

Social Justice in K-12 Education: Addressing Opportunity Gaps and Advocating for Change (fully online)

Partnerships with

- [Portland Youth Builders](#)
- [James John \(K-5\) SUN Program](#)
- [Community Partners for Affordable Housing \(after school program\)](#)
- [Wilkes \(K-5\) SUN Program](#)
- [King \(K-8\) SUN Program](#)
- [And More...](#)

100% Online Course

NOTE: This is an online course; you will be expected to fully participate throughout the term in all online and community-based portions of the class. This is a 6-credit course, and the workload will be non-traditional in its format (discussion facilitation, a team project, volunteering in the community, advocacy work, etc.). However, please expect to spend the same amount of time as you would in a face-to-face class (both inside of D2L and out) in our online classroom and in the community.

Instructor & Email: [Zapoura Newton-Calvert \(zapoura@pdx.edu\)](mailto:zapoura@pdx.edu)

Office Hours: [By appointment \(CH 117R, Google Voice or cel.ly\)](#)

Since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, the “achievement gap” has been at the forefront of discussions about school equity. The public has been tuned into this so-called “achievement gap” alongside shocking high school dropout rates, lack of access to equitable early childhood education, public disinvestment in the education system, disparities in access to higher education, and more. According to the Children’s Defense Fund’s *2012 State of America’s Children Report*, the gaps (more accurately and truthfully described as opportunity, wealth, or access gaps) between high and low income students is 30-40% greater now than a generation ago. This same report details that a lack of access to early childhood education can lead to 25% of at-risk youth dropping out and 60% never accessing higher education. This study goes on to state that while 76% of high school students graduate within four years, only 2/3 of black and Latino students graduate within this same time frame (Children’s Defense Fund).

While NCLB’s and Common Core standard’s emphasis on the “achievement gap” has admittedly been helpful in spotlighting underserved students in our nation’s public schools, critical race theorist Dr. Camika Royal’s attention to “wealth gaps” and American Federation for Children’s Kevin Chavous’ “opportunity gap” model are more helpful as frameworks for understanding systemic inequities that lead to disparities in public school education. In this Capstone, we will frame our exploration by looking at four wealth/opportunity gaps (international, racial, economic, and systemic) as students work in community education sites with the goal of ultimately becoming more deeply engaged in local and national communities through their social change work.

The Social Justice in K-12 Education Capstone is a fully online model focused on (1) current local and national education issues, (2) educational equity in public education, and (3) hands-on and virtual tools for transformative social action. Capstone students will volunteer either in a hands-on or virtual placements working directly with youth or with an education advocacy organization (in the case of virtual placement). There will be four different tracks for participants. Each participant will pick a custom track that works for him/her:

1. Local (Portland Metro Area) Face-to-Face Work with Long-Standing Community Partners

These will include the partnerships listed above. Placement will be facilitated by the instructor, who has a longstanding partnership with these organizations.

2. Out-of-Area National or Global Face-to-Face Work (elsewhere in Oregon, the nation, or abroad).

Students will be guided through various volunteer guides and search engines to find their own placement through a local education non-profit or school. Students will be given email and phone scripts in addition to information on other protocols for contact and modes of introduction/communication. Contracts will be signed and submitted, and a phone or email consult between the community partner and instructor is also required.

3. 100% Virtual Volunteer Work (this work will occur with a student-chosen organization from a carefully selected and vetted list compiled by the instructor). This virtual volunteer work will be preliminary related to research, writing, and social media work to support schools and non-profits in outreach, fundraising (etc.) and may also include tutoring/mentoring for Oregon's online charter school or other such public institutions. Students will be given email and phone scripts in addition to information on other protocols for contact and modes of introduction/communication. Contracts will be signed and submitted, and a phone or email consult between the community partner and instructor is also required. This option is possible with a lot of leg work on the part of the student. Start early and be persistent if choosing this option!

Note: Students must contact the instructor via email (Zapoura@pdx.edu) OR phone (971-270-4962) as soon as they register for the class for a conversation about the online format and about community site placement options. After initial contact, the instructor will send students a toolkit for community placement and for the technology used in the course!

INSTRUCTOR'S ROLE

My job, as your Capstone instructor, is to serve as a facilitator and advisor for your experience. Our work in our online learning spaces should build a context for thinking more deeply as you provide support to the community. This is a community-based class not only in your volunteer work but also in the classroom. The class community is built by all of us in an open, honest, and critical space and requires participation from the entire group for full learning to occur.

