

BEF 642: Studies in the Philosophy of Education

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The vision of the College of Education (COE) at The University of Alabama is to develop effective, ethical, and reflective professionals who advance the theme of the COE: Unites, Acts, and Leads (UA Leads). By engaging in theoretically informed and intellectually advanced effective practice our graduates will

UNITE with the larger community to collaboratively nurture cultural competence, empathy, and a vision of equity and justice for all learners;

ACT to develop the full potential of all learners to be excellent professionals in their field; and

LEAD through continuous research-based critical inquiry of policy and reflective practice to enable transformative change in our diverse local and global communities.



Expanded Catalog Description:

This course provides in-depth analyses of important individuals, ideas, or concepts that have helped to develop, expand, or shed light on the philosophical understanding of the myriad and contested purposes, policies, and practices of education. The course provides an advanced study of the philosophy of education, providing students with the philosophical tools necessary to develop their own philosophies of education and to critique educational policies, practices, and ideals. To accomplish this overarching objective of the course, different instructors may choose to use the tools on a variety of topics or points of interest. In this section of the course, we will draw on political philosophy -- particularly notions of distributive justice -- to analyze, inform, and refine conceptualizations of a philosophical ideal: equal educational opportunity.

Course Overview:

The discipline of Philosophy (in Education)

Philosophers of education have applied their skill in analyzing arguments, assessing the status of knowledge claims, exposing assumptions, and making syntheses of ideas from disparate fields, to throw light on all manner of educational challenges and on the validity of the very things they themselves are trying to argue as philosophers. Drawing upon the techniques devised within the

discipline, philosophers engage in the conceptual project of working out some general, systematic, coherent, and consistent picture of all that we know and think. This work has occurred, broadly speaking, within three traditions: the metaphysical, the analytical, and the normative.

Metaphysics addresses the many questions that arise about what lies beyond the physical world of sensory experience. What is the essence of beauty? Was there a prime mover of the universe? What are the features of human nature? Questions of truth and knowledge, epistemology, are important to philosophers as they consider curricular questions such as what to teach and why. Questions of human nature and other questions of ontology hold equal importance for the philosopher of education. For if society is, as Plato suggested, the individual writ large, the education of people for that society must take on specific characteristics.

What we now term “analytical philosophy” surfaced in great part from Aristotle’s work on ethics. Indeed, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, in which Aristotle was trying to analyze or explain the use of certain moral terms that occur in everyday speech in a more clear and consistent way than the layperson could do, might appropriately be identified as one of the earliest essays in this field. In education, analytic philosophy has made substantial contributions in elucidating a number of concepts including “authority,” “indoctrination,” and even such seemingly accepted popular terms as “teaching” and “education.” As Burbules has pointed out, “This method specialized in offering fine-grained distinctions and typologies; diagnosing hidden equivocations or blurriness in the ordinary concepts found within educational slogans or clichés...”

Within the normative tradition of philosophy, the philosopher, having reached some conclusions in her or his metaphysical investigations and having come to a common understanding of the terms through the application of analytical philosophy, might attempt to establish norms, standards, or guidelines for the conduct of human affairs. Philosophers of education carry out this same project in their examination of the aims, goals, or standards for schooling. Arguably, it is this step by which is drawn the very fine line between theory (mainly social theory) and philosophy.

To these descriptions, a couple of disclaimers must be added. First, having demarcated these three traditions, it must now be said that it is most inappropriate to do so. When engaging in any philosophical activity, these three traditions necessarily merge with and cross over each other in myriad ways. (Plato’s *Republic* is the quintessential example of this.) Second, often what is considered “‘philosophy’ of education” is not philosophical in a technical sense. It is what might properly be described as deep, cultured reflection. In fact, some of the most influential “‘philosophers of education” have provided us invaluable non-philosophical philosophies of education including John Locke (*Some Thoughts Concerning Education*), A. S. Neill (*Summerhill*), and Paolo Freire (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*). This tells us simply that “What is philosophy of education?” is a complex, deeply philosophical question itself and one to be explored in this course.

