George Mason University
College of Education and Human Development
[Program Name]

EDUC 874-002: The Achievement Gap
3 Credits, Fall 2019
Wednesday 4:30PM-7:10PM, East 103, Fairfax Campus

Faculty
Instructor: Linda J. Mann, PhD
Office Hours: By Appointment
Office Location: Fairfax Campus
Email Address: [lmann4@gmu.edu]

Prerequisites/Corequisites
Enrollment limited to students in a Doctor of Philosophy degree.

University Catalog Course Description
Focuses on achievement gap in schools. Students research and analyze gaps in student achievement related to race and ethnicity, limited English proficiency, family background, gender, poverty, and ableism, and practices designed to close the gap. Offered by Graduate School of Education. May not be repeated for credit.

Course Overview
EDUC 874. The Achievement Gap. This course will examine the persistent academic achievement gap among different groups of students, with a particular focus on the outcomes of students from different racial and economic backgrounds in K-12 education. In particular, students will explore, through different disciplinary perspectives and theoretical frameworks, the origins and historical context of the gap; its scope and trends, both current and historical; the various in-school and out-of-school factors identified as its causes; as well as strategies, policies, and practices for addressing inequality in educational opportunities and outcomes, improving academic achievement for historically disadvantaged student groups, and thus closing the gap.

Course Delivery Method
This course is a doctoral seminar, and material will be delivered using a seminar/lecture format as well as “learning via dialogue.” 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.
Learner Outcomes or Objectives

This course is designed to enable students to:

1. Develop an understanding of the historical origins, development, context and trends of the achievement gap, including landmark events, reports and legislation.
2. Describe and analyze the scope of the achievement gap, including its causes and implications, both for individuals and for society.
3. Examine in-depth an existing achievement gap, including its scope and causes, and recommend an evidence-based strategy for addressing it.
4. Discuss and critique different perspectives and approaches for explaining and addressing the achievement gap.
5. Think critically and communicate effectively about the achievement gap.

Required Texts


Brunner, H. (2013, January 29) Equal Internet access is a K-12 must-have. *Education Week, 32*(19), 24-25


Sparks, S. (July 2013). Drop out indicators for 1st graders. Education Week, 32(22), 37.


Theoharis, G. (2010). Disrupting injustice: Principals narrate the strategies they use to improve their schools and advance social justice. *Teachers College Record*, 112, 331-373


Welsh, P. (2010, March 21). *At T.C. Williams High School, a 'low achieving' label is a wake-up call.* Retrieved from [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/03/19/AR2010031901362.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/03/19/AR2010031901362.html)


Yatvin, J. (2009, October 23). Rediscovering the 'Pygmalion Effect'. *Education Week, 29*(9), 24-25.


Zeller, T. (2012, March 1). *For America's least fortunate, the grip of poverty spans generations.* [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/01/american-poverty-rate_n_1304269.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/01/american-poverty-rate_n_1304269.html)

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


**Additional Online Resources**

The Center for Education Policy. [http://www.cep-dc.org](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.


National Center for Education Statistics. [http://nces.ed.gov](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.


REL Midwest: [http://www.relmidwest.org/](http://www.relmidwest.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.

**Course Performance Evaluation**

Students are expected to submit all assignments on time in the manner outlined by the instructor (e.g., Blackboard, Tk20, hard copy).

**Assignments and/or Examinations**

- You will be expected to complete several assignments that will constitute your course grade. They include a documentary review, chapter summary/critique presentation, course participation, discussion thread, paper proposal and a research paper/project. Each of the following is described briefly below, with more discussion and additional specifics as questions arise in class:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Documentary Review</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Sept. 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter summary</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course participation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion Threads</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper Proposal</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Oct. 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper Presentation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Nov. 20 or Dec. 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Dec. 4</td>
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</table>

- **Documentary Review (Sept. 25):** Watch the following two documentaries (access via hyperlinks) and prepare a 4-page review that a) provides a brief summary of each, b) describes the main issues examined, questions raised and perspectives represented, and c) discusses your reaction, thoughts and commentary. (*10 points*)
  - *Waiting for Superman* or *Dropout Nation* and
  - *Separate and Unequal*

- Chapter summary/critique presentations. As part of this assignment, you will be expected to provide a summary or analysis of assigned book chapters from course readings in the form of a visual presentation to the class during the semester. Chapter summary/critique presentations will constitute 10% of your course grade.

- Course Participation. Course participation is a critical aspect of the course and will be important in maintaining an informed and critical analysis of issues and material that arise in the course. Early in the semester, typically by the second class, we will develop criteria for course participation collectively for consensus agreement by you and your classmates. At the end of
the semester, you will be requested to provide a self-evaluation of your course grade based on criteria determined in class. Course Participation will constitute 10% of your course grade.

