

# EDUC 541: ACCESS AND CHOICE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education

Summer 2018 – Session I (May 21 – June 25)

Tuesdays & Thursdays 10am-1pm

3700 Walnut Street, GSE Room 300

## Instructor:

Elaine Leigh, M.S.Ed.

Ph.D. Candidate, Higher Education

E-mail: [leigh@gse.upenn.edu](mailto:leigh@gse.upenn.edu)

Office Hours: Available by appointment – please schedule at

<https://leigh.youcanbook.me/>

---

## Acknowledgement

This syllabus is adapted from the syllabus of “Access and Choice in Higher Education – An Academically-Based Community Service Course” created and taught by Dr. Laura W. Perna. The structure of the course is modified to fit the timeline of the summer semester, but meets for the same number of hours and follows similar requirements to the course offered in the Fall and Spring semesters. I am grateful for the permission to use parts of her syllabus for this course.

---

## Course Description

College enrollment is a complex process shaped by economic, social, and policy contexts, higher education institutions, K-12 schools, families, and student choices. Numerous entities (including Penn) articulate a commitment to increasing access to college for underrepresented groups. Despite these commitments, college access and choice continue to vary based on such demographic characteristics as family income, parents’ education, and racial/ethnic group, as well as based on state and locality.

This course explores: 1) the structural and systemic forces that contribute to persisting gaps in college enrollment and choice; 2) policies and programs for addressing these forces; and 3) effective research-based policies and practices for improving college access and choice, especially for students from historically underserved groups.

---

## Course Objectives

1. Understand the characteristics of students who attend different types of postsecondary educational institutions, shifts over time in these attendance patterns, and implications of these patterns for policy and practice.
2. Develop a working knowledge of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks used to examine college choice and enrollment behavior.

3. Identify and analyze the structural barriers that limit college access and choice and the ways that various policies and practices address these barriers and promote access and choice, particularly for students from historically underrepresented groups.
4. Understand the strengths and limitations of research that has examined policies and practices for improving college access and choice.
5. Improve numeracy and data analysis skills by consuming quantitative research literature, using data tools, and interpreting data visualizations (e.g., tables, graphs).
6. Develop innovative but realistic recommendations based on theory and research for practitioners, policymakers, and others who are seeking to increase college access and choice.

---

## Expectations

---

1. Attendance and participation

Each student is expected to come to class prepared, having read and contemplated the readings, and ready to share his or her perspectives, questions, and insights. This course is conducted primarily as a seminar. The success of the class depends largely on the extent to which students engage in active discussion and debate around the issues posed in readings and other assignments.

2. Timeliness of work

Students are expected to complete all required readings and assignments as scheduled. Late assignments may result in the lowering of a student's grade. Incompletes will be granted only for exceptional circumstances.

3. APA style

All formal work should utilize APA style as described in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. Please refer to the following website for information on the citation of electronic resources: [www.apastyle.org/electref.html](http://www.apastyle.org/electref.html) For guidance on use of APA style, see: Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL): <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>

4. Ethical practices

All students are expected to abide by the Code of Academic Integrity throughout this course and all other courses offered at the University of Pennsylvania. Academic dishonesty, including cheating, plagiarism, and fabrication will not be tolerated. Additional information on the Code of Academic Integrity is available on the web at: [www.vpul.upenn.edu/osl/acadint.html](http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/osl/acadint.html).

5. iThenticate/Turnitin

“Turnitin” and “iThenticate” are two products used by GSE and incorporated into all materials submitted to Canvas. GSE faculty may run anything you write or submit—including theses and comprehensive exams—through these verification platforms. Uncovering large amounts of unoriginal written work is common, but proper citation is expected. These software platforms algorithmically verify and check written work against more than 60 billion web pages, 600 million student papers (including those written by GSE students), and 150 million journal articles, periodicals, and books. We want to make you aware of these tools to further encourage proper usage and deter plagiarism.

---

## Resources/Other Considerations

---

### 1. Special needs

A student with a documented disability or any other special need who wishes to discuss academic accommodations should contact the instructor as soon as possible. The University is obligated, whenever possible, to provide appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities. Students who have questions about their rights or accommodations may contact the Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunities at 215.898.6993 or the Office of Learning Disabilities Specialist at 215.573.8459.

