

Fall 2025 Newsletter

Jacqueline Zalewski, Chair

Sophia Loomis, Newsletter Editor

Educational Problems



Society for the Study
of Social Problems
In Pursuit of Social Justice



Join us for our annual 2026 meeting!

76th Annual Meeting

August 6-9, 2026

Westin New York at Times Square

New York City, NY

In this Issue

**Letter from the
Division Chair**

**2026 Conference
Division Sessions**

**Student Paper
Competition &
Survey**

Member News



Letter from the Division Chair

Written by Jacqueline Zalewski, PhD

Hello fellow Educational Problems Division Members!

I am Jacqueline Zalewski, Professor of Sociology at West Chester University of Pennsylvania, a public and unionized university. I am very excited to be leading the Educational Problems Division of the SSSP as Chair for the next two years!

I want to take a moment to thank Kyla Walters for her past leadership as Division Chair of Educational Problems and for her tutelage in the Chair transition prior to the 2025 SSSP conference. I also want to thank all of you who took time to help develop session titles, types, and descriptions for the 2026 SSSP conference and to division members for sharing important news on their recent promotions, newly published books, articles, a special journal issue, and an exhibit to include in this fall newsletter.

This newsletter comes on the heels of a successful 2025 SSSP conference in Chicago! The Educational Problems sessions focused on: Doing the Work of Education; Community Approaches to Mental Health; and Problems in Schools. **I'm looking forward to the 2026 SSSP conference, which will be held from August 6th through the 9th in New York City, with the theme of "Resisting Colonization of Lifeworlds." Please read the call for papers for Educational Problems sessions below and consider submitting your scholarly work to one of them before the deadline of January 31, 2026.**

Faculty mentors of graduate students doing research in the area, please encourage your students to apply to the Educational Problems graduate student paper competition before January 31, 2026. The call and instructions for this award are below. I also seek two other committee members from the Division, who are faculty, to serve on the award committee. Please consider supporting the Educational Problems Division in this important work by sending me an email expressing your interest in serving on the graduate student paper committee (jzalewski@wcupa.edu).

As Chair of the Educational Problems Division for SSSP, I have several goals for the Division over the next two years. The first goal is to increase participation by members in the work of the Division. One way to do this is to read the call for papers for Educational Problems Division sessions at the 2026 Society Conference and submit an extended abstract or paper. Secondly, I am interested in including your goals and suggestions for future conference session titles and themes. To do this, I encourage you to attend the Educational Problems Division business meeting, where session themes for the following year are brainstormed. The more members that attend, the more terrific ideas can be considered. We can continue to build a vibrant community of educational problems scholars who can experience SSSP as an intellectual home for our important work. I will share more details about the location, day, and time for the 2026 Educational Problems Division business meeting as the conference gets closer. I hope that you will join us!

On a related note, SSSP membership renewal time is near, so please be sure to renew your Society membership as well as your Educational Problems Division membership.

I wish everyone a good winter break. **Please read the call for papers for our Educational Problems Division sessions at the 2026 SSSP conference and consider submitting your proposal to share your work in one of them by the January 31, 2026 deadline.**

Sincerely,

Jacqueline M. Zalewski

2026 SSSP Educational Problems Division Sessions

Solo Sponsored Sessions

Title: Revitalizing Sociology to Resist Processes of Colonization (2026 Conference Theme)

Session Type: Works in Progress Roundtable

Co-organizers: Rodney Coates and Jacqueline Zalewski

Description: Many sociology programs are experiencing declining majors and minors. Resulting, some are being combined with other programs (e.g., Criminal Justice), face being placed in moratorium (i.e., the program no longer accepts majors or minors and is being discontinued), or they have been eliminated as academic choices shaping prospective career paths. We need to discuss what skill sets and career paths are available to students that major, master, or get a PhD in the field. Outside of higher education, what return on investment do students gain? Understanding the outcomes of majoring in sociology at all levels in higher education will help faculty, academic programs, and institutions develop strategies to resist processes of colonization of our life worlds.

Title: AI and Education

Session Type: Critical Dialogue

Co-organizers: Linda Waldron and Fredricka Saunders

Description: This critical dialogue will explore the profound and multifaceted impact of artificial intelligence on the current state and future of education. The rapid evolution of AI tools presents both unprecedented opportunities and significant challenges. We will explore the potential benefits of AI in terms of its ability to personalize learning and increase efficiency, while at the same time we will consider how its integration risks exacerbating existing social inequalities. AI has the potential to reproduce biases, amplify the digital divide, increase surveillance, and lessen the development of critical thinking skills. This dialogue will consider AI's role in the commodification of education and how social dynamics between students and teachers, and the overall educational landscape is significantly being changed.

