

Department of Applied Psychology
Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development
New York University

E63.2345
Academic Achievement Gaps
Fall 2012
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Catalog Description

This course focuses on understanding the central psychological issues in the academic achievement gaps between different social groups in America. Although structural and cultural factors will be discussed, the primary focus is on psychological factors in gaps between higher and lower income children and between African American, Latino, Asian, and Caucasian students in terms of test and school performance and in policy and educational interventions shown to reduce achievement gaps. There will be an emphasis on African Americans and to some extent Latinos because the gap for these populations is so consequential and because there has been far more written about these groups.

Objectives

Students will be able to: (a) describe important facts and debates about the various achievement gaps in American education; (b) demonstrate knowledge of the proposed causes and social implications of the gaps, including psychological, social, and cultural factors; (c) contrast the different explanations for gender and ethnic gaps in performance; (d) demonstrate the ability to critically evaluate policy proposals that address the gaps; and (e) produce a genuine piece of work valuable to the larger community with relevance for closing gaps.

Course Structure

This is a lecture/seminar/experiential course designed not only to contrast and compare important concepts in the understanding of achievement gaps but also to develop your skills at evaluating research, thinking, writing, and speaking in an arena central to human achievement. Your role in this course is to become conversant in the general area of achievement gaps, particularly in the

psychological perspective. Each week, class time will be devoted to focused discussion of the week's readings. Students will also be expected to deliver oral reports from time to time.

You will also become the resident expert on one sub-area that is interesting to you. For example, my sub-area is the social psychology of achievement. That means I will be the resident expert on that topic and take a lead discussant role as we discuss how things like stereotypes, expectations, and group norms relates to the gap. Your job is to consult with me early on in the semester about what aspect of the psychology of the achievement gap you want to be the resident expert in. You will then be a lead discussant when topics related to your sub-area come up in class discussions. The achievement gap is such a broad and multifaceted phenomenon that the possibilities for your sub-area are almost endless. Let me give you a few examples:

1. Psychological interventions that help reduce the gap
2. Why girls seem to be less interested in math and science than boys and what we can do about it
3. Social policies and their effect on the gap (e.g., No Child Left Behind; Affirmative Action)
4. Charter schools or alternative schools

Each of you will need to do a lot of independent reading on your narrower specialty topic. In this way, each of you becomes a very important collaborator in creating the collective knowledge of the class. The key will be for you to find something that draws on your interests and talents and that can sustain your interest over time.

Weekly Assignments

Each week you will be asked to write a one-page paper connecting the week's readings to the background readings (three books you will read early in the semester). On a few weeks we will visit schools that are successfully closing the gap and have meetings with the teachers/administration. We will also have a guest speaker. In at least one class session, you will lead a discussion on your area of expertise, which will require your doing some extra readings on top of the readings assigned for that week.

Field Research Project

Early in the semester, you will arrange a visit to a school that you have identified as an important context for understanding the achievement gap. You should begin this project immediately. You will record your observations in a paper that is at least five pages long. This paper is due by Thursday, November 15.

Final Research Project

Throughout the semester you will work towards creating an actionable, research-based project related to your sub-area of the psychology of the achievement gap. This project should reflect the wisdom you have gained from the semester, incorporating both the science you have learned from readings and your observations from the field. Your final project will be due on the last day of class, and you will give an oral presentation about it during finals week in lieu of exams.

Possible final projects can include but are not limited to:

