AGS 825 | Leading School-Community Partnerships

Spring 2025 | McKeown School of Education | Online, Hybrid

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Credit: Josh McPhee | https://justseeds.org/artist/joshmacphee/ | Instagram: @jmacphee

Course Description

In order to facilitate lasting and meaningful change, aspiring school leaders need the tools and frameworks to support them in this work, which ultimately helps to improve organizational practice, capacity, and culture. In this course, aspiring school leaders will learn how to make strong connections within the school community, and among the school, local community, and community-based organizations. Partnering with families and local organizations is crucial to building organizational capacity in schools. In this course, students will learn tools and frameworks that can help them to forge meaningful, lasting school-community partnerships that benefit all levels of the school organization and also support change processes. *3 credit hours*

Course Goals

In this course, students will:

1. Interrogate their own experiences with school-community partnerships and how these experiences resonate in their leadership development
2. Analyze frameworks for understanding the relationships between schools, families, and communities
3. Explore a range of exemplary models for family and community engagement and consider how they could be adapted to their unique contexts
4. Make their thinking and practice public through presenting and providing feedback on authentic dilemmas related to family-community engagement
5. Develop a plan for building or deepening school-community partnerships that extends course concepts

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Develop new connections (or deepen existing partnerships) between schools and the full range of family and community stakeholders
2. Interpret and apply research-based practices to the design of school-based programs and interventions related to family and community engagement
3. Provide substantive feedback to educators on the quality of school-community interactions, with particular attention to cultural responsiveness and inclusion
4. Critique one's own actions, reactions, or non-actions to ensure a humble and open stance when building relationships with families and communities

Required Text

There is one required text. Consider purchasing it from an independent bookstore [Bookshop.org]. It is also available as an e-book through the Berry Library. Additional readings will be posted on Canvas.

- Soo Hong, 2019, *Natural Allies: Hope and Possibility in Teacher-Family Partnerships*. Harvard Education Press.

Note on (Online) Teaching and Learning in the Wake of COVID-19

The most important and enduring legacy of Covid for me, as a teacher, has been a shift in my priorities. I care a lot about what we are learning together, but *my first priority is your well-being*, both physically and mentally. If you experience any challenges affecting your work in this course, please tell me as soon as possible. I don't need to know details. I only need to know that you need to discuss alternative arrangements to help you get the most from the course. And if you are experiencing challenges more generally, I am happy to connect you with the resources you need.

Also, a word about online learning. I understand distractions may impose at times. As such, I welcome children, siblings, roommates, pets, or wandering guests and understand if/when you need to step away briefly to take care of yourself or others. However, please make every effort to be fully present during synchronous sessions. Please keep your cameras on as much as possible. Please do not attend class while driving or attending a swim meet or making dinner. We all benefit when you bring your full self to class.

Course Format (Online, Blended)

This course has an online, blended format. Some work will happen asynchronously, working independently and at your own pace, but we will also meet as a group five times. Synchronous sessions will be held on Zoom, from 5:00-8:00 pm on the dates below.

- Thursday, January 16
- Thursday, January 23
- Thursday, February 6
- Thursday, February 27
- Thursday, March 6

Attendance

Please make every effort to attend our synchronous sessions. The learning of the group is made better when everyone contributes. That said, I do recognize that sometimes an absence is unavoidable. In this event, please reach out to me with as much notice as possible so that we can make alternative arrangements, if necessary, and ensure you stay up to date on course assignments.

Crew

As perhaps with other courses in the program, you will be assigned to a 3-4 person "crew." As a crew, you will be responsible for the learning of the group and for the learning of each member. Your online reflections will be posted to a crew discussion board. Small group conversations during our synchronous sessions will be held in crew. Consider these colleagues your first sounding board and your support network. As a crew, plan to model "expedition behavior" for each other.

Course Requirements

In addition to attending our synchronous sessions, you should expect to spend approximately two (2) hours per week on reading, written reflections, and other course assignments. *There is no final exam*.