We can explore this question both philosophically and as cultured reflectors. What does “philosophy of education” assume about the nature of philosophy? What does it assume about its relation to educational concerns? In this examination, we will arrive at many questions that the

philosophy of education is meant to address and provide us guidance in answering. What should we teach in schools? How should we teach it? Why should we teach it? To whom should we teach it? The philosophy of education, as a field of inquiry, then, should provide us with systematic and coherent justifications for our educational practices and commitments. From this broad conception, we can focus in on specific principles or ideals to be addressed through philosophical thought.

Equal (Educational) Opportunity: Where we're looking for it

One principle to be addressed through philosophical thought is that of equal educational opportunity. In this class we shall assume, as other philosophers, that “(1) equal educational opportunity is best construed as a principle that dictates the distribution of educational resources, and (2) how the principle is interpreted (or how binding it is) depends on the broader political theory in which it is embedded” (Howe, 1989, p. 326).

The principle of equal educational opportunity is almost universally endorsed in current educational policy arenas. In the U.S., this has been the case at least since the Brown decision of 1954. At the same time (and perhaps because it is so widely endorsed), the question of precisely what this principle means and requires has been a source of ongoing controversy.

Also widely endorsed is the idea that equal educational opportunity is a pre-requisite of equal opportunity generally (or vice versa?). Even though equal educational opportunity is a pre-requisite to equal opportunity, we will follow Plato's example and begin with the larger or broader picture first. Thus, in the first half of the class, we will engage in an examination of a number of political theories that inform the general notion of equal opportunity. Specifically, we will consider the dominant strands of 20th century liberal political philosophy-- utilitarianism, libertarianism, and liberal egalitarianism--and their points of agreement and disagreement. We will also examine communitarian and Neo-Marxist criticisms, as well as some others, of the liberal tradition.

In 1971 John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* arguably marked the rebirth of normative political philosophy. As such, many of the authors we will read employ a Rawlsian framework or use Rawls as a point of departure or as a foil. We will, therefore, consider Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*, or at least the foundational concepts of his Theory. Before that, however, it is necessary to consider Rawls' desired primary audience: utilitarians. Finally, throughout much of this unit we will use Lesley Jacob's three-pronged model of equal opportunity as a point of reference. By the end of the first half (or so) of class, we will have a certainly imperfect but fairly specific conceptualization of “equal opportunity,” and we will have had a chance to consider applications, again imperfect, of that conceptualization. We will have also begun some initial ruminations about what equal *educational* opportunity might mean.

In the second half of the class we will continue to use Jacobs as a segue to move into the task of defining equal *educational* opportunity directly and, hopefully, more precisely. To aid in this, we will look at the present state of public education vis a vis equality. Using *Brown v. Board* as an example of one iteration of equal educational opportunity, we will begin to explore both what equal educational opportunity has meant and what it should mean. A particular controversy here

was stimulated largely by James Coleman, who raised the issue of whether to conceive equal educational opportunity in terms of equality of inputs or equality of outcomes. We will consider these and other criteria. While this course is devoted to a sustained, philosophical investigation of equal educational opportunity, the mystery of the course is whether or not we will actually be able to delimit, define, and philosophically defend our own or some version of that principle.

Doing so should be made somewhat less abstract by considering, in the third half of class, specific education policies designed to promote equal educational opportunity (e.g., K-12 policies such as tracking, schools of choice/vouchers, special education, gifted education, standards and assessment; higher education policies in admissions requirements and procedures and affirmative hiring; and broad K-16 issues such as gender equality, sexual orientation, and multiculturalism). The ability to apply various politico-philosophical lenses to such issues will enable us to explain away or to justify more fully some political lenses over others, thus deepening the philosophical roots of our ultimate conceptualization of equal educational opportunity.

