

NEW SPECIAL TOPICS COURSE

PRIVILEGE, INTELLIGENCE, MERIT, AMERICA

An open, experimental course in democratic education and dialogic pedagogy

What constitutes merit? The notion of meritocracy has long been at the heart of varied discourses about the place of education in American society. Merit is most often understood as inhering in consistent and individual personality traits such as competency, intelligence and diligence. And yet, every individual is embedded in complex social worlds that are culturally specific and historically contingent. For example, individual traits may be differently interpreted depending on the person's race/ethnicity, gender, or class; desirable traits in one historical period may be undesirable in another. Drawing on a broad array of disciplines and literatures, this special topics course challenges students to consider how ideas of merit and its measurement are shaped by American history, culture and society. Any such dialogue will further require a careful interrogation of related enactments of intelligence, privilege, and the United States as social landscape.

Our goals include broadening our understanding of how various articulations of merit come together to structure behaviors, institutions, and educational policies in contemporary, American settings. This will in turn allow for the critical reflection of personal experiences on merit and speculation on alternative means of its operationalization.

WHAT IS AN OPEN COURSE?

Based on the works of Freire, Habermas, and Bakhtin, this course will take seriously the notion of "dialogic pedagogy" in which meaningful educational experience requires student dialogues and participation on a fundamental level. Thus students are thus invited to democratically build consensus, contribute to the design and structure of the course, implement its content, and even determine how merit will be evaluated in this space. The instructor remains a central actor and facilitator, but the space belongs to the group as a whole.



Topics include: genius and mediocrity; race, class and gender; cultural aspects of metrics and measurement; intelligence(s); aspiration and pathways to privilege; competencies and grit; white privilege, participation, (the myth of?) meritocracy, and more.

NEW COURSE SPRING 2015

Mondays

10:00 am to 12:00 pm

EDUC545.001

For more information, contact Dr. Alex Posecznick at alpos@gse.upenn.edu

Dr. Posecznick's expertise is in cultural anthropology, qualitative methods and post-secondary educational settings. He examines institutional culture, policy, and practice ethnographically, with particular emphasis on the social construction of legitimacy, privilege, merit, gatekeeping, access, equity and opportunity. Dr. Posecznick's interest in educational bureaucracies highlights the ways that peripheral institutions and systems both shape and are shaped by the individuals who move through them. This has also led him to explore the production of the neoliberal subject in post-secondary settings, as well as entrée into professional (and other) identities through post-secondary education.