Specifications Grading

In this course – as with all courses in this program – the focus of your efforts should be on *your learning*. I want you to take chances, to be unsure and uncomfortable (and to be okay with that), to challenge what you may have previously thought, to challenge what I think and what the authors we read think, and to struggle when using new ideas for the first time.

In line with these values, I use *specifications grading*, which is designed to shift your attention away from earning grades and towards learning and risk-taking. For each assignment, I will provide guidelines to help you know what is expected. I will also give you substantive feedback on your work in many forms throughout the course. Each task will be graded "complete" or "incomplete," and the following list outlines the tasks you must complete to earn particular grades. All listed criteria need to be met within a grade category to earn that grade.

Note that both the Core Assessment and autobiography must be completed to pass the course.

To receive an A
- Attend all five synchronous sessions (excused absences don't count as missed)
- Complete all five reading reflections (with all five responses)
- Complete all three required Core Assessment memos
- Complete the family-community engagement autobiography
- Complete the final Core Assessment

To receive an A-
- Complete all work required of an A, except for no more than two of the following:
  - A reading reflection
  - A reading reflection response
  - A Core Assessment memo

To receive a B+
- Complete all work required of an A, except for no more than three of the following:
  - A reading reflection
  - A reading reflection response
  - A Core Assessment memo

To receive a B
- Complete all work required of an A, except for no more than four of the following:
  - A reading reflection
  - A reading reflection response
  - A Core Assessment memo

To receive a B-
- Complete all work required of an A, except for no more than five of the following:
  - A reading reflection
  - A reading reflection response
  - A Core Assessment memo

To receive a C+
- Complete all work required of an A, except for no more than six of the following:
  - A reading reflection
  - A reading reflection response
  - A Core Assessment memo

To receive a C
- Complete all work required of an A, except for no more than seven of the following:
  - A reading reflection
  - A reading reflection response
  - A Core Assessment memo

To receive a D
- Complete all work required of an A, except for no more than eight of the following:
  - A reading reflection
  - A reading reflection response
  - A Core Assessment memo

If you are interested in learning more about this form of grading, here are a couple of books and a blog post that detail the logic and some of the mechanics:

- Blum, Susan D. (2020). *Ungrading: Why Rating Students Undermines Learning (and What to Do Instead)*. West Virginia University Press.
- Nilson, Linda B. (2015). *Specifications Grading: Restoring Rigor, Motivating Students, and Saving Faculty Time*. Stylus Publishing.
- Stommel, Jesse. (2018). How to ungrade. Retrieved from https://www.jessestommel.com/how-to-ungrade/

Using AI

AI tools, like ChatGPT, can be a helpful resource when gathering information, generating ideas, and crafting and refining your writing. For this reason, I encourage you to make use of these tools if/when you think it appropriate (though I encourage you even more to make use of the thoughtful, responsive humans available to support you – including in your crew or the Mary G. Walsh Writing Center). When using AI in an academic context, it is critical to distinguish your ideas from ideas generated by a tool like ChatGPT. When submitting work for this course, you must clearly identify any writing, text, or media generated by AI, by including a paragraph with your submission explaining (a) what tool(s) you used, (b) what prompts you asked, and (c) how you integrated the output into your work. Finally, be mindful that AI-generated materials are prone to errors or bias. You are responsible for any information you submit based on an AI prompt, which means you are responsible for fact-checking and verifying information.

Please contact me if you have questions about AI use or citation. Submitting AI-generated work without identifying it as such will be considered a violation of SSU's Academic Integrity Policy, which could negatively impact your grade on affected assignments or in the course overall.

A Note About Resistance and Learning

Having spent many years in school myself, I can say that my best learning did not happen when I was comfortable. Rather, my best learning happened when I spoke up or asked hard questions or challenged what I was hearing. I often resisted these impulses, whether out of shyness or deference to authority, but *that impulse is important*! During this course, you may have moments when you feel yourself pushing back against ideas that I share or that you read about. That resistance holds something important for you to learn and to make sense of. In your spoken or written contributions to this class, please speak or write about *that* – that resistance – and not what you think I want to hear. Doing so, I believe, will benefit your learning and mine.

