

**George Mason University**  
**College of Education and Human Development**

EDUC 874  
The Achievement Gap  
Spring, 2010  
Thursdays, 4:30 – 7:10, Krug 209

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Office hours: T/W/Th 2:30 – 4 and by appointment

**Prerequisite:** None

**Course Description and Relationship to Program Goals:** A doctoral seminar in which students will research and analyze the gaps in student achievement related and the practices being tested to close the gap.

**Course Objectives**

The learner will:

- Develop an understanding of the achievement gap in schools today including, its causes, its effects, its solutions, and the implications for policy formation;
- Deconstruct and explore in detail one aspect of the achievement gap, e.g. poverty, race, gender, teacher quality, student assessment practices, etc.;
- Explore “gap-generated” school reform models for their promise and for the barriers that need to be addressed;
- Prepare an in-depth analysis of one aspect of the gap related to her/his local setting.

**Required Readings**

Achieve. (2008). *Closing the expectations gap*. Washington, DC: Author.

Chenoweth, K. (2007). *It's being done*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Cohen, G., Garcia, J., Apfel, N., and Master, A. (2006). Reducing the racial achievement gap: A social-psychological intervention. *Science*, 313, pp. 1307-1310.

Coleman, J. (1987). Families and schools. *Educational Researcher*, 16,(6) 32-38.

Ferguson, R. (2007). *Toward excellence with equity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Noguera, P. & Wing, J. (2007). *Unfinished business*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Schechter, S., & Sherri, D. (2009). Value Added?: Teachers' Investments in and Orientations Toward Parent Involvement in Education. *Urban Education*, 44(1), 59-87.

**Suggested Readings** (and many more on blackboard “documents” and “weblinks”)

- Barton, P. (2003). *Parsing the achievement gap*. Princeton: Educational Testing Service.
- Borman, G., Hewes, C., Overman, L., Brown, S. (2003). *Comprehensive school reform and student achievement*. Baltimore: CRESPAR.
- Christensen, C., Horn, M., Johnson, C. (2008). *Disrupting class*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Education Commission of the States. (August, 2003). *Research sheds new light on Hispanic-White achievement gap*. Denver: Author.
- Education Trust. (2005). *Stalled in secondary*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Gamoran, A. (ed.) (2007). *Standards-based reform and the poverty gap: Lessons for No Child Left Behind*. Washington, DC: Brookings.
- Jencks, C. & Philips, M. (1998). *The black-white test score gap*. Washington, DC: Brookings.
- Loveless, T. & Chubb, J. (2002). *Bridging the achievement gap*. Washington, DC: Brookings.
- Perry, T., Steele, C. & Hilliard, A. (2004). *Young, gifted, and black*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Programme for International Student Assessment. (2005). *Learning for tomorrow's world*. Paris, FR: Organization for Economic and Co-operation and Development.
- Rothstein, R. (2004). *Class and schools*. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute.
- Thernstrom, A. & Thernstrom, S. (2004). *No excuses: Closing the racial gap in learning*. New York: Simon & Shuster.

**Recommended Text:**

Publication of the American Psychological Association. 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (2009).

Additional readings posted on <https://gmu.blackboard.com>

**Additional Online Resources**

The Center for Education Policy. <http://www.cep-dc.org> ; The Center on Education Policy is a national, independent advocate for public education and for more effective public schools. The Center helps Americans better understand the role of public education in a democracy and the need to improve the academic quality of public schools. It does not represent any special interest groups.

Childstats. <http://childstats.gov>; The website of the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics.

Harvard Family Research Project. <http://www.hfrp.org/> ; The Harvard Family Research Project is a very good source for information about “out of school” time and issues related to students and their families.

Kids Count. <http://www.aecf.org/kidscount> ; A report on the condition of children in the US from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

National Center for Education Statistics. <http://nces.ed.gov> . This website is the home of the nation's report card. Most statistics on the condition of education can be found at NCES.  
TQSource. <http://www.tqsource.org>; A service of the Education Commission of the States (ECS) intended to track changes in state regulations concerning teacher quality.

Learning Point Associates. <http://www.learningpt.org>; Formerly the North Central Region Educational Laboratory, this is another very good site for school reform.

Many others are posted on blackboard for your perusal and information.

### **Supplies**

Computer with Internet access and current GMU email account.

### **CEHD Course Expectations**

The College of Education and Human Development (CEHD) expects that all students abide by the following:

- **Professional Dispositions:** Students are expected to exhibit professional behavior and dispositions. See <http://www.gse.gmu.edu/facultystaffres/profdisp.htm> for a listing of these dispositions.
- **Attendance:** Attendance is mandatory, as the discussions that take place in this class are essential to achieving the course objectives.
- **Tardiness:** Prompt arrival for the beginning of class is expected.
- **Participation:** Each student is expected to complete all the assigned readings and participate in the discussions. It is expected that each student will be attuned to group dynamics in order to ensure the active participation of all in the class.
- **Absence:** If you must miss a class, you are responsible for notifying me (preferably in advance) and for completing any assignments, readings, etc. before the start of the next class.
- **Assignments:** All assignments must be completed in MSWord and sent to me as an attachment via email prior to class on the date each is due. Late assignments will not be accepted without making prior arrangements with me.
- **University Honor Code:** Students must follow the guidelines of the University Honor Code. See [http://www.gmu.edu/catalog/apolicies/#TOC\\_H12](http://www.gmu.edu/catalog/apolicies/#TOC_H12) for the full honor code.
- **Students with disabilities** who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the GMU Disability Resource Center (DRC) and inform the instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester. See [www.gmu.edu/student/drc](http://www.gmu.edu/student/drc) or call 703-993-2474 to access the DRC.

