PPHA 34330: Attaining Equity in K-12: Theory and Practice

Harris School of Public Policy
University of Chicago
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Course Description: Nelson Mandela is quoted as saying, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." **Under what conditions is this statement true?** The purpose of this course is to investigate practices for creating equity for disadvantaged students. Despite nearly half a century of "school reform", troubling gaps in educational attainment persist between white & Asian and underrepresented minority students. Similarly, one of the surest predictors of educational outcomes is family income. What solutions are proven to reverse these inequities? The course will begin by using national and state data to understand the scope of the achievement, or opportunity, gap. We will then consider a framework for understanding why many promising reforms fail to result in improvement. After developing this framework, we will look at evidence behind a number of popular approaches, including standards based accountability, intentional racial and socioeconomic integration, and charter schools. Finally, we will look at detailed data behind case studies in Chicago area school districts. During the course, we will also look at how American considerations for school reform compare to those in other countries.

Course objectives:

1. Students will be able to interpret data related to school outcomes from system and statewide perspectives. Particular emphasis will be placed on the treatment of outlier data and evaluating claims from research and policy proposals.
2. Students will be able to identify the key challenges facing urban schools, and will develop a model to understand why any particular policy intervention might or might not prove effective in addressing its intended effect.
3. Students will develop practice considering the practical and moral challenges associated with various approaches to reforming schools. Particular attention will be paid to how these challenges constrain policy choices in a political context along with how the trust of serving "other people's children" drives behavior.

Prerequisites: There are no formal prerequisites for this class. Students should have a foundation in statistical data analysis to the level covered in Statistics for Data Analysis I.

Class meetings: Wednesdays, 5:00-6:20 with asynchronous lectures posted on Sunday night

Teaching assistants: TBD

Office Hours: By appointment

Expectations for communication: I will respond to all course emails within 24 hours of receipt. I will try to be extra responsive the day before any assignment is due, but cannot commit to

responding with greater frequency, so please plan ahead. Email or interaction through Canvas are the preferred means of communication.

Grading: Grades will be based on problem sets (65%) and a final project (35%.) In lieu of a final exam, the final project will consist of the submission of a policy proposal designed to address a problem in one of multiple scenarios that will be posed to the class.

Readings: One text will be required for the class: *So Much Reform, So Little Change: The Persistence of Failure in Urban Schools* by Charles M. Payne (Harvard Education Press, 2008. Other readings will be assigned during the course of the term.

ADA student accommodations: Any student who believes they may need assistance should inform the Harris Dean of Students office by the end of the first week of class. The Dean of Students office will coordinate any student accommodations with Harris instructors.

Academic Dishonesty statement and penalties:

> *All University of Chicago students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic Integrity and honesty. Among other things, this means that students shall not represent another's work as their own, use un-allowed materials during exams, or otherwise gain unfair academic advantage. All students suspected of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Harris Dean of Students for investigation and adjudication. The disciplinary process can result in sanctions up to and including suspension or expulsion from the University. In addition to disciplinary sanctions, I will impose a grade penalty of "F" for students who have committed academic dishonesty. The Harris policy and procedures related to academic integrity can be found at https://harris.uchicago.edu/gateways/current-students/policies. The University of Chicago Policy on Academic Honesty & Plagiarism can be found at https://studentmanual.uchicago.edu/academic-policies/academic-honesty-plagiarism/*

Draft schedule of topics covered:

Week 1: What do we mean by equity?

What is the opportunity gap and how big is it? (Why "opportunity" and not "achievement"?)

Week 2: What constitutes excellence in teaching and learning?

How does data describe educational outcomes?

Week 3: What challenges prevent urban schools from being effective?

How do we spot the "lies" in educational statistics?

Week 4: How do various stakeholders interact with school systems?

How does income, race, & student need affect student outcomes?

Week 5: What are the prominent theories of reform in the United States?

Week 6: What are the prominent theories of reform in the United States? (continued)

Introduction to the final project

Week 7: How do challenges of equity in other countries compare to those in the United States? How are they similar and how are they different?

Week 8: How effective is standards based accountability?

Week 9: How effective are charter schools and other "choice" reforms?

How effective is intentional racial integration?

Week 10: "Corporate Reform" vs. "Liberal" models: which are better?