PSU VOLUNTEER ROLES:

PSU students will spend 30 hours of volunteer work in the community, including tutoring, mentoring, classroom assistance and team project work.

- **Hands-on or Virtual Service** (at least 2-3 hours a week at your placement site)
- **The Participating in Community (PIC) Team Project Work** (your hours will vary depending on the scope of your project)

Your weekly hands-on and group work participation will be documented in your weekly journal.

TEXTS/READINGS:

- *The Flat World and Education: How America's Commitment to Equity Will Determine Our Future* (Linda Darling-Hammond)
- D2L Weekly Content: Our D2L site will contain links to additional course readings AND we will crowd source some weekly readings as part of our online work together.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS/EVALUATION:

Your evaluation is based on all of the criteria for course requirements and policies. However, as indicated in the Student Capstone Guide, you are not evaluated only on the service aspects of the course in themselves, but on the learning demonstrated by your contributions to group work and the quality of group and individual written production and/or oral presentations.

This Capstone is evaluated using a number of American Academy of Colleges and Universities VALUE Rubrics (all are included in our D2L course shell). Within each 8-point rubric, there are the following three categories:

1. Emerging (3-4 range) (B-/B)
2. Proficient (5-6 range) (A-/A)
3. Exemplary (7-8 range) (A+)

In the first two weeks of the course, you will have the opportunity to look at the evaluation rubrics and evaluation methods of the class thoroughly. You will take part in a variety of evaluation methods: self-evaluation, work sample submission, peer evaluation, evaluation from the community partner site, and instructor feedback.

If you fall below the "Emerging" range on any piece of coursework, we will discuss the work and talk about ways to get into the Emerging-Proficient range. All students are expected to fall in the Emerging-Proficient range in the majority of their course work across all categories of our Capstone learning.

ONLINE COURSE LEARNING AND PARTICIPATION (40% of final evaluation)

Your final evaluation is a reflection of your work as a critical thinker, learner, speaker, and writer on topics surrounding public school education. You will participate in two different interactions with the group each week: class discussion in Voice Thread AND public discussion in reading or initiating a post (related to our weekly Voice Thread topic) in the PDX Educational Action Network blog. All discussions are asynchronous but do need to take place within the week that they are initiated. This is an active class even though it's online 😊

Weekly Participation and Interaction (25%)

- Participation: This is a 100% online course. You are required to participate in weekly online discussions and in weekly online coursework.
- Weekly Discussion Participation: A big part of community-based courses is the class discussion and information sharing, which will take place in our course via a tool called Voice Thread, where students can participate in discussion through text, video, or audio (a lively space)! We will also be sharing information and conversation with the public via my Capstone's PDX Education Action Network blog.
 - Participation is required weekly. You will be given a "complete" (5 points) or "incomplete" (0 points) grade for each week's discussion work (in Voice Thread and on the PDXEAN blog). You will compile, self-evaluate, and submit a work sample of your discussion participation in Week 5 and Week 9 of the term; at that point, you will also receive substantial feedback on your participation from the instructor.
 -

Co-Facilitating Voice Thread Discussion (15%) (once in the term)

- The core content on each week's theme will be provided by the instructor (via links in D2L) and by the course text. I will also initiate conversation with prompts each week. Along with this provided content, each student will sign up to co-facilitate one week's discussion. Instructions will be provided. Discussion will happen via Voice Thread.

Initiating a PDX Education Action Network Post/Discussion (extra credit)

- Post a blog post related to the week's education theme for extra credit. Connect to local activism on the theme, local activity related to the theme, national activity related to the theme, etc. Email the instructor for more details. All extra credit posts must be up BEFORE the start of Week 8.

SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE LEARNING (60% of final grade)

This portion of your grade will be evidenced in your interactions with your community partner and with one another in Participating in Community (PIC) team project (together totaling at least 30 hours).

Documentation of this work will take place in (a) the signed community-based learning agreement, mid-term community partner check-in, and an end-of-term community partner review; (b) weekly journal reflections on your work ending in a culminating reflection at the end of the term in lieu of a final; and (c) weekly documentation of team work ending in a final Inspire slideshow to be shared in the final week of the term.