Co-Sponsored Sessions

Title: "Bring Your Own Brilliance": Sharing our Ideas That Have Been Successful in Teaching

Session Type: Works in Progress Roundtable

Co-Sponsored: Teaching Social Problems & Educational Problems

Co-organizers: Janelle M. Pham (jpham@oglethorpe.edu) and Jacqueline Zalewski (jzalewski@wcupa.edu)

Description: In this session, presenters are invited to bring their most innovative and successful teaching strategies, techniques, and ideas to the floor. Participants can share insights, experiences, and best practices that have enhanced learning in their higher education classes.

Presenters could showcase their unique approaches, from engaging pedagogical methods, creative use of technology, strategies for ensuring inclusivity and supporting student well-being, to writing practices to improve the class's contents.

This session is an excellent opportunity to learn from each other's brilliance and build a collective resource of teaching excellence. Participants can be seasoned educators or junior scholars who desire to share their experiences.

Title: Under Siege: Power, Resistance, and Solidarity in Higher Education

Session Type: Critical Dialogue

Co-sponsored: Educational Problems and Critical Race and Ethnic Studies

Co-organizers: Christina Perez and Amani Michael Awwad

Description: Students, faculty, and institutions face escalating authoritarian threats such as political attacks, funding cuts, and efforts to silence academic inquiry. These assaults intensify longstanding racial, ethnic, gendered, and class disparities within higher education. This session examines how authoritarian pressures reinforce inequality and how communities of scholars and students are developing practices of resistance, solidarity, and participatory democracy. Ethnic studies and other critical traditions have historically played a central role in these struggles, and they continue to provide vital frameworks for surviving this moment, resisting authoritarianism, and fighting for liberation.

Title: Problems and Issues in Medical Education and the Health Professions in a Time of Social Backlash

Session Type: Works in Progress Roundtable

Co-sponsored: Educational Problems & Health, Health Policy and Health Services

Co-organizers: Jennifer Bulanda and Christine Beach

Description: Many current and prospective educators and learners in academic medical and higher education are excluded from full participation based on race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, ablism, sexual orientation, and related characteristics. Yet many use strategies including leaning on epistemic communities; drawing on cultural connections; contributing expert knowledge; resisting and persisting despite historical exclusion.

This session explores how marginalized educators and learners participate in medical and health education. We also welcome works-in-progress highlighting innovative research designs and decolonizing methodologies exploring how members exert agency as they successfully navigate their worlds.

We are interested in the potential futures of medical and health education and broader institutions in this time of backlash against participation of minoritized others, and the implications this has for society.

Title: Exploring and Resisting Academic Ableism

Session Type: Critical Dialogue

Co-sponsored: Educational Problems & Disability, Mental Wellness, and Social Justice

Organizer: Melinda Maconi

Description: Despite the existence of policies mandating accessibility in education, learning institutions of all types continue to perpetuate and reify ableism. Educational policies are not made with accessibility in mind, but rather, are created for certain bodies, minds, and abilities, with ad hoc accommodations later offered (inconsistently) to those whose bodies and minds don't fit. People with disabilities can and do resist this marginalization of their bodies and minds but often remain in institutions that were designed to uphold ableism. This critical dialogue explores both oppression and resistance of people with disabilities in academic settings.

2026 Student Paper Competition & Outstanding Scholarship Award

Deadline: 1/31/26

The **Educational Problems Division** announces its 2026 Graduate Student Paper Competition. Papers must address a contemporary educational problem and may be empirical or theoretical in nature. Authors must be current graduate students. In addition to single-authored papers, co-authored papers will be considered for this award if co-authors are graduate students but not co-authored with a faculty member or colleague who is not a student. Papers are not eligible for this award if they have been published or accepted for publication before being submitted for consideration. Papers are not eligible if they have been presented previously at SSSP or presented or accepted for presentation at other professional meetings, unless they have been revised substantially with new data, findings, or theoretical contributions. Papers must not exceed 30 double-spaced pages (excluding notes, references, tables, and figures). All papers must include a 150-200 word abstract and be prepared for anonymous review with the author's name and institutional affiliation appearing only on the title page. Authors are required to submit their papers through the annual meeting **Call for Papers** process as a condition for consideration for the award to ensure the winning paper is placed on the 2026 SSSP Conference program. Students may only submit to one division. All papers must also be submitted electronically (as a PDF attachment) to the Division Chair, Dr. Jacqueline Zalewski at jzalewski@wcupa.edu with the following e-mail subject line: SSSP Educational Problems Student Paper Nomination. Please include your name, institutional affiliation, and contact information in the body of your e-mail.

