

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

EDUC 874  
The Achievement Gap  
Summer, 2011  
Monday/Wednesday, 4:30 – 7:10, Robinson A245

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Office hours: M/W 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. (2009). *How 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.

Schecter, 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.
- Chenoweth, K. (2007). *It's being done*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Christensen, C., Horn, M., Johnson, C. (2008). *Disrupting class*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Cookson, P. (2011). Madison was right: Why we urgently need a national vision for public education. *Teachers College Record*. <http://www.tcrecord.org> ID Number: 16392, Date Accessed: 6/14/2011 11:52:51 am.
- 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.
- Wagner, T. (2010). *The global achievement gap*. New York: Basic Books

**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:

- **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. Late assignments will not be accepted without making prior arrangements with me.
- **Honor Code:** Students must adhere to the guidelines of the George Mason University Honor Code [See <http://academicintegrity.gmu.edu/honorcode/>].
- **Exceptionalities:** Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the George Mason University Office of Disability Services (ODS) and inform their instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester [See <http://ods.gmu.edu/>].
- **Computing:** Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing [See <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/1301gen.html>].
- **Email:** Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their George Mason University 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.
- **Distractions:** Students must follow the university policy stating that all sound emitting devices shall be turned off during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.
- **Dispositions:** Students are expected to exhibit professional behaviors and dispositions at all times.

### **Campus Resources**

- The George Mason University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff consists of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors who offer a wide range of services (e.g., individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs) to enhance students' personal experience and academic performance [See <http://caps.gmu.edu/>].
- The George Mason University Writing Center staff provides a variety of resources and services (e.g., tutoring, workshops, writing guides, handbooks) intended to support students as they work to construct and share knowledge through writing [See <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/>].
- For additional information on the College of Education and Human Development, Graduate School of Education, please visit our website [See <http://gse.gmu.edu/>].

### **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 (<https://courses.gmu.edu/webct/entryPageIns.dowebct>) framework throughout the course; many of the examples are posted there for you to read in advance of our discussions.

### **Assignment (Due date: July 27)**

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 (if you're not working in a school) 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.

No later than **July 1**, 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.)

***All assignments must be completed in MSWord and sent to me as an attachment via regular email prior to class.*** Late assignments will not be accepted without making prior arrangements with me.

### **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

<i>June</i>	<i>Topic</i>
6	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? Read Cookson on blackboard (course content) Read Chenoweth, pp. v-40
8	The Black-White Test Score Gap Read Coleman's <i>Families and Schools</i> on blackboard (Course content) Read A Broader, Bolder Approach <a href="http://www.boldapproach.org/bold_approach_full_statement.pdf">http://www.boldapproach.org/bold_approach_full_statement.pdf</a> Read the Executive Summary of the IES study of achievement gaps <a href="http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/studies/2009455.pdf">http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/studies/2009455.pdf</a>
13	The Black-White Test Score Gap Read Ferguson, pp. 1-78 Read Noguera and Wing, pp. ix-28
15	Structured Inequality? Read Noguera and Wing, pp. 29-86 Read Ferguson, pp. 79-116 Read Chenoweth, pp. 93-108
20	Structured Inequality? Read Ferguson, pp. 117-148 Read Noguera and Wing, pp. 87-120 Read Chenoweth, pp. 41-51 Read "Two Guys and a Dream" on blackboard (Course content)
22	Race? Poverty? Yes? No? Read Ferguson, pp. 149-202 Read Noguera and Wing, pp. 121-150 Read Chenoweth, pp. 141-160 Read Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, & Master on blackboard (Web links)
27	Your initial perspectives Presentation of your theories (more information provided in class)
29	Suburban gaps Read Ferguson, pp. 203-236 Read Chenoweth, pp. 161-175 Read Welsh (2009) on blackboard (Course Content: "Parents") <b><i>Due no later than July 1: Final Paper Topic</i></b>

**July**

- 4 Independence Day- No Class
- 6 Maybe it's the teachers  
Read Ferguson, pp. 237-255  
Read Noguera and Wing, pp. 153-200  
Read Welsh (2010) on blackboard (Course content: "Low-achieving")  
Read TFA and Teachers' Expectations on blackboard (Course content)
- 11 An Expectations Gap?  
Read "Closing the Expectations Gap" on blackboard course content (or <http://www.achieve.org/ClosingtheExpectationsGap2011>)  
Read Pygmalion Effect on blackboard (Course content)  
Read Chenoweth, pp. 53-76
- 13 Readyng schools to be different  
Read "An interview with Geoffrey Canada" on blackboard (Web links)  
Read "David Brooks..." on blackboard (Course content)  
Read Chenoweth, pp. 123-139
- 18 Technology as a gap closer  
Read "Disrupting Class" on blackboard (Web links)  
Read Chenoweth, pp. 77-92
- 20 Parents and the demand for change  
Read Ferguson, pp. 255-282  
Read Noguera and Wing, pp. 201-246  
Read Schecter and Sherri on blackboard (Course content)  
Read "The Parent Gap" on blackboard (Web links)
- 25 New Structures  
Read Noguera and Wing, pp. 247-280  
Read Chenoweth, pp. 109-122
- 27 Conclusions from our authors and from you  
Read Ferguson, pp. 283-304  
Read Noguera and Wing, pp. 281-304  
Read Chenoweth, pp. 177-206  
Read Galluzzo (Course content)  
***Final Paper Due***