Course Requirements:

1. Reading questions are provided for every class period. You should be prepared to respond to these questions. This preparation does not require full written, formal responses. Prepare a 5x7 index card with a [micro-essay](#) on one side, with key terms/concepts underlined. On the other side, provide at least one question to pose to the class regarding the reading. This should not be a regurgitation-type question (e.g., How does author X define Y on page 37?). It should be something for which you truly need clarification and/or something that challenges the class to think more deeply about the ideas presented.

2. Participate in class. Both quantity and quality count. The occasional short writing assignment will be included in your participation grade. The micro-essay will be waived when such assignments arise.

3. Write a paper or develop some other scholarly project. Below are a few **options** for a final project. You may choose any one as outlined here or come up with something else (for which you will need to get my approval). Basically, I want you to have a project that will benefit you the most in your broader degree studies. (You may, if you choose, develop your final project with a partner.) *Due electronically or hard copy December 12, 5:00.*

Option A: Write an essay review of a book of your choosing that discusses EEO explicitly or deals with some aspect of EEO (an educational policy or practice designed to promote EEO, e.g.). I can help you determine a book to review.

An essay review should develop a thesis that links the book under consideration to the field and examines its strengths and weaknesses to support that thesis. For the purposes of this course, your thesis will come out of the conceptual framework you develop from the course readings, which will allow you to not only “examine” but to critique. The Harvard Education Review, lists some other things to consider in developing a good essay review including

-Does the review convey the content of the book, the author's approach to the subject, and the author's conclusions? The best reviews avoid a chapter-by-chapter listing of themes in favor of a more integrated approach:

-Does the review place the work in the context of its field and give a sense of the work's significance?

-Does the review present a balanced analysis of the book's strengths and weaknesses and illustrate those points with examples?

-Is the review written in a clear and lively style? The question of style is hard to define, but the best reviews illustrate that elusive quality which makes a piece both interesting and engaging.

Option B: Write a research paper on an educational policy or practice ostensibly designed to promote fair equality of (educational) opportunity (E.g., charter schools, vouchers, common core, graduation exams, ability grouping, tracking, college entrance exams, Honors Colleges, etc.). This will require a minimum of two outside resources (articles) on the topic. These can be philosophical/theoretical or empirical pieces. You should explain the practice or policy and its purpose, reveal its political grounding (what political theory gives this practice authority?), and defend or critique the practice by drawing further on political theory, and the extent to which the policy promotes EEO (i.e., the conceptualization of EEO you cleave to).

Option C: Design a school based on the political theory and definition of EEO of your choosing. You might take a local school with which you are familiar and use it as your foil. In this project you might include the development of a conceptual framework for your school (based on your political position), writing a mission statement, and describing what policies and practices would or would not be in place (e.g., gifted education, retention, etc.) and why. You need to have a minimum of two outside resources (articles) that research, analyze, and discuss “model” schools from which you can analyze the strengths and weaknesses of other schools in the development of your ideal school.

Option D: Time simply does not permit our consideration of all perspectives. However, those of you who are somewhat read in the area of post-structural/post-modern theory, may want to critique liberalism – and its resultant notions of equal opportunity – from this perspective. This will require a minimum of two outside resources (articles) on the topic. You might use Howe’s rather abrupt dismissal of post-structuralism as a point of departure. So, what is the post-structural critique of liberalism? How does/should this inform our notions of equal (educational) opportunity? Are the positions irreconcilable?

Grading:

Micro-essays	= 35 points	Final Paper	= 35 points
Participation	= 20 points	Presentation*	= 10 points

*of an abstract and outline of your final paper

Final Grades: 100-90, A; 89-80, B; 79-70, C...and so on.

General Policies:

Absences - High and chronic absenteeism also affects the dynamics of the class. Your attendance is required and absences will negatively affect your participation grade since you cannot participate if you do not attend. One absence will not affect your grade. Barring some sort of emergency or illness, all others will.

