

Independent Study (SOC 600) Sample Proposal

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### **Brief course description**

A widely discussed topic in the sociology of education is the impact of teachers professional development programs on the student achievement gap. This self-directed course will facilitate my assessment of how coaching hours and peer-to-peer monitoring can improve the performance of students with low SES in public schools.

### **Learning goals / purpose of course**

My priorities for this quarter are twofold. My first goal is to produce a literature review so that I can situate my preliminary research questions within a broad debate about the achievement gap in public education. I plan to read widely about the social and psychological aspects of teacher career development, with a special interest in studies that focus on coaching and teacher collegiality. A particular attention to inequality in the school system and the role of parents' SES will also guide my readings. I will also consult publications that specifically discuss the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA) test and its reliability as an assessment tool for minority students. Secondly, I anticipate that a teacher's tenure and the number of coaching hours she has completed will be positively correlated with test scores, especially for students of low SES. I will use this course to estimate some statistical models that allow me to test this and other hypotheses.

### **Course structure and learning resources to be used**

Over the course of the quarter I will turn in three short reports (4 pages or less). Each report will consist of a brief summary of the works I will have read up to that point, with special attention to how their central arguments relate to my research questions.

I have already met with the professor to choose an appropriate reading list. In addition to relevant articles and books on the subject, I will use the New Jersey Board of Education's "Cycle I & II Score Interpretation Manual" as a reference in order to understand the intricacies of the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA) procedures and their interpretation in previous studies.

### **Meeting schedule**

The instructor and I have agreed to meet twice a month in order to discuss my progress and help me further develop my research agenda. My plan is to bring a list of questions and concerns to these meetings for clarification.

### **Expected outcome / product**

The three short reports will serve as a scaffold to think about appropriate statistical models and measures for a future project. My progressive work in this course will culminate in a 20-page paper, which will include a more extensive literature review and an interpretation of some preliminary statistical models.

### **Method of evaluation**

The professor will give me thorough and detailed feedback on each of the three short reports. I will also take full advantage of our frequent discussions to clarify my understanding of the major themes in the literature. In addition, I intend to present my work at an interdisciplinary conference organized by some graduate students from the college of Education.