Course Rhythms

This course will be run using learning modules on Canvas. New modules will open after class each week, with work generally due the following Thursday. Accompanying each module will be a short overview of the week's readings and assignments. I recommend that you read these first. Occasionally there may also be intermediary deadlines. Recognizing your busy lives as educators, please be in touch ahead of deadlines if you require an adjustment. However, staying on track with the course is important, particularly given our compacted schedule.

Course Requirement Details

Weekly participation and engagement

Each week, you will be asked to read or watch material related to the course. Please post your reflections on the material no later than Tuesday at midnight to your crew-based discussion boards. I will offer some question prompts, but you may respond to any aspect of the material that strikes you as important or provocative. In addition, by Thursday at noon, please respond to at least one of your

crewmates' reflections, building on their comments or making connections to your own experience or to course concepts. Some weeks, you will also be asked to draft some thoughts pertaining to the Core Assessment #4. These will be uploaded to a dropbox on Canvas, and I may give you feedback on these.

Family-Community Engagement Autobiography

Our capacity to engage deeply in the work of leading school-community partnerships means first interrogating and reflecting on the embedded narratives, assumptions, and beliefs associated with the relationships between families and schools (what Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot calls "ghosts"). In this assignment, you will reflect on how your family members, when you were a student, were connected to school. In addition, you will consider how these patterns of engagement – positive or negative or both – have informed your own interactions with families as an educator.

Community Connections Proposal: Core Assessment #4

The final project for this course is the completion of Core Assessment #4, a proposal for meaningful community partnership that will enhance learning in your department or school. The assessment will be scaffolded over the full span of the course, through class discussions and written updates submitted to me. Throughout the course, you will have multiple opportunities for feedback and the development of your ideas. Further guidelines will be provided in class.

PROPOSED SCHEDULE

This overview is a guide for the semester. It represents the core work and the readings for our time together. I may adjust the syllabus to respond to your needs across the semester. Please stay up-to-date by checking the Canvas site regularly.

Rows shaded grey in the table represent online modules when we will not meet in person.

Date	Topic	Readings Due	Assignments Due
Week 1 Jan 16	*What We Carry* What associations, assumptions, or anxiety do we carry about school-community partnerships? How can we interrogate these connections through a leadership lens?	*Please read before our first session:* • Lawrence-Lightfoot, *The Essential Conversation*, pp. xiii-xxii, 3-9	
Week 2 Jan 23	*What We Know* What does research say about the perils and possibilities of school-community partnerships? How do these perils and possibilities change across lines of race, class, and language?	• Mapp, Carver, & Lander, "Examine Your Core Beliefs" (pp. 17-35) • Hong, "Cinthia Colón" (pp. 77-99) • Cuevas, "Dreams, Aspirations, and *Sacrificios*" (pp. 13-22) *Recommended* • Mapp et al., "Family Engagement and Students" (pp. 21-42) • Cortés, "I Remember" • Watch: Cinthia Colón & Soo Hong (link)	FCE Autobiography