1. A 10- to 15-page research proposal testing a hypothesis of interest to you about the achievement gap. This should be a highly refined distillation of your weekly writings over the semester modeled after a grant proposal, with background literature, description of your proposed methods, sampling considerations, and so on. This proposal should be real, suitable for submission for funding.
2. Conduct in depth analysis of an actual school, classroom teacher, or principal who is eliminating the achievement gap: write your voluminous notes into a magazine article to be submitted to a publication such as Education Leadership or Ed Week (Note: to receive a grade the article must be suitable for submission and hopefully submitted after I edit).
3. Interview or do study of someone discussed in the Thernstrom Book (*No Excuses* that deserves a second look/e.g., Gregory Hodge/Raif Esquith/ David Levin).
4. Write an Op Ed to be submitted to the New York Times on the Achievement Gap and an important consideration the next President must be aware of (Note: to receive a grade the Op Ed must be ready for submission and hopefully submitted).
5. Design an intervention in a school and propose it in an actual proposal to Spencer or National Science Foundation (Note: to receive a grade the Proposal must be suitable for submission).
6. Participate in conducting school based research. I can help you find a project--there are many available and describe in a brief paper the methods and results of the study (the study must be real)
7. Draw up a design for a charter school that will produce the most learning from all students. Justify the design by citing relevant research.
8. Write a book quality chapter (20 pages)describing an intervention (e.g, cooperative learning) its success rate for closing gaps along with instructions for teachers on how to implement it.
9. Propose your own "real" project.

Grading

Class attendance and participation = 30%

Weekly assignments = 20%

Final Oral Report = 15%

Final project = 35%

Course readings

Required Books

1. Rothstein, R. (2004). *Class and schools: Using social, economic, and educational reform to close the black-white achievement gap*. Washington, D.C.: Economic Policy Institute.
2. Thernstrom, A. & Thernstrom, S. (2003). *No excuses: Closing the racial gap in learning*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
3. Ravitch, D. (2010). *The life and Death of the great American school system*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Recommended Books for Background Reading

1. Ceci, S. & Williams, W. (2007). *Why aren't more women in science?* Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association Books.
2. Jencks, C. & Phillips, M. (1998). *The Black White test score gap*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press
3. Nisbett, R. (2009). *Intelligence and how to get It: Why schools and cultures count*. New York City: W. W. Norton & Company.
4. Noguera, P. (2003) *City schools and the American dream*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
5. Steele, C. M. (2010). *Whistling Vivaldi and other clues to how stereotypes affect us*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.
6. Aronson, J. (2002). *Improving Academic Achievement: Impact of Psychological Factors on Education*. Sand Diego: Academic Press.

Additional required readings are listed on the Class Schedule.

Class Schedule

September 6: Introductions

No Excuses, Class and Schools, and The Death and Life of the Great American School System

Watch *Waiting for Superman*

September 13: Psychology and the Achievement Gap (Part I)

No Excuses, Class and Schools, and The Death and Life of the Great American School System

September 20: Oral presentations by students about your interests, aspects of the gap that you are interested in, and your “burning questions.”

No Excuses, Class and Schools, and The Death and Life of the Great American School System

September 27: Psychology and the Achievement Gap (Part II)

Finish reading *No Excuses, Class and Schools, and The Death and Life of the Great American School System*

October 4: Charter School Visit 1: KIPP AMP

1224 Park Place, 4th Floor, Brooklyn, NY 11213 (Housed in M.S. 390/Maggie L. Walker Campus, corner of Sterling and Troy)

Meet at the school at 9:00 AM

Knowledge is Power Program. (2011). The promise of college completion: KIPP's early successes and challenges. Retrieved from KIPP website: <http://www.kipp.org/ccr>

Henig, J. R. (2008). What do we know about the outcomes of KIPP schools? *EPIC/EPRU Policy Brief*.

October 11:

Part I: “Noncognitives” and the Achievement Gap

Duckworth, Al. L., Peterson, C., Matthews, M. D., & Kelly, D. R. (2007). Grit: Perseverance and passion for long-term goals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92(6), 1087-1101. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.92.6.1087

Tough, P. (2011, Sept. 14). What if the key to success is failure? *The New York Times Magazine*. Available online:
<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/18/magazine/what-if-the-secret-to-success-is-failure.html>

Farrington, C. A., Roderick, M., Allensworth, E., Nagaoka, J., Seneca Keyes, T., Johnson, D. W., & Beechum, N. O. (February 2012). Teaching adolescents to become learners: The role of noncognitive factors in shaping school performance. Consortium on Chicago School Research. Draft of report.

