

**GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**

EDUC 874.001 THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

FALL 2014 (3 CREDITS)

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Meeting Times: Thursdays, 4:30 – 7:10 p.m. (Sept. 3 – Dec. 10, 2014)
Meeting Location: Fairfax Campus, Thompson Hall, Room 2022

Prerequisite: Admission to Ph.D. program or permission of instructor

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.

COURSE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

1. Describe and analyze the *achievement gap*, its causes, effects, and implications for schools and society; and
2. Analyze and critique *achievement gap* discourses in education research, policy, and/or practice from multiple disciplinary perspectives;
3. Deconstruct and examine in detail one aspect of the *achievement gap* to include its root cause, evidence base, and proposed solutions to close it.

COURSE DELIVERY

A variety of instructional methods will be used in this course to include large and small group discussions, instructor and guest lectures, small group case studies, individual and group presentations, and independent research. Because the creation of knowledge is a collaborative endeavor; your primary responsibilities are to: (1) read the literature; (2) share your questions, reflect on your experiences, and engage in productive discussion to make the literature relevant to research and practice; and (3) write, share your written work, and provide feedback to others in a respectful fashion.

COURSE MATERIALS

The following are required texts:

Boykin A. W., & Noguera, P. (2011). *Creating the opportunity to learn: Moving from research to practice to close the achievement gap*. Alexandria, VA: ACSD.

Carter, P. L., & Welner, K. G. (Eds.) (2013). *Closing the opportunity gap: What America must do to give every child an even chance*. Oxford University Press.

Horsford, S. D. (2011). *Learning in a burning house: Educational inequality, ideology, and (dis)integration*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Putnam, R. D. (2015). *Our kids: The American dream in crisis*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Additional required and recommended readings will be available via Blackboard based on student needs and interests.

GRADING AND COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Final grades are based on class participation (10%) and quality, completeness, and timeliness of assignments (90%) described below. Grading criteria for overall class performance is provided at end of syllabus.

Class Participation (10 points)

Students are expected to attend all classes on time and participate actively in class discussions, small group activities, and serve as critical friends to one another. This requires completing the readings in advance, ensuring contributions to the discussion are informed and relevant to the topic at hand, and providing other students the opportunity to share their perspectives and experiences in an intellectually stimulating but supportive classroom environment. At the end of the course, you will be expected to provide a self-reflection of your participation, and that of your small group peers, which will be considered along with the instructor's assessment of participation.

Assignments (90 points)

To complete assignments, students will need access to a computer, basic word processing software, Internet, their GMU Blackboard account, and an active Mason email account. All written assignments (unless otherwise noted) must be submitted to Blackboard by 4:30 p.m. on the due date as a Word file attachment and formatted according to APA Publication Manual, 6th edition. Late assignments will receive a reduction in points if accepted at all.

1. Research Paper Outline (10 points)

Submit a 1–2 page (single-spaced) outline for your research paper (see Assignment #3 below). The proposal will present the following components related to the “achievement gap” problem you intend to examine: (1) clearly articulated research problem statement, (2) key research theories, findings, and literature, and (3) why the problem you’ve identified is important to the study and practice of education.

DUE: October 1 no later than 4:30 p.m. Upload to Bb and bring hard copy to class.

2. Small Group Presentation (20 points)

Each student will be assigned to a small group of two to three members to conduct a mini-case study of *achievement gaps* in a school district in the Washington Metro area. Each group will be assigned a different school district and responsible for presenting the following information about that district:

- a. Brief history of district and description of geographic area served;
- b. Demographic profile of students, teacher, and leadership;
- c. Board governance and leadership structure;
- d. Descriptive statistics on achievement gaps by race, class, ability, language, and any other points of difference (make sure to include explanation of data sources here)
- e. Discussion of district-level strategies to close identified gaps, the extent to which they are working, and alternative policy recommendations identified by the group.

The presentation should be no longer than 20 minutes followed by 15 minutes of Q&A and class discussion. Visual presentation software and handouts are recommended. No paper is required for this assignment.

DUE: October 29 no later than 4:30 p.m. Have one group member upload your presentation file and/or handout to Bb on behalf of the entire group AND bring copies of handouts for the instructor and each student to class.

3. Research Paper (40 points)

Each student will be required to submit a research paper describing and analyzing one dimension of the achievement gap OR the larger scholarly or practitioner-focused discourse concerning the *achievement gap*, broadly conceived.

This assignment is central to the course, should be related to your research interests, and must include the following:

- a. Clear statement of the research problem and description of the dimension you intend to study (e.g., assessment of English learners and its implications for achievement gap between EL and non-EL students);

- b. Review of relevant literature documenting evidence of the identified gap and its causes;
- c. The policy debate surrounding it (what policies and practices have been identified, designed, implemented to close this gap?);
- d. A discussion of promising practices and/or future research that might address this dimension of the gap with supporting evidence from the existing research and policy literature.

Recommended length: 10-12 pages not including title page, tables, figures, or references.

DUE: December 3 no later than 4:30 p.m. Upload paper to Bb.

4. Research Paper Presentation (20 points)

Each student will be responsible for presenting her or his research paper to the class during the final two weeks of the course. The presentation should be no longer than 15 minutes followed by 5 minutes of Q&A. Visual presentation software and handouts are recommended.

DUE: December 3 or 10 (sign-up sheet will be available in class). Bring copies of presentation handouts for the instructor and each student to class.