- **Discussion Thread.** Discussion threads are designed to capture your developing paper assignment. You are required to post at least two responses to other threads. One thread will include an annotated bibliography. The requirements of the discussion thread are listed below. (10 points)

- **Paper Proposal (Oct. 23):** Prepare a 4-page proposal for your final paper that a) describes an existing achievement gap at any level of education and any geographic unit level within the US (school/university, district, state, national), b) discusses its historical trends and current scope, c) explains its significance, impact, potential causes, and related policy debate, d) identifies the relevant research literature you intend to review, and e) lists key research and policy questions that will guide your analysis. *(10 points)*

- **Paper Presentation (Nov. 20 or Dec. 4):** Present your achievement gap study and analysis to the class and describe what you researched and learned in preparing your final paper. The purpose is to share the knowledge and understanding you gained about your chosen topic during the semester. The presentation should be no longer than 10 minutes followed by 5 minutes of Q&A and class discussion. Use of presentation software, such as PowerPoint, and handouts are required. Presentations should be emailed to the instructor by 5 p.m. the day prior to your presentation. Students will be assigned to either the Nov. 28 or Dec. 5 presentation days by the instructor. *(10 points)*

- **Final Paper (Dec. 4):** Building on your proposal, write a 15-page paper on an existing achievement gap at any level of education and any geographic unit level within the US (school/university, district, state, national). The paper should include a) a clear description of the gap, b) data on historical trends and current scope, c) a discussion of its significance and impact, d) a literature review of its causes and strategies for addressing the gap, e) a summary of the policy debate surrounding the gap, and f) an evidence-based analysis and recommendation for closing the gap. *(40 points)*

**Other Requirements**

- Students are expected to arrive on time, actively participate in discussions, read assignments prior to class, and meet deadlines. Please notify the instructor in advance if you are unable to meet any of these requirements. Phone/tablet use is not allowed during class.

**Evaluation and Grading**

- This course is graded on the Graduate Regular scale. See [http://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/academic/grading/](http://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/academic/grading/)

- Cumulative points corresponding to each grade are as follows:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>97-100</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-96</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83-86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>70-79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-82</td>
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</table>

- 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.

- **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.
- **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.

**Professional Dispositions**

See [https://cehd.gmu.edu/students/polices-procedures/](https://cehd.gmu.edu/students/polices-procedures/)

**CLASS SCHEDULE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 28: Introduction</td>
<td>No readings. Introductions and syllabus review.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publication / Details</th>
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</table>

**Documentary Review Due**

**Discussion thread 3: Explain its significance, impact, potential causes, and related policy debate.**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
**Will, M. (2017).** “Teachers' low expectations for students of color found to affect students' success.” *Education Week* (May 18). |
**Berkowitz, R., Moore, H., Astor, R.A., & Benbenishty, R. (2016).** “A research synthesis of the associations between socioeconomic background, inequality, school climate, | **Discussion thread 5: List key research and policy questions that will guide your analysis** |


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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 20: Research Paper Presentations #1</td>
<td>No readings.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 4: Research Paper Presentations #2</td>
<td>No readings.</td>
<td>Final Paper Due</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Faculty reserves the right to alter the schedule as necessary, with notification to students.

**Core Values Commitment**

The College of Education and Human Development is committed to collaboration, ethical leadership, innovation, research-based practice, and social justice. Students are expected to adhere to these principles: [http://cehd.gmu.edu/values/](http://cehd.gmu.edu/values/).

**GMU Policies and Resources for Students**

*Policies*
• Students must adhere to the guidelines of the Mason Honor Code (see https://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/honor-code-system/).

• Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing (see http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/responsible-use-of-computing/).

• Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their Mason email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students solely through their Mason email account.

• Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with George Mason University Disability Services. Approved accommodations will begin at the time the written letter from Disability Services is received by the instructor (see https://ds.gmu.edu/).

  • Students must silence all sound emitting devices during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.

Campus Resources

• Support for submission of assignments to Tk20 should be directed to tk20help@gmu.edu or https://cehd.gmu.edu/aero/tk20. Questions or concerns regarding use of Blackboard should be directed to http://coursessupport.gmu.edu/.

• For information on student support resources on campus, see https://ctfe.gmu.edu/teaching/student-support-resources-on-campus

For additional information on the College of Education and Human Development, please visit our website https://cehd.gmu.edu/students/.
Class Participation Reflection
(due last day of class)

Name: ____________________________________________________________

Number of absences _____ Reason(s) ___________________________________________

Number of tardies _______ Reason(s) ___________________________________________

Based on the Class Participation Rubric and instructor expectations for participation, how many points (out of 10 possible) would you grant yourself for class participation and why?

How would you describe the quality and effort associated with your contributions to in-class interactions and discussions?
### Grading Criteria for Written Assignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of Performance</th>
<th>Unsatisfactory</th>
<th>Basic (C)</th>
<th>Proficient (B)</th>
<th>Distinguished (A)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quality of Work</strong></td>
<td>Unacceptable</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Completeness of Work</strong></td>
<td>Difficult to recognize as the assigned task.</td>
<td>Insufficient evidence of understanding and application; important elements missing or difficult to find. References are not correctly cited. APA is not adhered to.</td>
<td>Moderate shortcomings; minor elements missing that distract the instructor’s ability to see the product as a whole. Evidence of effort, but one or more significant points are missed or not addressed. Some references are missing or APA is not always adhered to.</td>
<td>100% complete and error free. Accurate and seamless writing; virtually a complete product. Adheres to APA 6th ed. All references are correctly cited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Timeliness</strong></td>
<td>Assignments missed or not submitted. Incompletes not made up.</td>
<td>Assignments excessively or repeatedly late.</td>
<td>Assignments late more than once without prior conversation with instructor. Not necessarily chronic.</td>
<td>100% on time. Almost always on time; rare but forgivable tardiness (such a serious or personal family illness). Instructor is notified in advance.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>