spring 2024
- Advanced Macroeconomic Theory, Fall 2022

Research Experience

Research Assistant: *The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Labor Market Outcomes*, for Professor Lorien Rice, Northeastern University Sept. 2024–Sept. 2025

Research Assistant: *Agricultural Economic Development and Regional Policy Research*, Fujian Academy of Agricultural Sciences Sept. 2020–Aug. 2021

Research Paper: *The Impact of Monetary Incentives on COVID-19 Vaccination Rates*, supervised by Professor Silke Forbes, Tufts University 2022

Teaching Experience

University of Delaware, Newark, DE

- Teaching Assistant, International Economics (ECON 340), Spring 2026
- Teaching Assistant, Economic Forecasting (ECON 415), Spring 2026
- Teaching Assistant, Applied Econometrics I (ECON 622), Fall 2025

Northeastern University, Boston, MA

- Teaching Assistant, Macroeconomic Theory (ECON 2315), Spring 2024

Technical Skills

Software and Tools: R, Stata, Python, SQL, SPSS, Excel, Tableau, LaTeX

Languages

Chinese (Native); English (Fluent)

Statement of Research Interests and Motivation

Zhichun Chai
University of Delaware

I am a first-year doctoral student in Economics at the University of Delaware, where I have received strong training in microeconomic theory and applied econometrics. My interest in health economics developed through Professor Barton Willage's econometrics course, where I engaged with empirical papers on health economics, policy evaluation, and health inequality. These experiences helped me realize that health economics is a field I hope to continue exploring and potentially develop into a central part of my research agenda. They also made clear how much I still need to learn and how valuable sustained mentorship in this area would be.

My current research interests are centered on health inequality, aging, and how health shapes economic decisions across the life cycle. First, I am interested in women's health and health inequality, especially how socioeconomic status, gender, and race shape health outcomes and access to care. My academic and personal background has also made me especially attentive to how inequality is experienced across different social and institutional contexts. Second, I am interested in the economics of aging and labor force participation, including how health shocks affect retirement decisions and how older workers respond to changes in Medicare or Social Security. Third, I have a strong interest in mental health as an important dimension of health and well-being, especially how it interacts with labor market outcomes, caregiving responsibilities, and long-term care needs among older adults and their families. Although I have not yet settled on a dissertation topic, I see these themes as closely connected through questions about health, inequality, aging, and economic decision-making. I hope that the workshop will help me identify a more focused and feasible research question within this broader area.

In terms of methods, I have received training in applied econometric methods, including difference-in-differences, instrumental variables, and regression discontinuity designs. At the same time, I recognize that health and aging research often requires additional methodological and data-related skills, such as working with large-scale administrative data, understanding the complexities of Medicare and Medicaid records, and thinking carefully about dynamic decisions over the life cycle. I would greatly benefit from guidance on which data sources are most valuable for the questions I am interested in, how to evaluate the feasibility of a project early on, and how researchers in this field navigate practical challenges related to identification, measurement, and data access.

Attending the Mentoring Program on Aging and Health Economics Research would be particularly valuable at this stage of my doctoral training. Having completed my first year of coursework, I am now working to identify a dissertation topic and to translate broad interests in health economics into a more focused research agenda. I would especially benefit from mentorship on how to evaluate whether a research question is tractable, policy-relevant, and well suited to available data. I also hope to gain a deeper understanding of current research in health and aging economics, as well as opportunities to learn from senior scholars and peers whose work can inform my own development as a researcher. I am committed to pursuing research that speaks to real challenges facing aging populations and addresses health inequality, and I believe this program would provide valuable guidance at a pivotal moment in my doctoral training.