Part II: Identity and Motivation

Mickelson, R. A. (1990). The attitude-achievement paradox among Black adolescents. *Sociology of Education*, 63, 44-61. Available online:
<http://sociology.uncc.edu/people/rmickelson/images/paradox.pdf>

Crane, J. (1991). The epidemic theory of ghettos and neighborhood effects on dropping out and teenage childbearing. *American Journal of Sociology*, 96(5), 1226-1259.

Osborne, J. W. & Walker, C. (2006). Stereotype threat, identification with academics, and withdrawal from school: Why the most successful students of color might be the most likely to withdraw. *Educational Psychology*, 26(4), 563-577.

Aronson, J. & Steele, C.M. (2005). Stereotypes and the fragility of human competence, motivation, and self-concept. In C. Dweck & E. Elliot (Eds.), *Handbook of Competence & Motivation*.

Walton, G. M., & Cohen, G. L. (2007). A question of belonging: Race, social fit, and achievement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92(1), 82-96. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.92.1.82

Walton, G. M. & Spencer, S. J. (2009). Latent ability: Grades and test scores systematically underestimate the intellectual ability of negatively stereotyped students. *Psychological Science*.

[Optional Readings for Further Study](#)

Steele, C. M. & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African-Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 69(5), 797-811.

Aronson, J. (2008). Low numbers: Stereotypes and the gender gap in math and science. In Hoff Summers, Christina (Ed.). *The Nature and nurture of women in science*. Washington D.C.: American Enterprise Institute.

October 18: Psychological Interventions

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

Dee, T. (2011). Social identity and achievement gaps: Evidence from an affirmation intervention. Preliminary Draft.

Aronson, J., Fried, C. B., & Good, C. (2002). Reducing stereotype threat and boosting academic achievement of African-American students: The role of conceptions of intelligence. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 38, 113-125.

Good, C., Aronson, J. Inzlicht, M. (2003). Improving Adolescents' Standardized Test Performance: An Intervention to Reduce the Effects of Stereotype Threat. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 24, 645-662.

Oyserman, D., Bybee, D., & Terry, K. (2006). Possible selves and academic outcomes: How and when possible selves impel action. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 91(1), 188-204.

Walton, G. M. & Cohen, G. L. (2011). A brief social-belonging intervention improves academic and health outcomes of minority students. *Science*, 331, 1447-1451.

Aronson, E. & Bridgeman, D. (1979). Jigsaw groups and the desegregated classroom: In pursuit of common goals. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 5, 438-446

"About" section of AVID website: http://www.avid.org/abo_whatisavid.html

McClowry, S. G., Snow, D. L., Tamis-LeMonda, C. S., & Rodriguez, E. T. (2010). Testing the efficacy of INSIGHTS on student disruptive behavior, classroom management, and student competence in inner city primary grades. *School Mental Health*, 2, 23-35.

Yeager, D. S. & Walton, G. M. (2011). Social-psychological interventions in education: They're not magic. *Review of Educational Research*, 81, 267-301

Optional Readings for Further Study

Slavin R. & Oickle, E. (1981). Effects of cooperative learning teams on student achievement and race relations: treatment by race interactions. *Sociology of Education*, 54, 174-180.

Johnson, D. W. & Johnson, R. T. (2009). An educational psychology success story: Social interdependence theory and cooperative learning. *Educational Researcher*, 38, 365-379. Available online: <http://m.edr.sagepub.com/content/38/5/365.short>

Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T., & Stanne, M. B. (2000). Cooperative learning methods: a meta-analysis. Available online: <http://www.tablelearning.com/uploads/File/EXHIBIT-B.pdf>

October 25: Charter School Visit 2: Excellence Boys Charter School of Bedford Stuyvesant
225 Patchen Avenue (between Macon and Macdonough Streets), Brooklyn, NY 11233
Meet at school at 9:00 AM

November 1: Alternative Schooling

Gray, P. & Chanoff, D. (1986). Democratic schooling: What happens to young people who have charge of their own education? *American Journal of Education*, 94(2), 182-213.

