Instructor:  Prof. Meredith Phillips
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Office Hours:  Mondays, 12:00-3:00 p.m., Public Affairs 6323 (Sign up on office door.)

Class Meetings:  Wednesdays, 2:00-4:50 p.m., Public Affairs 4357

Description:  This class provides a broad survey of the literature on social class and ethnic disparities in academic success and the policies that might help reduce those disparities. Although we will focus on the U.S. educational system, you are welcome to write your final paper on a policy or policies that might improve educational outcomes for “disadvantaged” students abroad. Likewise, although we will focus on the pre-K through twelfth grade years (we simply do not have enough time to cover higher education, too), you are welcome to write your final paper on a policy or policies that might improve low-income students’ access to, or academic success in, college.

Format:  Class periods consist of a mix of lecture, discussion, and student presentations.

Purpose:  The course has three goals:
1.  To introduce you to the major arguments for and against a number of education policies;
2.  To help you learn how to evaluate the logic and evidence behind various policies; and
3.  To help you learn to develop evidence-based, persuasive arguments.

Prerequisites:  In order to understand and evaluate the evidence in some of the lectures and readings, you will need to have a conceptual understanding of regression analysis and be able to interpret regression tables. An understanding of research design and causal inference will also be very helpful for understanding the readings and producing a high quality final paper.

Expectations:  This course requires a lot of reading, research, and careful writing. You should only take this course if you are certain that you can devote enough time to it.

Grades:  Even though this is a graduate-level class, I only give “A’s” for excellent work. Generally, a “B+” indicates good understanding of all course material. A “B-” or below indicates that you have not mastered a considerable portion of the course material.

Materials:  You will need to buy the following books:


**Requirements:**
Mini-papers: Because the quality of class discussion depends so heavily on all students’ preparation, I require three short papers about the main readings (I assign five and you can choose which two not to write, but you must write #5).

**By 2 pm on the Tuesday before class** you must e-mail me a pdf containing your response to the readings ([meredith.phillips@ucla.edu](mailto:meredith.phillips@ucla.edu)). In the subject line, write: EdPol—Mini-Paper #X--Your Last Name.

These papers should not exceed 3 pages double spaced (1 inch margins on all sides, 12 point Arial font, pages numbered). If you turn in a longer paper, I will not read it. I will not accept late papers. I expect clear, succinct, logically-organized, grammatically-correct, jargon-free, typo-free papers. If I correct your spelling, grammar, or sentence structure in one paper, I expect that future papers will not repeat the same errors. Taken together, the mini-papers will count for 21% of your grade. (The specific writing prompts for the mini-papers appear in the syllabus under the date they are due.)

**Taskforce Recommendations:** Students will participate in research-based group exercises that will culminate in in-class presentations. The taskforce projects have three purposes: 1) to allow you to focus on currently hot topics in the Los Angeles Unified School District; 2) to further develop your research and persuasive presentation skills; and 3) to give you experience responding to the type of quick-turn-around project you are likely to encounter in the education policy world. I will randomly assign you to groups and pass out instructions for the projects a week before they are due. The project counts for 15% of your grade.

**Discussion Leadership:** Each student is responsible for leading the discussion of one of the “discussion” papers. During the second class period, students will draw chits to determine the order of paper selection (lowest number chooses first). Once two papers are chosen for a given week, students may only select papers from other weeks (depending on class size, students may double or triple up on papers). **All students are expected to read the selected discussion papers** but discussion leaders are responsible for reading them deeply and critically. Aim for your description and critique of the paper to last about 10 minutes. Discussion leadership counts for 10% of your grade.

When it’s your turn to discuss a paper, please bring in a short FAQ, with enough copies for all, that responds to the following questions:

1. What’s the main question/issue/hypothesis that the author(s) wanted to address?
2. Why is that question interesting or important?
3. What data does the author use? Please describe the source of the data (i.e., what state, school district do the data come from?), the level of the data (i.e., are the data from individual students, schools, school districts?), how the data were gathered (random sampling, convenience sampling?), the time frame covered by the data (what years do the data cover?), whether the data are longitudinal or cross-sectional, and the concepts measured by the data.
4. What type of analysis does the author use? (Explain the analysis as intuitively and clearly as possible.)
5. What does the author find?
6. What does the author conclude?

Then offer a critique of the paper (your answers to these needn’t be included in your FAQ):

1. Are you convinced by the author’s findings/arguments? Why or why not? (Keep in mind that you may be convinced by some of the results but not others.)
2. In what ways, if at all, should these results influence policy discussions?
3. What crucial unanswered questions did the research raise?

Class participation: Class attendance is required. During class, we will discuss the arguments and evidence presented in the readings. I expect you to come to class having done the readings, even if you chose not to write the mini-paper about those readings that week. Try to listen well to others, offer persuasive arguments, provide evidence from the readings, and set insightful directions for discussion. Do not make comments that are vague, repetitive, or irrelevant. Class attendance and quality participation count for 10% of your grade.

Policy Presentation: You will present a first draft of your policy proposal (see below) to your classmates for discussion and critique. You will have X minutes to present, followed by Y minutes for questions/critiques, with X and Y determined once the class size is known. Your presentation will be judged based on persuasiveness, clarity, and organization, and will count for 10% of your grade.

Policy Proposal: Your final assignment will consist of a 15-25 page policy discussion paper (1” margins on all sides; body must be double-spaced, 12 point Arial font; footnotes may be single-spaced, 10 point Arial font) advocating for a program, intervention, or policy that will improve academic success or narrow the gap in academic success.

