PPHA 35720: Higher Education Policy
Spring 2024

Professor Lesley J. Turner
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Class Meetings: Mondays, Keller Center 2112, Section 1: 9:00-11:50am, Section 2: 1:30-4:20pm

Office hours: Tuesdays 9:00am – 11:30am (or by appointment), Keller 2047 or via Zoom.
To reserve a slot during regularly scheduled office hours, please use https://calendly.com/lesleyjturner/ppha-35720-office-hours.

Teaching assistant: Shana Metcalf, shanametcalf@uchicago.edu. Office hours TBD.

Course description and goals: This course will examine major policy issues in higher education in both the United States and abroad. Topics covered will include models of individuals’ educational investment decisions, rationale for government involvement in higher education markets, the effects of higher education on long-term social and economic outcomes, and the behavior of institutions that produce higher education. Students will use economic models and interpret experts’ empirical findings to analyze current issues in higher education policy such as free community college, financial aid and student loans, affirmative action, higher education accountability, and student debt relief. The two primary goals of the course are to (1) familiarize students with key features of the higher education landscape and relevant policies and (2) provide students with the analytic tools and theoretical frameworks to evaluate higher education policy. This course involves considerable reading, writing, and in-class discussions and presentations with the goal of enhancing students’ oral and written communication skills around these topics.

Prerequisites: We will draw upon tools of program evaluation, econometrics, and microeconomic theory. Students lacking these prerequisites are responsible for learning the relevant material.

Relationship to other programs: This course fulfills part of the Education Policy UChicago Harris School Certificate/Specialization.

Expectations of students: Because this course involves a considerable amount of reading and subsequent in-class discussion, it is essential that students read the assigned readings in advance to be able to fully engage with the course and complete course requirements. Please regularly check the course website; relevant documents, announcements, and lecture slides will be posted here.

Class format: Classes are held in-person. Active participation is a key component of this class. Attending via zoom is only an option in extenuating circumstances; students should notify the instructor as soon as possible if such circumstances arise. Lecture slides will be posted after each class on Canvas. Students are expected to attend the section for which they are registered except in extenuating circumstances; students should notify the instructor as soon as possible if such circumstances arise.
Evaluation:

1) Policy memo (15% of course grade)

Students will apply theoretical frameworks and interpret research evidence to provide a proposal relating to specific policy scenarios. Memos should not exceed 3 pages (12-point font, 1” margins). Students are encouraged to consult sources outside of the required reading list for background information and evidence. Memo topics will be posted on April 1. The policy memo is due on April 15 before the start of class. Memos must be submitted on Canvas and uploaded as PDF files. Please ensure you know how to create and upload a PDF file before the first due date. Failure to turn in a policy memo more than 24 hours after due date/time will result in a 0. Memos will be graded based on

2) In-class exercises (20% of course grade)

In most weeks, the second part of class will be devoted to small-group work (3-4 students). All students are expected to actively contribute to in-class exercises. Groups will be required to submit deliverables related to in-class exercises on March 25, April 1, April 22, and April 29. In-class exercise deliverables will be graded on a 5-point scale. Students who are absent will receive a 0. At the instructor’s discretion, individual members of the group may receive higher or lower grades than the group average, to reflect individual contributions.

3) Participation (20% of course grade)

Students are expected to regularly attend and participate in class discussions. Each student will be responsible for “leading” a class discussion by submitting 3-4 discussion questions by the Friday before the class meeting using the designated discussion board on Canvas. Students who are not discussion leaders for a given week are required to participate in the discussion by providing at least 2 responses, comments, or follow-up questions at least 12 hours before class. Discussion topics are noted in the schedule at a glance. Three or 4 students will be assigned to each discussion topic. Discussion leaders will be notified of their assignments by March 25. I will lead the first discussion.

4) Congressional hearings: final paper (25% of course grade) and presentation (25% of course grade)

The last class session on May 20 will be devoted to mock Congressional hearings. Students will submit written testimony (final paper) and give short presentations on an ongoing issue in higher education policy. Students will work in self-selected groups (3-4 students total, at least 1 on each “side” of the issue) to develop the hearing topic and agenda. Potential topics include, but are not limited to: student loan forgiveness, higher education prices, free college, accountability, affirmative action. In addition to the final paper and presentation, students will:

A) Submit the names of your group members by March 29.
B) Schedule an office hours appointment to discuss potential hearing topics by April 9.
C) Submit a short description of the hearing and each group member’s focus by April 22.
D) Submit an outline of your argument by May 6.

Slides and written testimony should be uploaded to Canvas by May 19 and students are encouraged to seek feedback on draft presentations and papers in advance of the last class. Hearings should be no more than 20 minutes in total and each presentation should include a maximum of 4 slides.

Grade appeals: Any student wishing to appeal a grade on an assignment or exam must do so within two working days of receiving the graded exam or assignment. The decision to re-grade is at the digression
of the instructor and may also be evaluated by another instructor from the department if appropriate. Please note that requesting a re-grade could result in a grade that is lower than the original grade.

Course readings and schedule: Readings consist of academic papers, news, and policy articles that can be accessed through Canvas and are listed in the course reading list. Required readings denoted with an asterisk (*). Additional readings are also included for students who wish to explore a topic further. Some of the research articles may contain technical material that is beyond the scope of this course, and students will not be expected to master techniques beyond those discussed in lecture. Students should do the reading with the aim of understanding the research question, the quality of evidence provided, and the resulting policy implications. Additional required readings that are not currently listed on the syllabus will be posted on the course website approximately 1 week before they will be covered in class.

