



The Robertson Bequest Seminars 2008

Perceptions of Discrimination and Academic Engagement within the United Kingdom

Dr Angel Harris, Department of Sociology, Princeton University

**Thursday, 12th June 2008, 3.00-5.00pm
in Room 4.22, Seminar Room, St John's Land
The Moray House School of Education, The University of Edinburgh
St John Street, off Holyrood Road, Edinburgh EH8 8AQ**

This seminar draws on collaborative work which Dr Harris is conducting with Dr Jeremy Staff, Pennsylvania State University, and Dr Ricardo Sabates, London Institute of Education.

The difference in academic outcomes between whites and minority groups is a major concern among scholars, educators, and policy makers within the United States (U.S.). The dominant framework within the social sciences for explaining group differences in academic outcomes within the U.S. is the oppositional culture explanation (or resistance model) (Ogbu 1978). The theory posits that some minority groups experience persistent forms of discrimination leading them to perceive barriers to success with regard to future employment and earnings. Since schooling is linked to the belief that more education improves chances for upward social mobility, failure to believe in the achievement ideology (i.e., education leads to status attainment) compromises academic engagement. While research on the theory within the U.S. has produced mixed results, few studies have provided a quantitative assessment of the framework in a non-U.S. context. Thus, this study uses the British Cohort Study to determine whether 1) academic engagement varies by social class and 2) the extent to which these differences are explained by perceptions of discrimination.

Dr. Harris is a research associate in the Office of Population Research, Center for Research on Child Wellbeing, and the Joint Degree Program in Social Policy and Sociology at Princeton University. His research interests include social inequality, policy, and education. His work focuses on the social psychological determinants of the racial achievement gap. Specifically, he examines the factors that contribute to differences in academic investment among African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans, and Whites.

Places at the seminar are limited; please let Annette Greenock know, 0131 651 6019 (Annette.Greenock@ed.ac.uk) by 30th May if you want to attend.

The Robertson Bequest

The Robertson Bequest was made in 1959 by Stewart Robertson, retired Director of Education, to the Court of the University of Edinburgh in order that the proceeds of the Bequest might be used to support an annual programme of lectures to be known as the "Stewart Alan Robertson Lectures", on some subject connected with the Theory, History, Art and Practice of Education. In 1998 responsibility for the bequest was transferred to the newly formed Department of Education and Society within the new Faculty of Education of the University of Edinburgh and the responsibility was transferred to the Head of DES, who continues to support the seminar series, which is organised by members of the Department, including Centre for Educational Sociology (CES).