Statement of Equal Treatment and Disabilities – The instructors and students in this course will act with integrity and strive to engage in equitable verbal and non-verbal behavior with respect to differences arising from age, gender, race, nationality, language, physical ability, religious preferences, and sexual orientation. If you are registered with the Office of Disability Services, please make an appointment with the instructor as soon as possible to discuss any course accommodations that may be necessary. If you have a disability but have not contacted the Office of Disability Services, please call 354-5175 or visit Osband Hall to register for services.

Academic Misconduct – All acts of dishonesty in any work constitute academic misconduct. The Academic Misconduct Policy will be followed in the event of academic misconduct. Please see the University statement and policy regarding [plagiarism](#).

Required Texts:

Fishkin, J. (2014). *Bottlenecks: A New Theory of Equal Opportunity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 0199812144

Howe, K. R. (1997). *Understanding equal educational opportunity: Social justice, democracy and schooling*. New York: Teachers College Columbia University. 080773599X

Arthur, J. and Shaw, W. H. (1991). *Justice and Economic Distribution* (2nd Ed.). Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall. 0135142415

Select Additional Readings and Resources

Bell, D. (1993). *Communitarianism and its critics*. NY: Oxford University Press, Inc.

Benhabib, S. (1989). Liberal dialogue versus a critical theory of discursive legitimation. In Nancy L. Rosenblum (Ed.), *Liberalism and the moral life*, pp. 143-156. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Benhabib, S. (1999). The liberal imagination and the four dogmas of multiculturalism. *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 12(2), 401-413.

Boaz, S. (1997). *Libertarianism: A primer*. NY: The Free Press.

Bowles, S. & Gintis, H. (1976). Broken promises: School reform in Retrospect. In Bowles, S. & Gintis, H., *Schooling in capitalist America: Educational reform and the contradictions of economic life* (pp. 18-49). New York: Basic Books, Inc.

Bowles, S. & Gintis, H. (1989). Can there be a liberal philosophy of education in a democratic society? In Giroux, H. A., & McLaren, P. L., *Critical pedagogy, the state, and cultural struggle* (pp. 24-31, p. 255). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

- Bredo, E. (2002). How can philosophy of education be both viable and good? *Educational Theory*, 52(3), pp. 263-271.
- Brighouse, H., Howe, K. R., and Tooley, J. (2010). *Educational Equality* (2nd Ed.). New York: Continuum.
- Burbules, N. C., & Sherman, A. L. (1979). Equal educational opportunity: Ideal or ideology. In *Philosophy of Education 1979*, (pp. 105-114).
- Burbules, N. C. (1990). Equal opportunity or equal education? *Educational Theory*, 40(2), pp. 221-226.
- Cavanagh, M. (2002). *Against equality of opportunity*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Coleman, J. (1968). The concept of equality of educational opportunity. *Harvard Educational Review*, 38, 7-22.
- Eisenberg, A. (2006). Education and the politics of difference: Iris Young and the politics of education. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 1(38), 7-23.
- Ennis, R. H. (1976). Equality of educational opportunity. *Educational Theory*, 26(1), pp. 3-18.
- Fenstermacher, G. D. (2002). Should philosophers and educators be speaking to each other? *Educational Theory*, 52(3), pp. 339-348.
- Frazer, E. (1999). *The problems of communitarian politics: Unity and conflict*. NY: Oxford University Press.
- Guinier, L. (2004). From racial liberalism to racial literacy: Brown v. Board of Education and the interest-divergence dilemma. *The Journal of American History*, pp. 92-118.
- Gupta, N. (2001). Addressing persistent forms of oppression in a liberal democracy: A cultural approach to multiculturalism. *Philosophy of Education*, 300-307.
- Gutmann, A. (1999). *Democratic education*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Gutmann, A. (Ed.) (1994). *Multiculturalism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Howe, K. (1989). In defense of outcomes-based conceptions of equal educational opportunity. *Educational Theory*, 39(4), pp. 317-336.
- Howe, K. (1990). Equal opportunity is equal education (within limits). *Educational Theory*, 40(2), pp. 227-230.
- James, A. (1998). Communitarianism: What are implications for education? *Educational Studies*, 3(24), 353-368.

