I. General Course Information

Instructor:  
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Course Page: http://courses.washington.edu/pbafdg/pbaf573/

Office Hours:  
Mondays 10:30-11:30 and by app’t

Class meeting time:  
M/W 9:00 – 10:20 am

Location:  
Parrington 310

II. Course Description

In this course students will evaluate public policies that attempt to reduce the persistent gap in standardized achievement tests that exists between various racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups. This will include a focus on differences in K-12 educational outcomes of various groups, the implications of these differences for later success, and some of the public policies that have been suggested to make schools function better for all students, but particularly those that are struggling.

The course has two main objectives 1) to help students develop critical-thinking and presentation skills through presentations, critiques and defenses of assigned class readings, and 2) to encourage students to consider the educational policy implications based on the available educational literature.

III. Course Expectations and Grading

Students are expected to complete all of the course readings, develop thoughtful critiques of the analytic and policy issues that are raised, attend class and participate actively, make at least one formal presentation to the class, and complete a final examination.

General method of instruction:  
Instruction will focus around discussion and debate over the issues in readings assigned for each class period.

Recommended preparation for success in the course:  
It is strongly recommended that students have completed a statistics or quantitative analysis course such as PBAF 527.

General nature of assignments:  
Students will be assigned readings for each class and are expected to be able to articulate the main arguments, findings, and public policy implications of these readings. In particular, each student will be responsible for making at least one presentation (roughly 20 minutes in length) to the class on one of the topics covered in class. This presentation should argue for or against (I will decide which on the day of the presentation) a statement associated with the topic, and it should heavily draw upon articles from the reading list, when appropriate critiquing the main evidence and arguments of the assigned readings. Since students will not know whether they are arguing for or against a particular position, they should be fully prepared to argue either side.
A second pre-assigned student will then be asked to present the counter to the position taken by the first. In order to enhance the effectiveness of the presentation, students will be encouraged to generate overhead transparencies or PowerPoint slides.

Following these presentations, other students from the class (picked at random) will be asked to offer rebuttals to the main arguments presented in the reading of interest. Students may also be asked to argue one side of a public policy issue (e.g. class size reduction is a cost-effective public policy for increasing student achievement).

These “policy debates” are intended to stimulate class discussion, and to encourage students to read the class materials in a thoughtful way and formulate their own opinions and ideas on the issues at hand.

Basis upon which grades are assigned:
1) class participation, 2) quality of the presentation, 3) pop quizzes (maybe), and 4) a final exam.

Required Text:

Syllabus
R/C = Reserves or E-reserves/Coursepack
Web = available online
TXT = required text

Week I. Why Are Educational Quality/Inequality Important, and How Much Exists?
Questions: What is the magnitude of the white-minority (African-American) test score gap and what are the implications of this gap? How much can schools do to address inequality of outcomes?

Required Readings:


Week II. How Much Influence Do Schools Really Have Over Student Outcomes?
Questions: What are some of the non-schooling explanations for minority-white differences in student outcomes? How much influence do schools have over student outcomes?
Statement: “Schools really can’t do too much to address issues of educational inequality.”

Required Readings:


Supplemental Readings:


**Week III. Inequality of Schooling Resources/K-12 School Finance**

Questions: *Is the financing of public schools fair? What are the alternatives, and how well do they work?*

Statement: “States should have all have strong educational resource equalization formulas.”

Required Readings:


Week IV. Do Resources Matter, If So, Which Ones?
Questions: Is there a strong connection between spending and student outcomes? How does expenditure on specific schooling inputs relate to student outcomes? Why might we see weak relationships?

Statement: “Increased spending on schools does not lead to improved student outcomes.”

Exercise: See link on PBAF 573a Course Page

Required Readings:


Week V. Class Size Reduction (CSR)
Questions: Does lowering the student-teacher ratio increase student achievement? Is this a cost-effective policy? What is the role of context and implementation in mediating effects of CSR?

Statement: “States should require districts to reduce all elementary class sizes to 20:1 or less.”

Required Readings:


Week VI. Standards-Based Accountability Policies
Questions: How effective are accountability policies at raising student achievement? Which Schools and Students Are Generally Affected By Accountability? Are all accountability policies created equal? What can we make of the new federal accountability role (NCLB)?

Required Readings:


Supplemental Readings:


Week VII. The Role of Teachers
Questions: Which, if any, easily quantifiable teacher attributes predict teacher effectiveness? Are teachers born or made? Do teachers get better with experience?

Statement: “Empirical evidence clearly shows that more experienced teachers with higher degrees are better.”

Required Readings:


3-18-04


**Supplemental Readings:**


**Week VIII. Teacher Licensure Policies**

**Questions:** Do teacher credentials predict teacher effectiveness? What is the proper regulatory role of states? Which schools and students would likely be affected by licensure reforms?

**Statement:** “States should get out of the business of licensing teachers and leave hiring totally up to localities.”

**Required Readings:**


R/C Goldhaber, Dan D. “Why Do We License Teachers?” Forthcoming in *A Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom: Appraising Old Answers and New Ideas*. Edited by Frederick Hess, Andrew Rotherham, and Kate Walsh. To be published by Harvard Education Press, April 2004.

**Supplemental Readings:**


Week IX.  Teacher Compensation: Level and Structure  
Questions: Are teacher salaries too low? Do we need to re-structure the way teachers are typically compensated? Is there enough evidence to form conclusions on these issues?

Statement: “Merit pay can work and it would lead to better teaching.”

Required Readings:


Supplemental Readings:


Week X.  Market-based Reforms: Charters and Vouchers  
Questions: What are the arguments for and against providing parents/guardians with more choice over where to send their children to school? Might choice lift all boats? Is choice a panacea?

Statement: “Competition in education leads to better student outcomes.”

Required Readings:


Supplemental Readings:


Summary: Real World Decisions: The Economics of Education on Judgment Day
Questions: Is there much of an evidentiary base for any specific changes to K-12 schools? What should be done to make schools work better for all students?

Required Readings:
