

## Workshop on Education

Tue Oct 13, 2020  
100 pm until 220 pm

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*Inequality American Style: What Role Do Schools Play?*

**ABSTRACT:** There is an assumption among both the American public and most academic scholars: differences in school quality play an important role producing and reproducing inequality. On its surface this view seems obviously true. It is why high-income parents search for homes in neighborhoods with "good" schools and it is why low-income parents sometimes support charter schools and other school-based reforms. But it turns out that important evidence contradicts this position. I discuss several key empirical patterns that suggest that schools primarily reflect rather than generate inequalities in children's math and reading skills. To the extent that schools do affect achievement gaps, they mostly reduce them. This more favorable view of schools has recently gained stature because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Faced with the reality of reduced schooling, public discourse has become much more appreciative of how schools help the disadvantaged and reduce inequality.

**BIO:** Doug Downey is a professor of Sociology at Ohio State University. Two of his seasonal comparison studies have won the James Coleman Award given by the Sociology of Education section of the American Sociological Association to the best article published over a two-year period. During a fellowship at Stanford's Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, he wrote the forthcoming book, *How Schools Really Matter: Why Our Assumption about Schools and Inequality is Mostly Wrong* (University of Chicago Press).

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