- Kymlicka, W. (1990). *Contemporary political philosophy: An introduction*. NY: Oxford University Press.
- Kymlicka, W. (1991). *Liberalism, community, and culture*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Kymlicka, W. (1995). *Multicultural citizenship*. NY: Oxford University Press.
- Maiese, M. "Distributive Justice." *Beyond Intractability*. Ed. Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess. Posted June 2003. Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado, USA. http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/distributive_justice/
- McQuillan, P. J. (1998). *Educational opportunity in an urban American high school: A cultural analysis*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Mill, J. S. (1979). *Utilitarianism* (G. Sher, Ed.). Cambridge, MA: Hackett Publishing Co.
- Newall, P. (2005). Introducing Philosophy 9: Political Philosophy. Retrieved from <http://www.galilean-library.org/manuscript.php?postid=43787>
- Nielsen, K. (1985). *Equality and liberty: A defense of radical egalitarianism*. Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Allanheld.
- Phillips, D. C. (June, 2008). "Philosophy of Education," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), Retrieved from <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/education-philosophy/>
- Noddings, N. (1984). *Caring, a feminine approach to ethics and moral education*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Noddings, N. (1992). Excellence as a guide to educational conversation. *Philosophy of Education*, 5-21.
- O'Neill, O. (1976). Opportunities, equalities and education. *Theory and Decision*, 7, 275-295.
- Rosenblum, N. L. (Ed.). (1989). *Liberalism and the moral life*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Rawls, J. (2001). *Justice as fairness: A restatement*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Shavelson, R. J., Baxter, G. P., & Pine, J. (1992). Performance assessments political rhetoric and measurement reality. *Educational Researcher*, 21, 22-27.
- Smart, J. J. C., & Williams, B. (1973). *Utilitarianism for and against*. NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Smith, S. (2002). A lower wall between church and state: Vouchers or charter schools? *Philosophy of Education*, 212-220.

Young, I. M. (1989). Polity and group difference: A critique of the ideal of universal citizenship. *Ethics*, 99(2), pp. 250-274.

Young, I. M. (1994). Comments on Seyla Benhabib, situating the self. *New German Critique*, 62, 165-172.

Course Schedule

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Reading</u> (Online, in J&ED, other class text)	<u>Reading Questions</u>
<i>Unit 1: Philosophy, Distributive Justice, and Equal Opportunity</i>			
8/22	Introduction to the course and to philosophical method, political philosophy, and philosophy of education	Phillips Maiese	What is the philosophical method? What is political philosophy? What is philosophy of education? What is justice? What does the political philosophy of distributive justice have to do with? Video : What is philosophy? (Note: A micro-essay is not required for these readings.)
8/29	Utilitarianism	Bentham , chs. 1-5 Mill , chs. 2 & 5	What is utilitarianism? What are the strengths and weaknesses of utilitarianism as a political philosophy? Can utilitarianism be seen as a philosophy of justice and/or, more specifically, as a theory of distributive justice? Probably one of the most powerful types of utilitarianism is “meritocratic utilitarianism.” Building on Mills, what do you think that is and what might it have to do with equal (educational) opportunity? <i>Video: Sandel on “The moral side of murder”</i>
9/5	Liberal Egalitarianism	Hobbes , Intro, chs. 13 & 14 Rawls	What is social contract theory? In what ways is Rawls’ project a response to utilitarians? Is it an improvement as a theory of distributive justice or not? How so or why not? How might you begin to apply Rawls to a conceptualization of equal educational opportunity?
9/12	Libertarianism, Utilitarianism (revisited), Libertarianism (reconsidered)	Nozick Smart Cohen	What are the libertarian and utilitarian critiques of liberal egalitarianism? What would equal (educational) opportunity consist of for a libertarian? Why would a liberal egalitarian (Rawls) have a problem with that? How does libertarianism fail according to Cohen? <i>Video: Political Philosophy</i>