- **Computing Use:** Students must agree to abide by the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing. See <http://mail.gmu.edu> and click on Responsible Use of Computing at the bottom of the screen.

### **Course Delivery**

This course is a doctoral seminar, and my teaching style revolves around the concept of “learning via conversation.” As such it is expected that you will read in advance of class and continue to try to find the bigger picture as you learn to sort through the findings of one study to the next. In addition to classroom attendance and participation, I expect you to participate fully in whole class and small group discussions, group, pair, and individual projects, internet research, analyses of case studies, and reflections on practice. I will use GMU’s web-accessible Blackboard course framework periodically throughout the course; many of the examples are posted there for you to read in advance of our discussions.

### **Assignment**

There is only one assignment and that is to prepare a 15-20 page paper on one dimension of the achievement gap that is found in your own school or that is an area of interest for you and to explore:

- 1) the nature of that dimension e.g. LEP, inequitable access to knowledge, etc.;
- 2) how it contributes to the gap with data to support your case, e.g. performance of LEP students;
- 3) the policy debate surrounding it (what policies and practices have tried to help close this gap?); and
- 4) a discussion of promising practices that might close this dimension of the gap with supporting evidence from research and evaluation studies. ***Due date: May 6.***

By ***March 18***, please provide me with a one-paragraph description of your topic and with an abbreviated reference list (no more than a page. This is just to I can find ways to assist you.)

### **Evaluation and Grading**

3 = highly accomplished (letter grade = A). The paper clearly delineates the nature of the area that the literature suggests “causes” the achievement gap. The discussion includes research studies in which the data clearly indicate the gap. The student also presents a deep discussion of the policies enacted that are intended to alter practice to close the gap, and lastly, there is a solid presentation and critique of the promising practices designed to close the gap and a judgment of their strengths and weaknesses.

2 = adequate (letter grade = B). The paper describes the nature of the area as a “cause.” The student includes a general and abstract discussion of the research literature to date and identifies some policies enacted to close the gap, and lastly there is some discussion of the promising practices that is more perspective than critique.

1= needs rewriting (letter grade = C). The literature and reads more like a “thought” paper than an analysis of the research literature, the policies enacted, and the effects of those promising practices to date.

## Tentative Schedule

### **January**

#### **Topic**

- 21 Introduction to the course  
What causes the gaps? What is the best evidence?  
Why are so many people poor? Why are so many kids underperforming?
- 28 The Black-White Test Score Gap  
Read Coleman's *Families and Schools* on blackboard (Course Content Files)  
Read A Broader, Bolder Approach  
[http://www.boldapproach.org/bold\\_approach\\_full\\_statement.pdf](http://www.boldapproach.org/bold_approach_full_statement.pdf)  
Read the Executive Summary of the IES study of achievement gaps  
<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/studies/2009455.pdf>

### **February**

- 4 The Black-White Test Score Gap  
Read Ferguson, pp. 1-78  
Read Noguera and Wing, pp. ix-28  
Read Chenoweth, pp. vii-22
- 11 Structured Inequality?  
Read Noguera and Wing, pp. 29-86  
Read Ferguson, pp. 79-116
- 18 Structured Inequality?  
Read Ferguson, pp. 117-148  
Read Noguera and Wing, pp. 87-120  
Read Chenoweth, pp. 47-58 and 113-124  
Read "Two Guys and a Dream" on blackboard (Course Content Files)
- 25 Race? Poverty? Yes? No?  
Read Ferguson, pp. pp. 149-202  
Read Noguera and Wing, pp. 121-150  
Read Chenoweth, pp. 59-71  
Read Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, & Master on blackboard web links

### **March**

- 4 Suburban gaps  
Read Ferguson, pp. 203-236  
Read Chenoweth, pp. 175-188  
Read Welsh (2009) on blackboard
- 11 Spring Break
- 18 Maybe it's the teachers  
Read Ferguson, pp. 237-255  
Read Noguera and Wing, pp. 153-200  
Read Chenoweth, pp. 125-138; 189-212

Read Welsh (2010) document on blackboard  
Read TFA and Teachers' Expectations on blackboard  
***Due Today: Final Paper Topic***

25 An Expectations Gap?  
Read "Expectations Gap" on blackboard web link (or  
<http://www.achieve.org/files/50-state-2009.pdf>)  
Read Pygmalion Effect on blackboard course contents  
Read Chenoweth, pp. 23-46; 139-152

***April***

1 Early Childhood  
Read: Perry Preschool on blackboard\  
HCZ from 60 minutes

8 Readyng schools to be different  
Read Chenoweth, pp. 163-174

15 Technology as a gap closer  
Read Chenoweth, pp. 101-111

22 Parents and the demand for change  
Read Ferguson, pp. 255-282  
Read Noguera and Wing, pp. 201-246  
Read Schecter and Sherri on blackboard

29 New Structures  
Read Noguera and Wing, pp. 247-280  
Read Chenoweth, pp. 73-86; 163-174

***May***

6 Conclusions from our authors and from you  
Ferguson, pp. 283-304  
Noguera and Wing, pp. 281-304  
Chenoweth, pp. 213-227  
***Final Paper Due***