



ASSOCIATION FOR  
PUBLIC POLICY ANALYSIS  
& MANAGEMENT

**Session: Justice in Education: Educating about Justice**

**Moderator:** Jennie Owen, Duke University

**Speakers:** Daryl Atkinson, Department of Justice

Sarah Bryer, National Juvenile Justice Network

**Session Summary:** Kim Arnold, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**Barriers to Education and Employment Stemming from Involvement in the Criminal Justice System**

Panelists discussed how the criminal justice system is inherently built on structural racism. Racial/ethnic disparities are evident throughout the entire justice system. Contact with the criminal justice system comes with collateral consequences such as the denial of voting rights, rejection from military service, lack of employment options, and less educational opportunities. Most ex-offenders are unable to find a job when they are released. This often occurs because they must check the box on employment applications that affirms their previous involvement in the criminal justice system. Checking “the box” weeds out many qualified ex-offenders and makes it extremely difficult for them to secure employment. Atkinson mentioned that the presence of “the box” drives the cycles of poverty and criminality.

Common college applications also use “the box” as a screener when considering students for admission into various academic programs. This shuts out a huge demographic of the population, mainly African Americans and Hispanics/Latinos. It is important to recognize that justice reform is about achieving racial justice as well.

**Ways that Educators in Higher Education Can Promote Considerations of Equity and Justice**

Educators should sharpen their own lenses of race and class, and understand that race and class are inextricably linked. Panelists mentioned the importance of incorporating considerations of race, justice, and equity into courses regardless of field or subject.

Equity trainers can help lay an equity foundation within institutions. Safe spaces should be provided on campus for students to discuss race and class. Professors can introduce introductory materials into the syllabus to spark interest among students and start the conversation about these issues. Helpful resources include the social cognition theory, the opportunity agenda, and information from “Race Forward: The Center for

Racial Justice Innovation” (formerly known as the Applied Research Center). University administrators, such as Chief Diversity Officers, could require racial equity training for faculty. Panelists encouraged educators to read and recommend “The New Jim Crow” by Michelle Alexander, “The Condemnation of Blackness” by Khalil Gibran Muhammad, and to view documentaries such as “Slavery by Another Name,” and “The House I Live In.”

## **Policy Implications**

### *Multi-sector Collaboration*

Educators and public policymakers should work together to provide a viable support system and equal access to opportunities. Policies need to address both race AND class, not one or the other. Public policy should be informed by advocates and people that are most impacted by public policy. Advocacy organizations can benefit from researchers and graduate students that can access data and/or analyze data. Multi-sector collaboration is key to achieving justice and equity.

### *Employment & Employment*

President Obama has endorsed “banning the box” for federal government agency jobs, which reduces discrimination against ex-offenders by removing the criminal record box from federal government employment applications. This delays the background check and criminal history inquiries until later in the hiring process. Many states have already adopted a similar policy, and advocates are hoping that more government and private employers will follow suit. Universities and colleges that screen applicants based on criminal history and prior school suspension/expulsion should adopt a similar “ban the box” policy to increase equal opportunity to higher education.