### 2. Writing help

Along with feedback from the instructor, students are encouraged to take advantage of resources at the Weingarten Learning Center early and often for assistance on writing clarity, organization, reference lists, and

### 7. Religious holidays

Students will not be penalized because of their religious beliefs and observances. Whenever possible, students will be given reasonable time to make up any academic assignment that is missed due to participation in a religious observance. Students should inform the instructor of any conflicts between the course schedule and religious observances as soon as possible so that appropriate arrangements may be made.

### 8. Instructor Responsibilities

The instructor for this course has high expectations not only for students in the course, but also for herself. Students should expect that the instructor will:

- Be prepared for class, read and return students’ work in a timely manner, and be interested and engaged in students’ projects;
- Recognize that each student brings a different background, experience, and perspective to this course;
- Learn from the students;
- Meet with students individually or in groups upon request and be available in person, by telephone, and by e-mail; and
- Work hard, have fun, and empower students to pursue their interest in this area.

---

## Course Evaluation and Grade Inflation

---

Student evaluation is an important educative act. Grades are the means by which such evaluations are efficiently communicated to external groups (e.g., employers) and, most importantly, to the student. The compression of grades in the upper range (grade inflation) has occurred at many colleges and universities. However, without variation in grades, it is impossible to differentiate between “distinguished” work (the criterion for an A in the graduate grading system at Penn) and “good” work (the criterion for a B). Grade inflation unfairly penalizes students whose exemplary work deserves to stand apart through the recognition of an A. Inflated grades also can mislead students and give them an unreasonably optimistic assessment of their performance. At Penn GSE, the expectation is that grade distributions in courses fall predominantly in the A to B range and that the notional mean of most courses is B+.

---

## Course Requirements

---

Each student is expected to complete the following assignments.

1. Pre-class reflection posts - 10% of grade  
The quality of class discussion depends on students’ preparation and readiness to engage in the topic of the day. To encourage pre-class reading and reflection, students will be expected to post a short reflection on the course readings (e.g., title/author, sources of data, methodology, main takeaways, other connections) and pose questions/reflections by 11pm the night before class on the Canvas discussion board. These reflections will help the instructor shape discussions on the day of class based on student interests and reactions.
2. Statement of the Problem Paper - 20% of grade  
Each student is expected to prepare a 2-3 page paper (double-spaced) that describes the nature of a college access and/or choice problem of interest. The statement should draw on data and/or research to identify and document a problem related to college access and/or choice and describe the importance of addressing the problem. The statement should reference at least two relevant policy briefs or reports and include attention to data that summarizes the problem.
3. Data Analysis & Policy Brief - 25% of grade  
Building on the first assignment, each student is expected to prepare a 4-6 page paper (double-spaced) that: (1) identifies a problem in college access, choice, or completion; (2) includes descriptive data using different data tools available at NCES, the Census Bureau, or local district resources; (3) argues for a policy or practice that is intended to improve some aspect of your chosen problem of practice; and (2) uses findings from at least three different sources that examines the effectiveness of the policy/practice to defend your argument. The paper may draw on research studies that use varying methodologies (quantitative and/or qualitative), policy reports, and/or administrative or

governmental agency publications. The selected intervention may be implemented at any level (e.g., national, state, college or university, K-12 school or district, or community).

4. Final Paper - 40% of grade

Students must complete one of the following options. The final paper should be 15-20 pages, double-spaced (with appendices of additional relevant reference and/or supporting materials). See the Canvas site for a list of project topics.

*a. Option A: Program Recommendations*

As a future program manager or administrator serving students, you may need to work on grant proposals, project outlines, and presentations that argue for or against policy changes or new practices for your organization. This paper should be a cohesive, research-based argument for a set of policies to address a professional problem of practice fitting with your future professional interests and desired roles. You can address problems in relevant settings of your choice (school and non-school-based pre-college programs, university student affairs, admissions, etc.). Be sure your recommendations can realistically be used to improve college access and success of different students. The paper should include:

- A discussion of the “problem of practice” that the program is seeking to address, the importance of addressing the problem, and the forces that are contributing the problem, drawing from current college access and choice theories.
- A set of recommendations that the program should adopt to address the “problem,” along with explicit discussion of how the recommendations recognize the relevant contextual and programmatic characteristics.
  - The recommendations should be grounded in what is known from relevant theories and prior research, as well as insights gained from a review of other programmatic approaches and models.
  - The recommendations should do more than acknowledge that programmatic constraints exist. Rather, the recommendations should be informed by the constraints and reflect strategies that are feasible and may be realistically implemented.