Hands-on or Virtual Volunteer Hours:

- Before the term begins, we will be solidifying your community placements and the volunteer schedule for the term. You will be able to choose the days and times you will volunteer each week. These should be consistent week-to-week.
- If you are ill or not able to attend your community placement, please directly contact the community partner to let them know in advance.
- It is critical that you do not miss or be late to your sessions. The community partners and the students will be depending on you; also, you will be representing PSU in the community, so responsible behavior is obviously essential.

Participating in Community (PIC) Team Project: Moving Along the Spectrum of Community Involvement (15%)

- The PIC project will be detailed in D2L content. Students will self-select into theme-based teams and will devise their own face-to-face or virtual project to expand their community engagement using the Spectrum of Engagement as a model.
- Volunteering on site with our various community partners is a primary focus of our learning this term. Beyond your learning as tutors/mentors/support volunteers with our community partners, we will also be talking about and developing skills around the bigger picture of civic engagement and how to get involved in the community. Group PIC projects will vary by group. Specific guidance and prompts for the group project will be given in Week 1 or 2 of the course.

Policies:

Presence & Participation:

Consistent weekly participation is expected and required both in class and with your community partner. The community partners and the students will be depending on you; also, you will be representing PSU in the community, so responsible behavior is obviously essential. The Capstone handbook (a link appears in CONTENT) will contain rules around this.

Notify in advance if you must miss a session of your volunteer work.

More than 1 week of lack of participation (equal to 1 PSU absence) will lower your grade by one grade (i.e., B becomes B-). Two or more "absences" (weeks of lack of traceable participation online) may result in failure or mandatory withdrawal.

Late Work: Late work is not accepted unless previous arrangements have been made at least 24 hours in advance.

Paper Format: Typed, double-spaced, proofread, thoughtful

Course Goals

As members of the Enhancing Youth Literacy learning community, students will

- become familiar with key issues in local education, national education, and education policy.
- identify processes, core concepts, and modes of action and engagement relevant to the key issues in education discussed in class
- empower themselves and each other to apply knowledge in those key issues as informed action in the community
- apply these civic engagement skills within hands-on community partner placement experiences and beyond (either within education or other key social justice issues impacting our community)
- use technology to mobilize, connect, and share information about educational equity

Through the course goals and outcomes, students will engage deeply with learning in the four key university studies areas: [inquiry and critical thinking](#), [communication](#), [diversity of human experience](#), and [ethics and social responsibility](#).

Course Outcomes

- Evaluate, analyze, and compare primary and secondary sources detailing key issues of education and educational equity in order to challenge assumptions about schools and learning in the U.S. Pieces of the AACU Critical Thinking rubric will be used for evaluation. ([UNST Inquiry and Critical Thinking Goal](#))
- Make connections between course materials and experience at the volunteer placement site and provide evidence through discussion and reflective writing of a willingness to challenge personal and systemic assumptions about our course's key education issues. ([UNST Inquiry and Critical Thinking and Diversity of Human Experience Goals](#))
- Learn and use diverse forms of communication (blogging, email, oral presentations, and letter writing) to nurture relationships within small groups, with the community partner, and with the larger public. In-class workshops on these forms will be included. ([UNST Communication Goal](#))
- Use multiple models/scales of intercultural sensitivity (including the Bennett scale) and understanding of the culture of power (from Lisa Delpit's "The Silenced Dialogue") to read, interpret, and discuss/write reflectively and to use these scales to analyze bias and privilege. ([UNST Diversity of Human Experience and Ethics and Social Responsibility Goals](#))
- Analyze written and hands-on best practices in community volunteering, outreach, and school reform and to develop modes or plans for future civic engagement on a small or big picture level (voting, continued activism, parenting practices, support for extended family, etc.) ([UNST Inquiry and Critical Thinking and Ethics and Social Responsibility Goals](#))
- To apply in-class and on-site learning to empower youth, the self, or others to initiate new content, create new partnership possibilities and/or take ownership of specific aspects of the of the small group work, role at the community partner site, and/or classroom discussion (online or face to face). Evidence of this work will take place in reflective journals and the culminating assignment. ([UNST Communication and Ethics and Social Responsibility Goals](#))

The overarching course rubric appears here: <http://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/pdf/CivicEngagement.pdf>.

