

Psychology 84: Abilities, Giftedness, and Genius: The Psychology of High Achievement. Spring, 2013

Rogers Elliott

Office hours by appointment

This course concerns limits to the equality of the opportunity to achieve conventional success that are imposed by individual differences, primarily in mental abilities, but also in personality traits. We will examine the nature of the measures of such traits and abilities, and the controversies that have accompanied both the measures and the differences, especially with regard to heritability, validity, bias, and importance. The first text (Intelligence: a Very Short Introduction) and the articles accompanying it, provide the basic knowledge with which to approach these questions. The second text (Real Education) and several other articles and chapters summarize and highlight various aspects of the educational policy arguments that attend differences in intelligence and other traits important to success.

These include two that will be of special interest in this course: the question of meritocracy (the development and transmission of social stratification based upon intelligence and other traits known to be important to success), and the related question of education, which is now the great sorting mechanism for economic and other forms of success. To what extent can education, and should education, try to narrow ability differences? Or conversely, to what extent can it or should it widen them? A related question has to do with the education of talented children in the K-12 period, and the sorting of students in post-secondary education. Two topics concern salient issues attendant on group differences. The first has to do with the relatively low achievement of African Americans, Hispanics, and American Indians. The second concerns what might be called the Larry Summers problem: why is the achievement of women in some sciences (and in other fields as well) not close to that of men, and how much, if at all, might it be a matter of discrimination?

I'll be asking you, individually and collectively, to provide an account of how intelligence (especially), energy, special talent, personality, culture, and socio-economic conditions combine to produce the differences we see in life's outcomes (including the special and mysterious case of genius); and what, if anything, should or could be done about them by the education system.

The assessment of your work in this course will be based largely on papers in which you will typically write defensible summaries of your readings or of policy positions: i.e., positions taken after reasonable consideration of various arguments based on the readings and lectures in response to some problem I will set for you. In addition, each student will make two presentations. The first will be a lecture on one of the topics in the syllabus: for example, the debates about IQ, or testing, or tracking in schools, or affirmative action. You will also choose from our study area a topic of your choice (with my advice and consent) and give a research presentation about it. In a seminar, each student learns much from, and contributes much to, the lectures, presentations, and discussions. None of this will happen if you are not there. Your contributions to the class, in the forms of presentations and participation, will also provide a substantial basis for evaluation.

Calendar 2013: Dates and events subject to some change

- March 26 Introduction to the course
- Readings: Meritocracy packet.
- March 28 Intelligence and its Measurement: Some basic concepts: reliability, stability, validity, bias; the nature and importance of individual differences; myths and realities about testing.
- Readings: Deary: a Word about Correlation; Ch. 1
Murray: Chs. 1, 2
Humphreys (Commentary)
Kuncel and Hazlett
Sackett et al. (High Stakes Testing in Higher Education...)
- April 2 Correlates of g: elementary cognitive processes; brain
- Readings: Deary: chapters 2,3.
Various handouts
- April 4 Heredity, environment, and possibilities for change.
- Readings: Deary, chapters 4,6,7
Ridley on nature via nurture
Lykken: The Genetics of Genius
Brody: IQ and Policy
Various handouts
- April 9 , 11 Life correlates of g: schools, work, SES, and other matters
- Readings: Deary: chapter 5
Various handouts
- HAND OUT PROBLEM ONE
- April 16 Group Differences in Test Scores
Various handouts
- April 18 The Condition of Education
The Possibilities for Reform
Murray: Review Ch. 2, read Ch. 5
Various handouts

HAND IN PROBLEM ONE

April 23 At the Right Tail: Gifted Education and College admissions
 Murray: Chs. 3, 4.
 Various handouts

April 25, April 30 Affirmative Action and Diversity
 Papers by Cohen, Glazer, Sanders, Elliott and others
 or
 Mismatch

HAND OUT PROBLEM TWO

May 2 Women, Science, and The Larry Summers Problem

Readings: Browne: (Women in Science)
 Strenta et al., (Choosing and Leaving Science...)
 What Summers actually said, and other interesting pieces

May 6 Is the underrepresentation of women in the STEM
 fields the result of discrimination?
 Articles by Ceci and Williams
 Several handouts

HAND IN PROBLEM TWO

HAND OUT PROBLEM THREE

May 8 Prepare for research presentations

May 13 First set of research presentations

May 15 Second set of research presentations

May 20 Third set of research presentations

HAND IN PROBLEM THREE

May 22 Fourth set of research presentations

May 27 Final research presentations