*b. Option B: Research Proposal*

Students who want to gain more experience in policy analysis or develop research projects should complete a final paper that proposes an empirical research design in addition to a comprehensive review and synthesis of relevant prior research. Papers should follow the format of a research paper or conference proposal (e.g., for ASHE or AERA) and thus include a description of the significance of the issue addressed, a statement of the research question(s) examined, a critical review of the literature, a description of the conceptual framework for understanding the issue, a discussion of the methods used to address the research question(s), preliminary findings (based on 1-2 interviews or data analysis), and a discussion of the implications for policy, practice, and future research.

This option is particularly recommended/encouraged for those aspiring to doctoral studies in education.

5. Final Paper Presentations – 5% of grade

During the final class session, students will summarize the content of their final papers and respond to questions from the class. The time allotted to each presentation will depend on the number of presentations (typically 10-15 minutes per presentation).

---

**Required Readings**

Perna, L.W., & Jones, A. (2013). *The state of college access and completion: Improving college success for students from underrepresented groups*. New York: Routledge. ISBN: 978-0-415-66045-7 \*\*Free eBook available through Penn Libraries\*\*

Supplemental readings: A compilation of additional readings is available via Canvas. The Canvas site may be accessed by directing your browser to <http://canvas.upenn.edu> Login using your PennKey and password.

---

**Other Resources**

Perna, L.W., & Finney, J. (2014). *The attainment agenda: State policy leadership in higher education*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Perna, L.W., & McLendon, M. (2015). The role of state policy in promoting college access and success. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. <http://ann.sagepub.com/content/655/1.toc>

Weis, L., Cipollone, K., Jenkins, H. (2014). *Class warfare: Class, race, and college admissions in top-tier secondary schools*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

---

## Class Schedule

---

**Class 1**  
**Tuesday, May 22**

### Introduction and overview of the course

*Do we have a college access problem? If so, why do we need to address this problem? How will this course improve students' understanding of the problem? How will this course improve practice pertaining to college access?*

Required Readings:  
What is the problem on a national level?  
What do the data say (and not say)?

Skim – pay attention to data sources and types of evidence considered: Ma, J., Pender, M., & Welch, M. (2016). *Education pays 2016: The benefits of higher education for individuals and society*. <https://trends.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/education-pays-2016-full-report.pdf> (Canvas)

Skim – pay attention to data sources and major trends: Cahalan, M., Perna, L.W., Yamashita, M., Ruiz, R., & Franklin, K. (2017). *Indicators of higher education equity in the US: 2017 historical trend report*. Washington, DC: The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education and Alliance for Higher Education and Democracy. (Canvas)  
<http://pellinstitute.org/indicators/>

Chetty, R., Friedman, J.N., Saez, E., Turner, N. & Yagan, D. (2017). Mobility report cards: The role of colleges in intergenerational mobility. *The Equality of Opportunity Project*. (Canvas) [http://www.equality-of-opportunity.org/assets/documents/coll\\_mrc\\_summary.pdf](http://www.equality-of-opportunity.org/assets/documents/coll_mrc_summary.pdf)

- Optional: Scan the Equality for Opportunity website; read NYT The Upshot's synopsis of the college mobility study

How do others articulate the problem?

Jones, A. (2013). Improving postsecondary access, persistence, and completion in the United States: Setting the stage. Chapter 1 in Perna & Jones. (Text)

---

**Class 2**  
**Thursday, May 24**

### Theoretical frameworks and conceptual approaches for understanding college access and choice

*What are prevailing conceptual and theoretical perspectives for understanding how students make college enrollment decisions?*

Required Readings:

Perna, L. W. (2006). Studying college choice: A proposed conceptual model. In J. C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher Education:*

What are prevailing conceptual and theoretical models for forces influencing college access and choice?

*Handbook of theory and research, Vol. XXI* (pp. 99-157). Springer. **(Canvas)**

Iloh, C., & Tierney, W.G. (2014). Understanding for-profit college and community college choice through rational choice. *Teachers College Record, 116*, 1-34. **(Canvas)**

- Optional: Somers, P., Haines, K., Keene, B., Bauer, J., Pfeiffer, M., McCluskey, J., Settle, J., & Sparks, B. (2006). Towards a theory of choice for community college students. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 30*(1), 53-67.

Yosso, T.J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 8*, 69-91. **(Canvas)**

---

**Class 3: Tuesday, May 29**

**The state of research on college access programs & research skills**  
*What is known from research about the effectiveness of college access programs? What research has been conducted on these programs? What conclusions may be drawn from available research? What forces limit the ability to determine “what works”?*

Required Readings:  
 What do we know about college access?