Your paper must contain:
1. An accurate and accessible description of the problem you are trying to solve;
2. Detailed and well-footnoted references to high-quality research that supports your idea;
3. A detailed description of how much your proposed policy would improve the academic outcome you aim to improve (or how much it would narrow disparities in that outcome);
4. A realistic estimate of how much your proposed policy would cost per child;
5. A description of how you would implement your policy; and
6. An assessment of the barriers to your policy’s adoption, implementation, and scaling.

I expect clear, succinct, logically-organized, grammatically-correct, jargon-free, typo-free papers. Other things equal, shorter papers will receive higher grades than longer papers. The policy proposal counts for 34% of your grade. For a model of such a paper, see the Ludwig/Sawhill reading assigned for week 7.

Academic Dishonesty: I assume students will hold themselves to high standards of academic honesty in this class (and always). When you use other people’s ideas, data, or words in your papers or projects, I expect you to cite them appropriately. If you have any questions about whether your citations are sufficiently detailed, please do not hesitate to ask. I expect you to turn in original work for this class. If you would like to turn in a final paper that bears any resemblance to one you have written (or plan to write) for another class, you must clear it with me first. Please familiarize yourself with UCLA’s rules on academic conduct (http://www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu/integrity.html) because I will not hesitate to enforce those rules.
COURSE SCHEDULE:
Note: * means that the article will be available electronically on the course website; ** means that you will have to obtain the article from the library or another source; # denotes a “discussion” article (analyze it carefully if it’s your turn to lead discussion).

Week 1—Wednesday, October 8, 2014: Course Description; Introductions


Agenda: Lecture; Discussion; Discussion Paper Assignments

Read for today:


*Rothstein. 2013. “Why Children from Lower Socioeconomic Classes, on Average, Have Lower Academic Achievement Than Middle-Class Children.” In Carter and Welner (Eds.), Closing the Opportunity Gap: What America Must Do to Give Every Child an Even Chance.

*“Poor Schools or Poor Kids? Winter 2010. To Some, Fixing Education Means Taking on Poverty and Health Care.” Education Next.

*Education Equality Project Principles
(Notice: Education Equality Project has been subsumed into Stand for Children - http://standleadershipcenter.org/what-we-stand)

*Bold_approach_full_statement (www.boldapproach.org)

*What Works Clearinghouse Procedures and Standards Handbook (3.0)

Due Tuesday before today: Mini-paper #1
Prompt for mini-paper #1: Based on today’s readings, make a strong case for a realistic policy/set of policies that would substantially reduce achievement disparities or improve poor children’s academic performance.

Additional assignment: Brainstorm a list of possible topics for your policy paper

Week 3—Wednesday, October 22, 2014: Will Market Solutions Improve Our Schools?

Agenda: Lecture; Discussion

Read for today:


For discussion leaders:


**Due Tuesday before today: Mini-paper #2**

Prompt for mini-paper #2: Given what you read for today, do you think we should expand schooling options? If so, why and what form should they take? If not, why not?

**Week 4— Wednesday, October 29, 2014: Will Greater Accountability or School Reform Improve Achievement?**

**Agenda:** Lecture; Discussion

**Read for today:**


For discussion leaders:


**Due Tuesday before today: Mini-paper #3**

Prompt for mini-paper #3: Whom should we hold accountable for student learning? How should we do it?

**Due today: Paragraph-length proposal for final paper topic.**

**Week 5— Wednesday, November 5, 2014: How Can We Improve Instructional Quality?**

**Agenda:** Lecture; Discussion; Taskforce Assignments

**Read for today:**


Familiarize yourself with the research reports (and pdf book) on the Measuring Effective Teaching (MET) Project website: http://www.metproject.org/resources.php


*Clark, Melissa et al. 2013. NCEE Evaluation Brief: Addressing Teacher Shortages in Disadvantaged Schools: Lessons from Two Institute of Education Sciences Studies. Institute of Education Sciences. (For full report, see “The Effectiveness of Secondary Math Teachers from Teach for America and the Teaching Fellows Programs.”)

For discussion leaders:


Due Tuesday before today: Mini-paper #4.

Prompt for mini-paper #4: What did you learn from Ms. Moffett and the other readings that policy makers need to know?

**Week 6—Wednesday, November 12, 2014: Taskforce Recommendations**

**Week 7—Wednesday, November 19, 2014: Will Parenting Programs, Pre-School Reforms, Supplemental Programs, or Neighborhood Reforms Narrow the Gap?**

**Agenda:** Lecture; Discussion

**Read for today:**


**Due Tuesday before today:** Mini-paper #5.
Prompt for mini-paper #5: Critique the Ludwig/Sawhill proposal.

**For discussion leaders:**

**#Cook, Philip et al. 2014. The (Surprising) Efficacy of Academic and Behavioral Intervention with Disadvantaged Youth: Results from a Randomized Experiment in Chicago. NBER Working Paper 19862.**


**Week 8— Wednesday, November 26, 2014: Class cancelled because of Thanksgiving**
**Agenda:** Work on your policy proposal

**Week 9— Wednesday, December 3, 2014: Policy Proposal Presentation and Critique**
**Agenda:** First set of presentations, with assigned critique and class discussion

**Week 10— Wednesday, December 10, 2014: Policy Proposal Presentation and Critique**
**Agenda:** Second set of presentations, with assigned critique and class discussion

**Tuesday, December 16, 2014: Final Policy proposal due at 3pm (Word and pdf copy emailed to Meredith.phillips@ucla.edu).**