Possible Points

Class Participation	10 points
Research Proposal Outline	10 points
Small Group Presentation	20 points
Research Paper	40 points
Research Paper Presentation	20 points
TOTAL POSSIBLE	100 points

Grading

The grading scale for the final course grade is as follows:

A	=	94-100 points
A-	=	90-93 points
B+	=	87-89 points
B	=	83-86 points
B-	=	80-82 points
C+	=	77-79 points
C	=	70-75 points
F	=	below 70 points

GMU POLICIES AND RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

- a) Students must adhere to the guidelines of the George Mason University Honor Code [See <http://oai.gmu.edu/honor-code/>].
- b) Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing [See <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/responsible-use-of-computing/>].
- c) 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.
- d) 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/>].
- e) 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/>].
- f) Students must follow the university policy stating that all sound emitting devices shall be turned off during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.
- g) 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/>].

Professional Dispositions

Students are expected to exhibit professional behaviors and dispositions at all times.

CEHD 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/>. For additional information on the College of Education and Human Development, please visit our website at <http://gse.gmu.edu/>.

Academic Integrity

The principle of academic integrity is taken very seriously and violations are treated gravely. When you are responsible for a task, you will perform that task. When you rely on someone else's work in an aspect of the performance of that task, you will give full credit in the proper, accepted form. When in doubt (of any kind), please ask for guidance and clarification.

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Course Calendar - Tentative

	DATE	TOPIC/LEARNING ACTIVITIES	READINGS* & ASSIGNMENTS DUE
1	Sep 3	Course introduction and overview What is the “achievement gap” and where did it come from?	Course syllabus
2	Sep 10	Understanding the achievement gap and its dimensions	Reardon et. al. (2014) Boykin & Noguera, Part I
3	Sep 17	History, law, and the role of race	Horsford, Ch. 1-4
4	Sep 24	The declining significance of race? Examining the impact of poverty on achievement	Berliner (2006) Carter & Welner, Ch. 5 (Rothstein)
5	Oct 1	Who’s to blame? The impact of families, schools, and communities <i>In-class: Small group work</i>	Putnam, Ch. 1 and Ch. 4 DUE: Research paper outline
6	Oct 8	Analyzing the research on culture and engagement <i>In-class: Small group work</i>	Boykin & Noguera, Part II, Ch. 3-4 Carter & Welner, Ch. 10 (Carter)
7	Oct 15	Analyzing the research on relationships and intersubjectivity <i>In-class: Small group work</i>	Boykin & Noguera, Ch. 5-7
8	Oct 22	Meeting the needs of language minorities Field Trip: AERA Brown Lecture	Carter & Welner, Ch. 11, (Gandara)
9	Oct 29	<i>Small group case study presentations</i>	DUE: Small group presentations
10	Nov 5	Reframing the problem: Achievement or opportunity gaps?	Carter & Welner, Ch. 1 Carter & Welner, Ch. 2 (Ladson-Billings)
11	Nov 12	Analyzing policy solutions	Carter & Welner, Ch. 6 (Darling-Hammond) and another chapter in Part Two selected by student
12	Nov 19	Applying what we know	Boykin & Noguera, Part III Horsford, Part III Putnam, Ch. 6
13	Nov 26	NO CLASS: Thanksgiving Holiday	
14	Dec 3	<i>Research paper presentations</i>	DUE: Final papers
15	Dec 10	<i>Research paper presentations</i> Course wrap up	DUE: Self-reflections on class participation

*Schedule and list of readings are subject to change based on class needs and interests.

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**?

How would you describe *your* contributions to your **small group's case study presentation**?

Class Participation Criteria

	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Approaching Expectations	Below Expectations
Attendance	Exemplary attendance, no tardies.	Near perfect attendance, few tardies.	Occasional (1-3) absences or tardies.	Frequent (>3) absences or tardies.
Quality of Questions, Interaction	Most queries are specific and on point. Deeply involved in class dialogue. Challenges ideas, seeks meaning.	Often has specific queries, stays involved in class dialogue, though sometimes tentative or off base.	Asks questions about deadlines, procedures, and directions or for help with little specificity. Little discussion of ideas.	Rarely asks questions of any quality.
Effort	Willingly participates when asked. Plays a leadership role in groups. Engages and brings out the best in others.	Willingly participates when asked. Takes on group tasks. Engages others.	Reluctantly participates when asked. Seeks easiest duties in groups. Tolerates others.	Actively avoids involvement when possible. Complains about others. Has large set of excuses.
Engagement	Enthusiastically initiates discussion. Personalizes and takes ownership of activities. Always knows where class or group is.	Sometimes initiates discussion and always works well with direction. Generally knows what's going on.	Seeks direction, but does not initiate discussion. May know where class or group is.	Waits for direction. Knows little of what is going on. Cannot describe where class or group is.

Grading Criteria for Written Assignments

	Levels of Performance			
	Unsatisfactory (F)	Basic (C)	Proficient (B)	Distinguished (A)
Quality of Work	Unacceptable	Undergraduate level and quality; unsophisticated; assignments show little or no connection to course content or concepts.	Competent; provides credible evidence or understanding and application; some lapses in organization, citations, and/or writing clarity. Evidence of understanding presented, but incomplete; writing indicates gaps in logic; grammar and/or spelling errors distract the reader. Weak or insufficient citations.	Exceptional quality and insight; a rare and valuable contribution to the field. Convincingly on target; demonstrates evidence of understanding and application; clear and concise writing; the reader is not distracted by grammar and/or spelling and citation errors.
Completeness of Work	Difficult to recognize as the assigned task.	Insufficient evidence of understanding and application; important elements missing or difficult to find.	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.	100 % complete and error free. Accurate and seamless writing; virtually a complete product.
Timeliness	Assignments missed or not submitted. Incompletes not made up.	Assignments excessively or repeatedly late.	Assignments late more than once without prior conversation with instructor. Not necessarily chronic.	100% on time. Almost always on time; rare but forgivable tardiness (such a serious or personal family illness). Instructor is notified in advance that a paper may be late.