Perna, L. W. (2002). Pre-college outreach programs: Characteristics of programs serving historically underrepresented groups of students. *Journal of College Student Development, 43*, 64-83. **(Canvas)**

Page, L.C., & Scott-Clayton, J. (2016). Improving college access in the United States: Barriers and policy responses. *Economics of Education Review, 51*, 4-22. **(Canvas)**

Required Readings:  
 How do we know what works?

DesJardins, S., & Flaser, A. (2013). Nonexperimental designs and causal analyses of college access, persistence, and completion. Chapter 10 in Perna & Jones. **(Text)**

Browse What Works Clearinghouse website, pick at least one subtopic, and explore research evidence on the topic:  
<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>

Browse NCES Datalab and create user account:  
<https://nces.ed.gov/datalab/>

Assignment Due: Statement of the problem **(submit to Canvas by 10am)**



---

**Class 4: Thursday,  
May 31**

**The role of high schools and academic preparation in college enrollment**

*Focusing on Philadelphia, what are forces that promote or limit academic preparation and college enrollment found in the high school context? How is academic preparation related to college access and success? What programs and structures promote students' academic preparation?*

High School Visit to Kensington Health Sciences Academy

2463 Emerald Street

Philadelphia, PA 19125

<https://khsa.philasd.org/>

<https://dashboards.philasd.org/extensions/philadelphia/index.html#/>

Required

Readings:

What is the problem?

Harrington, P. E. & Fogg, N.P. (2015). *From diplomas to degrees: A longitudinal study of the college enrollment and graduation outcomes of high school graduates from the School District of Philadelphia*. Philadelphia, PA: Drexel University Center for Labor Markets and Policy. **(Canvas)**

[https://www.pyninc.org/docs/diplomas\\_degrees2015.pdf](https://www.pyninc.org/docs/diplomas_degrees2015.pdf)

- WWC review:

<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/quickreview.aspx?sid=29850>

**PICK ONE:**

*(PA state focus)*

Slaughter, A., Moran, D., Lapp, D., & Lin, J. (November, 2016). Racial disparities in educational opportunities in Pennsylvania. Philadelphia, PA: Research for Action.

<https://8rri53pm0cs22jk3vqna1ub-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/RFA-Civil-Rights-Data-PACER-Brief-Nov-1-2016.pdf> **(Canvas)**

**OR**

*(IB Program focus)*

Perna, L.W., May, H., Yee, A., Ransom, T., Rodriguez, A., & Fester, R. (2015). Unequal access to rigorous high school curricula: An exploration of the opportunity to benefit from the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP). *Educational Policy*, 29(2), 402-425. **(Canvas)**

What are potential solutions?

Haxton, C., Song, M., Zeiser, K., Berger, A., Turk-Bicakci, L., Garet, M.S., Knudson, J., & Hoshen, G. (2016). Longitudinal findings from the Early College High School Initiative impact study.

*Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 38(2), 410-430.  
(Canvas)

- WWC Review: <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Study/77771>

Long, B.T., & Boatman, A. (2013). The role of remedial and developmental courses in college access and persistence. Chapter 5 in Perna & Jones. (Text)

---

**Class 5: Tuesday,  
June 5**

**Knowledge, information, mentoring, and college counseling**  
*How do knowledge and information influence students' college enrollment and choice? What forces limit college-related knowledge? What programs and strategies improve college-related knowledge?*

College Counseling Panel:

*Kaitlin Irvine - Summer Search*

*Joann Gonzalez-Generals - Penn Upward Bound*

*Caryn Rivers - Pathfinder Placement*

Required

Readings:

What is the problem?

Perna, L.W., Rowan-Kenyon, H., Thomas, S. L., Bell, A., Anderson, R., & Li, C. (2008).

The role of college counseling in shaping college opportunity: Variations across high schools. *Review of Higher Education*, 31, 131-160. (Canvas)

What are potential solutions?