Lillard, A. & Else-Quest, N. (2006). Evaluating Montessori Education. *Science*, 313(5795), 1893-1894. doi:10.1126/science.1132362

Genre Practice Blog. (2009). About. Retrieved from Genre Practice Blog website: <http://www.genrepractice.org/about>

November 8: Guest Lecture: Pedro Noguera

Reardon, S. F., Atteberry, A., Arshan, N., & Kurlaender, M.. (2009). *Effects of the California High School Exit Exam on student persistence, achievement, and graduation* (Working Paper #2009-12). Institute for Research on Education Policy & Practice.

Vasquez Heilig, J, & Darling-Hammond, L. (2008). Accountability Texas-style: The progress and learning of urban minority students in a high-stakes testing context. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 30(2), 75-110.

Sections of Noguera's latest book (excerpts TBA)

November 15: School Culture

Dee, T., Jacob, B. A., & Schwartz, N. (2011). The effects of NCLB on school resources and practices. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*. Manuscript EEPA-11-OM-0771.R1.

Herman, R., Dawson, P., Dee, T., Greene, J., Maynard, R., & Redding S. (2008). *Turning around chronically low-performing schools: An IES practice guide*. Washington, D.C.: Department of Education.

Bryk, A. S. & Schneider, B. (2003). Trust in schools: a core resource for school reform. *Educational Leadership*, 60(6), 40-45.

November 22: NO CLASS - THANKSGIVING

November 29: Student Culture

Reread relevant passages from *No Excuses, Class and Schools*, and *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*.

Fordham, S. & Ogbu, J. U. (1986). Black students' school success: Coping with the "burden of 'acting white'". *The Urban Review*, 18(3), 176-206.

Harber, K. D., Stafford, R., & Kennedy, K. A. (2010). The positive feedback bias as a response to self-image threat. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 49(1), 207-218.

Treisman, U. (1992). Studying students studying calculus: A look at the lives of minority mathematics students in college. *The College Mathematics Journal*, 23(5), 362-372.

Dee, T. (2005). A teacher like me: Does race, ethnicity, or gender matter? *American Economic Review*, 95(2), 158-165.

December 6: Health and Nurture

Review *Class and Schools*, chapters of *No Excuses* and *The Death and Life of the Great American School System* related to teacher quality and poverty.

Basch, C. E. (2010). Healthier students are better learners: A missing link in school reforms to close the achievement gap. *Equity Matters: Research Review No. 6*.

Pedersen, E., Faucher, T. A., & Eaton, W. W. (1978). A new perspective on the effects of first-grade teachers on children's subsequent adult status. *Harvard Educational Review*, 48(1), 1-31.

Lareau, A. (2002). Invisible inequality: Social class and childrearing in Black families and White families. *American Sociological Review*, 67(5), 747-776.

December 13: Meaningful Work

David, J. L. (2008). Project-based learning. *Educational Leadership*, 65(5), 80-82. Available online:

http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/feb08/vol65/num05/Project-Based_Learning.aspx

Wolk, S. (1994). Project-based learning: Pursuits with a purpose. *Educational Leadership*, 52(3), 42-45. Available online:

http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/nov94/vol52/num03/Project-Based_Learning@_Pursuits_with_a_Purpose.aspx

Stix, A. & Hrbek, F. (2006). *Teachers as Classroom Coaches*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD. Chapter 11: The Nine Steps of Project-Based Learning. Available online:

http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/106031/chapters/The_Nine_Steps_of_Project-Based_Learning.aspx

Boaler, J. (2002). Learning from teaching: Exploring the relationship between reform curriculum and equity. *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education*, 33(4), 239-258.

Allen, J. P., Philliber, S., Herrling, S., & Kuperminc, G. P. (1997). Preventing teen pregnancy and academic failure: Experimental evaluation of a developmentally based approach. *Child Development*, 68(4), 729-742.

Hulleman, C. S. & Harackiewicz, J. M. (2009). Promoting interest and performance in high school science classes. *Science*, 326, 1410-1412. doi: 10.1126/science.1177067

FINAL DATE (TBD): Final oral reports and end-of-semester party