9/19	Rawls as luck egalitarian and the problem of merit	Fishkin, pp. 1-82	What is a "luck egalitarian" and how might/should that inform a conceptualization of equal opportunity? How do luck egalitarians think about meritocratic order?
9/26	Radical Egalitarianism, Equal Opportunity, and the problem of merit (cont.)	Nielsen (pp. 45-99 and 148-87) <i>(In class exercise ... case studies to be read in class.)</i>	How does Nielsen's egalitarianism differ from Rawls'? In other words, what makes the former "radical" and the latter "liberal?" How does Rawls engage in utilitarian thinking according to Nielsen and how does he think about merit differently than Nozick and/or Fishkin?
10/3	Opportunities and "natural inequalities"	Fishkin, 83-129	What is the importance of a view of human nature to philosophy generally and EEO specifically? If there are no natural talents, to what extent can equalization be pursued? How is Fishkin's argument similar/different from Rawls' and what are the implications?

Unit 2: Pursuing Equal Educational Opportunity

10/10	Brown v Board and re-conceptualizing EEO	Brown v. Board Coleman Guinier	How is (might) EEO (be) defined by Coleman, by the justices in Brown v. Board, and by Guinier?
10/17	Defining EEO	Burbules & Sherman Howe Burbules*	ASSIGNMENT: WRITE A 2-3 PAGE RESPONSE AS HOWE TO BURBULES. (You may skip the micro-essay this week.)
10/24	Defining EEO as "opportunities worth wanting" (within communities?)	Sandel Arthur Howe (Chs. 1-2, and Conclusion) <i>In class reading: Mozert Case</i>	<p>What is the communitarian critique of liberalism? What must liberals do philosophically to withstand this critique? What does this mean to education generally and to a conception of EEO specifically?</p> <p>How does Howe "solve" the debate on whether EEO should be based on equality of inputs or equality of outcomes?</p> <p>How does Howe employ an egalitarian framework to build his argument toward his specific conceptualization of EEO? Is he more like Rawls or Nielsen? Why? 10</p> <p><i>Video: Sandel on "The claims of community"</i></p>

10/31	Gender, Feminism, and EEO	Friedman Howe (Ch. 3)	critiques of liberal egalitarianism. How does Howe explain the libertarian and utilitarian approaches away? Do you agree with his assessment of them? What is the basic argument (not position) provided by Howe and Jacobs regarding equal opportunity for women? What are the linkages between EEO (Howe) and EO (Jacobs)? How might Friedman's feminist critique of
11/7	The demands of multiculturalism on justice and EEO	Howe (Chs. 4-5) Gupta	Reviewing chs. 2-4 in Howe, what are the primary components and processes of the participatory ideal? Is Howe susceptible to Gupta's critique of providing a limited "political account" of equality? Why not or how so? In what ways and instances might "participation" differ for Howe and Gupta? If "recognition" and identity maintenance are key to equal opportunity generally (e.g., Jacobs) and the participatory ideal specifically, isn't integration counter-productive? <i>Due: Choice of paper topic and working title</i>
11/14	The politics of difference vs. the meritocratic order	Howe (Chs. 6-7) Eisenberg	All: What are the key contributions made by Iris Young (according to Howe and Eisenberg) and how do (should) they affect educational policy and conceptualizations of EEO? Why/how does Eisenberg distinguish between a politics of redistribution and a politics of difference? How would you solve this philosophically? Group 1 (TBD): How does standardized testing affect equal opportunity and equal educational opportunity? Presentations: 1-4
11/28		Fishkin, 130-197	What is "opportunity pluralism" and how does it inform a notion of EEO? In what ways is it (in)consistent with Howe's notion of EEO? Presentations: 5-9
12/5		Fishkin, 198-257 Smith	Group 2 (TBD): How does school choice promote/detract from EEO? Presentations: 10-13