Castleman, B. L., & Page, L. C. (2015). Summer nudging: Can personalized text messages and peer mentor outreach increase college going among low-income high school graduates? *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 115, 144-160. (Canvas)

Hoxby, C., & Turner, S. (2013). *Informing students about their college options: A proposal for broadening the expanding college opportunities project*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, Discussion Paper 2013-03). <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2013/06/26-expanding-college-opportunities-hoxby-turner> (Canvas)

---

**Class 6: Thursday,  
June 7**

**Financial resources and financial aid**  
*How does money influence students' college enrollment and choice? What programs and structures help reduce the role of money in college enrollment and choice?*

Required

Readings:

What is the problem? Heller, D. (2013). The role of finances in postsecondary access and success. Chapter 6 in Perna & Jones. **(Text)**

What are potential solutions? Scrivener, S., Weiss, M.J., Ratledge, A., Rudd, T., Sommo, C., & Fresques, H. (2015). *Executive Summary - Doubling graduation rates: Three-year effects of CUNY's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) for developmental education students*. New York, NY: MDRC. Retrieved from <https://www.mdrc.org/publication/doubling-graduation-rates> **(Canvas)**

Castleman, B. L., & Long, B. T. (2016). Looking beyond enrollment: The causal effect of need-based grants on college access, persistence, and graduation. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 34(4), 1023-1073. **(Canvas)**

Hillman, N. (2015). Borrowing and repaying student loans. *Journal of Student Financial Aid*, 45, 35-48. **(Canvas)**

Assignment Due: Data Analysis & Policy Brief memo (submit to Canvas by 10am)

---

**Class 7: Tuesday, June 12**

**Families**

*How do families influence students' college-related decisions? What forces limit and promote the involvement of parents in students' college-related decisions? What programs and structures encourage college-related support from parents?*

Required Readings:  
What is the problem?

Guest Instructor: Sean Vereen, Ed.D.  
President of Steppingstone Scholars & Former Associate Dean for Opportunity and Access at Penn Admissions

Watch *First Generation* documentary:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pfDx4duheHk>

What are potential solutions?

Chapman, T.K., Contreras, F., & Martinez, Jr., E. (2018). African American parents and their high-achieving students: Issues of race, class, and community in the college choice process. *Journal of African American Studies*, 22, 31-48. **(Canvas)**

Mwangi, C. A. G. (2015). (Re)examining the role of family and community in college access and choice: A metasynthesis, *Review of Higher Education*, 39, 123-151. **(Canvas)**

Weis, L., Cipollone, K., & Jenkins, H. (2014). *Class warfare: Class, race, and college admissions in top-tier secondary schools*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Chapter 3: “Class practices and the college process in a suburban, public high school: Creating distinction around the highly selective college-going self.” (Canvas)

---

**Class 8:**  
**Thursday, June 14**

**The higher education and state context**

*How do higher education institutions influence college access and choice? How might a college or university promote college access and choice, especially for students from historically underrepresented groups?*

**Guest Speaker:** Jeremy Wright, Ph.D. Student - Higher Education; Former Assistant Director, University of Chicago’s Center for College Student Success & College Advisor in City Colleges of Chicago system

Required Readings:  
What’s the problem?

Bastedo, M., & Jaquette, O. (2011). Running in place: Low-income students and the dynamics of higher education. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 33, 318-339. (Canvas)

What are potential solutions?

Perna, L. W., & Finney, J. (2014). *The attainment agenda: State policy leadership for higher education*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press. Chapter 1. (Canvas)

Melguizo, T., Kienzel, G., & Kosiewicz, H. (2013). The potential of community colleges to increase bachelor’s degree attainment rates. Chapter 7 in Perna & Jones. (Text)

Chase, M.M., Dowd, A., Pazich, L.B., & Bensimon, E.M. (2014). Transfer equity for “minoritized” students: A critical policy analysis of seven states. *Educational Policy*, 28(5), 669-717. (Canvas)

---

**Class 9: Tuesday, June 19**

**A place-based approach to promoting college access and attainment**

*How do aspects of geography and place shape higher education choices or outcomes? What are place-based strategies for improving college attainment? How should place-based programs be constructed to best improve attainment?*

Required Readings:

Hillman, N. (2016). Geography of college opportunity: The case of education deserts. *American Educational Research Journal*, 53(4), 1-35. (Canvas)

What's the problem?

What are potential solutions?

Miller-Adams (2015). *Promise nation: Transforming communities through place-based scholarships*. Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research. Chapters 1-2 & 4-5 (Canvas)

Henig, J.R., Riehl, C.J., Houston, D.M., Rebell, M.A., & Wolff, J.R. (2016). Collective impact and the new generation of cross-sector collaborations for education: A nationwide scan. New York, NY: Teacher's College, Columbia University. Retrieved from <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Collective-Impact-and-the-New-Generation-of-Cross-Sector-Collaboration-for-Education.pdf> (Canvas)

---

**Class 10: Final Presentations & Reflections**  
**Thursday,**  
**June 21**

Assignment Final Paper (submit to Canvas by 10am)  
Due:

---