LHA1065H
Educational Equity and Excellence in International Comparison
Winter 2016

Time: Tuesdays, 5:00-8:00pm
Location: TBA

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Office hours: Mondays, 3-4:30pm or by appointment

Course Description
In an era of expanding educational enrolments and attainment and rapidly growing world income inequality, equity and excellence of national education systems are seen as key routes to equality of opportunity, economic growth and competitiveness. This course will explore questions of how educational equity and excellence are defined and measured, how they are related to social and educational policies and whether they are competing or complementary goals. We will discuss a variety of theoretical and disciplinary perspectives from sociology, economics, psychology and education, and their views on status attainment and mobility, human capital, organization of the curriculum and opportunity to learn. Using this framework, we will review recent empirical evidence on macro-level patterns of educational equity and excellence across countries and over time and the role of educational institutions and social and welfare policies in shaping these patterns. Finally, we will examine the history, use and abuse of international data in educational policy-making, with particular emphasis on large-scale cross-national assessments and how particular countries gain prominence as world models of educational equity and/or excellence. The objective of the course is for students to become informed and critical consumers and users of international evidence in educational policy-making. Please note this is not a research methods course, and no statistical knowledge is required.

Approximate* Course Schedule and Readings
*I reserve the right to change the schedule as necessary.

There are no books required for the course. All readings are available as PDFs on Blackboard.

Week 1 – Jan. 12 – Introduction

Week 2 – Jan. 19 – International Comparisons of Educational Systems
  - Read up to p. 36. Optionally, read pp. 36-49.

**Week 3 – Jan. 26 – The History and Development of International Assessments**

**Week 4 – Feb. 2 – Curriculum and Opportunity to Learn**

**Week 5 – Feb. 9 – Human Capital and Economic Growth**

**Week 6 – Feb. 16 – Equity in Achievement, Trends Over Time**

Week 7 – Feb. 23 – School and Non-School Factors Determining Achievement

Week 8 – Mar. 1 – School and Non-School Factors (Cont.): Societal Inequality and Educational Inequality

Week 9 – Mar. 8 – No Class
• Search for 2-3 media articles on international comparisons of education systems to bring to class in Week 10
• If you are attending the CIES conference, reflect on how international tests are used, abused and/or critiqued in the research presentations you attend. (Consider attending the sessions or business meeting of the Large-Scale Cross-National Studies SIG.) Come to class in Week 10 prepared to share your observations.

Mar. 14-18 – No Class – Midwinter Break

Week 10 – Mar. 22 – Educational Equity and Excellence: Complementary or Contradictory?
Week 11 – Mar. 29 – International Assessments and Policymaking, the Finland Phenomenon and the Ontario Phenomenon?

Final Paper Proposal Due


Week 12 – Apr. 5 – Critical Perspectives on Large-Scale Cross-National Assessments

- “OECD and PISA tests are damaging education worldwide”
- “Academics warn international school league tables are killing ‘joy of learning’”

Fri., Apr. 22 – Final Paper Due (5pm)
Marking and Assignments

Participation 10%
3 Reflection Papers 45% total (15% each)
Paper proposal 5%
Final paper 40%

Participation includes class attendance, completing readings, and participation in class discussions.

Reflection Papers. Students will sign up for 3 different weeks to write a 3-page (double-spaced) paper containing reflections and responses to one or more readings from the week. Each reflection paper should begin with a brief summary of the reading(s) (1-2 paragraphs) to demonstrate understanding. The paper should then make a clear argument, supported by evidence from the readings, personal experiences that illustrate or run contrary to readings, or (optionally) outside references (please cite sources). On the weeks that students prepare reflection papers, they should be prepared to present their argument (but not a summary) to the class.

The Final Paper can take one of two formats:

- A memo written for a policy or practitioner audience of your choice. For example: recommendations to a national ministry of education considering participating in a large-scale cross-national assessment; a brief to journalists on how to validly cover international comparisons of educational systems.
- A research proposal on a topic related to the course (i.e., the paper should resemble the ‘front end’ of a journal article – motivation, research questions and hypotheses, review of literature, empirical approach of the proposed study – but need not contain original data collection).

Regardless of format, the final paper should be 10-15 double-spaced pages and should draw on readings from the course as well as outside references.

For the Final Paper Proposal, students should submit a 1-2 page double-spaced abstract summarizing the chosen topic for the final paper, plus a preliminary list of outside references.

- All assignments should be submitted via Blackboard by the beginning of class on the due date. Please do not skip class to complete assignments; the penalty for an assignment submitted 30 minutes late is the same as 12 hours late.
- Late submissions (of reflection papers, proposal, or final paper) will lose 3 points for less than 12 hours late and 5 points each day thereafter.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is essential to the pursuit of learning and scholarship in a university, and to ensuring that a degree from the University of Toronto is a strong signal of each student’s individual academic achievement. As a result, the University treats cases of cheating and plagiarism very seriously. The University of Toronto’s Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters (www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm) outlines the behaviours that constitute academic dishonesty and the processes for addressing academic offences.

Accommodation

The University provides academic accommodations for students with disabilities in accordance with the terms of the Ontario Human Rights Code. This occurs through a collaborative process that acknowledges a collective obligation to develop an accessible learning environment that both meets the needs of students and preserves the essential academic requirements of the University’s courses and programs. For more information on services and resources available to instructors and students, please contact Tanya Lewis, Director, Academic Skills and Accessibility Services at 416-978-6786; tanya.lewis@utoronto.ca.