Date	Topic	Readings Due	Assignments Due
Week 3 Jan 30	*What We Need* How do schools figure out what they need from families and communities and how do they figure out what families and communities need from schools?	• Safir, *The Listening Leader*, ch 7 (pp. 146-165) • Hong, "Ilene Carver" (pp. 25-46) *Recommended* • Watch: Ilene Carver in AGS 825 • Watch: Ilene Carver & Soo Hong (link)	CA Memo #1 Reflection #1
Week 4 Feb 6	*Movement Building and Trust-Building Within Schools* How do teachers, teacher leaders, school leaders build a mindset and practice to support two-way engagement with families and communities?	• Hong, "Julia Finkelstein" (pp. 125-153) • Bryk & Schneider, "Trust in Schools" (pp. 12-34, esp. 20-26) *Recommended* • Tatum, "Cultivating the Trust of Black Parents" • Shapiro, Green, & Kim, "Missing in School Reopening Plans: Black Families' Trust" (NY Times) • Watch: Soo Hong & Julia Finkelstein (link)	CA Memo #2 Reflection #2
Week 5 Feb 13	*Movement Building and Trust-Building Within Communities* How have school and community members found constructive ways to work together for the good of young people? What obstacles have they needed to avoid?	• Warren & Mapp, "A Match on Dry Grass" (pp. 14-32) • Hong, "Annie Shah" (pp. 101-123) *Recommended* • Watch: Soo Hong & Annie Shah-Solle (link)	CA Memo #3 Reflection #3
Feb 20	SCHOOL VACATION – TAKE A VACATION		
Week 6 Feb 27	*Promising Practices* What are promising approaches to building connections across schools, communities, and families?	• Mapp & Kuttner, "Dual Capacity-Building Framework," through Stanton Elementary School (pp. 5-16) • Hong, "Megan Lucas" (pp. 47-75) *Recommended* • Mapp et al., "Implications for Practice" (pp. 101-113) • Han & Love, "Stages of immigrant parent involvement" • Review www.pthvp.org • Watch: Soo Hong & Megan Lucas (link)	Reflection #4 CA Memo #4 (optional)
Week 7 March 6	*Schools as Grounded Institutions* How can schools unlearn and relearn their stance toward families and communities?	• Hong, "New Hopes and Possibilities," (pp. 155-194) *Recommended* • (Re-)watch: Soo Hong & Annie Shah-Solle (link)	Reflection #5
Final Project Due: March 13, by 11:59pm			

Acknowledgments

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Attribution

This syllabus—its policies, assignments, and sequencing—is by James Noonan and licensed under Creative Commons BY-NC 4.0 (Attribution-NonCommercial). You are free to share and adapt it, with attribution and only for non-commercial purposes.

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Safir, S. (2017). *The Listening Leader: Creating Conditions for Equitable School Transformation*. Jossey-Bass.

Warren, M., & Goodman D. (2018). *Lift Us Up, Don't Push Us Out*. Beacon Press.

Warren, M., & Mapp K. (2011). *A Match on Dry Grass: Community Organizing for School Reform*. Oxford University Press.

MORE THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW

COVID-19 Health and Safety Protocols

Students must comply with any university health and safety protocols for the current academic term. Students should review the updated Covid-19 information found at www.salemstate.edu/covid19.

Equal Access Statement

Salem State University is committed to providing equal access to the educational experience for all students in compliance with Section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act and The Americans with Disabilities Act and to providing all reasonable academic accommodations, aids and adjustments. Any student who has a documented disability requiring an accommodation, aid or adjustment should speak with the instructor immediately. Students with Disabilities who have not previously done so should provide documentation to and schedule an appointment with Disability Services and obtain appropriate services.

Critical Emergency Statement

In the event of a University declared critical emergency, Salem State University reserves the right to alter this course plan. Students should refer to www.salemstate.edu for further information and updates. The course attendance policy stays in effect until there is a University-declared critical emergency. In the event of an emergency, please refer to the alternative educational plans for this course, which will be posted on Canvas. Students should review the plans and stay up to date via Canvas.

The Mary G. Walsh Writing Center

The Mary G. Walsh Writing Center offers writing support to the entire Salem State community. Writing center staff will talk with students about any kind of writing for any audience, host writing events and workshops, and provide students with a supportive space in which to write. Center staff have worked with students who come from over 30 different majors and who speak over 50 different languages. Professionally trained tutors can assist with topic development, brainstorming, organization, sentence-level writing issues, citation, oral and/or visual presentations, conference abstracts, proposals, presentations, and professional documents (cover letters, resumes, personal statements). Click here to watch a video with instructions for how to make an appointment.

Citations and Attribution

Please ensure that all work you submit is your own and cite your sources when you use them. The work of education involves creativity and being resourceful. Often, this means looking elsewhere for ideas. That is encouraged in this course. However, you must attribute those ideas to the original authors when you use them. Failure to do so, in the form of plagiarism (even if unwitting) can result in a grade of 0 or further action with the SSU administration. Please visit this site for further information about citation and attribution: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/