Academic papers: You are responsible for understanding the question(s) asked in each paper, along with the context, empirical approach, and results; you are not responsible for technical details or minutia. You are also expected to think about threats to validity, potential questions left unanswered and implications for policy.

News and policy articles: These materials may come with a “point of view” (which is not endorsed); it is expected that you will engage critically with this work, asking what assumptions are – and are not – supported by evidence.

Current Events: The education policy landscape is changing rapidly. I highly recommend staying informed of current developments through the news, as it is likely such topics will be discussed in class. Some options include websites such as Education Week (https://www.edweek.org) and Inside Higher Ed (https://www.insidehighered.com).

Accommodation for Disabilities: The University of Chicago is committed to ensuring equitable access to our academic programs and services; policies regarding students with disabilities are available here. Students with disabilities who have been approved for the use of academic accommodations by Student Disability Services (SDS) and need a reasonable accommodation(s) to participate fully in this course must follow the procedures established by the Harris School of Public Policy. Timely notifications are required to ensure that your accommodations can be implemented; please inform Professor Turner and your TA at the beginning of the quarter so we can discuss how your accommodations may be implemented. Students are asked to notify the Harris Student Disability Liaison, Eman Alsamara of their access requests by the end of the first week of the quarter. The Harris Student Disability Liaison will work with the student and instructor to coordinate the implementation of student accommodations. Students who are facing extenuating circumstances at any point during the quarter should reach out to their Academic Advisor in the Dean of Students Office for support. If you feel you need accommodations on an ongoing basis, contact Student Disability Services at 773-702-6000/TTY 773-795-1186 or disabilities@uchicago.edu.

Accommodation for Religious Observances: Students must inform the instructor in writing of their need to observe a religious holiday reasonably well in advance of the absence, preferably at the beginning of the quarter. As with any absence, it is your responsibility to catch up on any material discussed and assignments given during the missed class period.

Academic Integrity: All University of Chicago students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty and follow the Harris Academic Policies and Standards. Among other
things, this means that students shall not represent another’s work as their own, use previously submitted work from another course to fulfill requirements for this course, or otherwise gain unfair academic advantage. Please read The University of Chicago policy on plagiarism, presented in the Student Manual. If you have any questions about how to properly attribute sources, please contact the teaching staff. The University’s policies regarding academic integrity and dishonesty are described here. The University’s approach is: “It is contrary to justice, academic integrity, and to the spirit of intellectual inquiry to submit another’s statements or ideas as one’s own work. To do so is plagiarism or cheating, offenses punishable under the University’s disciplinary system. Because these offenses undercut the distinctive moral and intellectual character of the University, we take them very seriously.”
Course Schedule at a Glance
(Note that this is tentative; topics and class formats are subject to change)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class #</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part 1: Background, theory, and rationale</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3/18</td>
<td>Introduction and overview of higher education markets</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3/25</td>
<td>Measuring the benefits of higher education</td>
<td>Discussion #1, Group activity #1</td>
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<td>Part 2: Access, postsecondary choice, and student success</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4/1</td>
<td>The transition from high school to college</td>
<td>Group activity #2, Policy memo topics posted</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>4/8</td>
<td>Access and admissions policies</td>
<td>Discussion #2</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4/15</td>
<td>Vocational education, major choice, and success</td>
<td>Policy memo due</td>
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<td>Part 3: Affordability and prices</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>4/22</td>
<td>Higher education prices</td>
<td>Discussion #3, Group activity #3</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>4/29</td>
<td>Financial aid</td>
<td>Discussion #4, Group activity #4</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>5/6</td>
<td>Student loans and repayment</td>
<td>Discussion #5</td>
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<td>Part 4: Accountability</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>5/13</td>
<td>Accountability and regulation</td>
<td>Discussion #6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finals week</td>
<td>5/20</td>
<td>Congressional hearings</td>
<td>Final presentation, paper</td>
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Reading list
(Note that this is tentative; reading assignments are subject to change. * Indicates required reading.)

General References (not required)


Part 1: Background, theory, and rationale

**Measuring the benefits of higher education** *Discussion topic*

* Lovenheim and Turner textbook, chapters 4 & 5.

Lovenheim and Turner textbook, chapter 6 (introduction & 6.1 only).

Part 2: Access, postsecondary choice, and student success

**The transition from high school to college**


* Explore the College Scorecard. Available at: https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/.


### Access and admissions policies

* Dynarski, Nurshatayeva, Page, Scott-Clayton (2023) Addressing Nonfinancial Barriers to college access and success: Evidence and policy implications. In *Handbook of the Economics of Education*, vol. 6. [Section 5 only.]


Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce. Race-Conscious Affirmative Action: What’s Next? Available at: https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/diversity-without-race/.


Vocational education, major choice, and success


* Lovenheim, M. & Smith, J. (2023). Returns to different postsecondary investments: Institution type, academic programs, and credentials. In Handbook of the Economics of Education, vol. 6. [Sections 1, 2.2.2, 4.1, 5.1-5.3, 6 only.]


Informing Students about Degree Costs and Earnings to Improve Educational Choices in Chile. Available at: https://www.povertyactionlab.org/evaluation/informing-students-about-degree-costs-and-earnings-improve-educational-choices-chile.

Part 3: Affordability and Prices

Higher education prices *Discussion topic*


**Financial aid**


Urban Institute Pell Grant Reform Simulator, [https://apps.urban.org/features/pell-simulator/](https://apps.urban.org/features/pell-simulator/).

**Student loans and repayment**

*Discussion topic*


Research Brief: The Distributional Effects of Student Loan Forgiveness. Becker Friedman Institute at the University of Chicago.


Part 4: Accountability and regulation *Discussion topic*


Lovenheim & Turner textbook, chapter 13 (skip 13.2).