Award:

1. An award certificate
2. A cash stipend of \$150
3. Student membership in the SSSP
4. Conference registration to the 2025 SSSP Annual Meeting
5. Recognition at the annual meeting Awards Ceremony
6. Recognition at the annual Educational Problems division meeting
7. Recognition in the Educational Problems newsletter
8. Recognition on the SSSP's website under award winners

For more information, visit:

<https://www.sssp1.org/index.cfm/m/1014/>

Survey on Experiences

Greetings,

We invite you to participate in a survey exploring the experiences researchers encounter while conducting qualitative research that may be awkward, uncomfortable, or even dangerous. We are particularly interested in understanding how these experiences are shaped by researchers' identities. Please note that the survey is designed for anyone who has conducted qualitative research, not only for those who identify as qualitative researchers.

This study is part of a research project led by Dr. Rebecca Hanson (University of Florida) and Dr. Patricia Richards (University of Georgia). The project has been designated exempt by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at both universities. Your participation is completely anonymous, and you will not be asked to provide any identifying information.

We have prepared two versions of the survey.

One version is for people currently in academia or those who have retired from an academic position. You can access that survey here: https://ufl.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_eh5RV8zjCELVHnw

Another version of the survey is for people who work or worked outside of academia before retiring (this includes those who enrolled in but did not complete a graduate program). You can access that survey here: https://ufl.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_54ry7M9T4jc3cLI

The survey takes approximately 5 to 20 minutes to complete, depending on your experiences.

If you have any questions or concerns about the survey, please contact Dr. Rebecca Hanson at r.hanson@ufl.edu.

We would greatly appreciate your time and insight in helping us better understand the experiences that researchers navigate in the field.

Thank you for considering participating in this research.

Rebecca Hanson and Patricia Richards

Member News

- **Kyla Walters** was tenured and promoted at Sonoma State University. She is also beginning a 3-year term as the Faculty Fellow for University Studies and Transition Programs.
- **Linda Waldron** was promoted to full professor at Christopher Newport University. She serves there as the Director for the Center for Education Research and Policy.

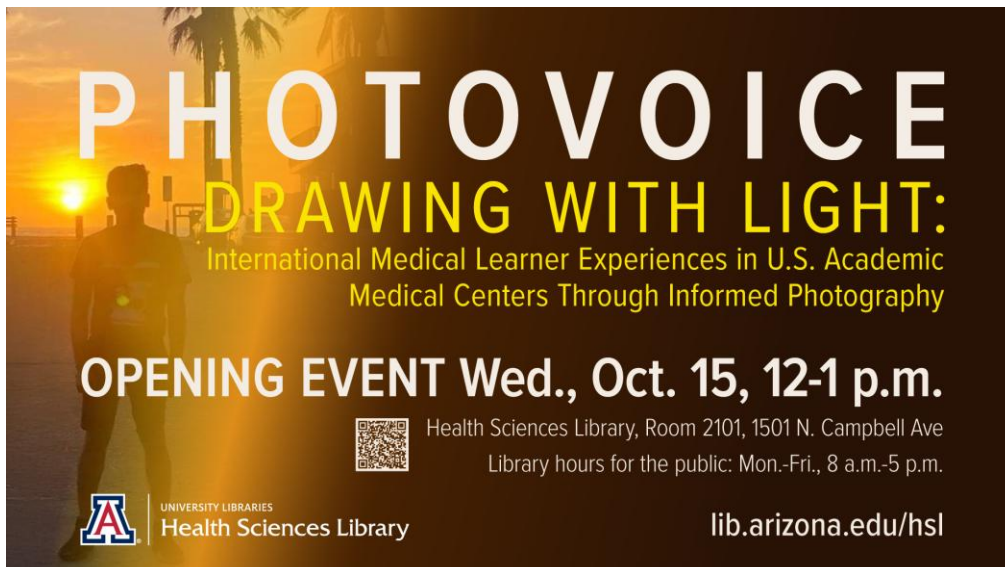
Christine Beach is a PhD candidate, interdisciplinary and medical education scholar in the Center for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Arizona. They are a board-certified clinical laboratory scientist and 2026 – 2027 Fulbright U.S. scholar applicant. This exhibit (described below) is one of the culminating works from their dissertation, *“Drawing With Light: Exploring International Medical Learner Experiences in U.S. Academic Medical Centers through Informed Photography.”*

The exhibit:

This Photovoice-inspired photography exhibit featured digital photos taken by international medical learners (future physicians) who shared how they make sense of their experiences with U.S. Academic Medical Centers through the lens of their cameras. Through images, learners transcend words to convey their training experiences, wellbeing strategies, and unique knowledge contributions to serve our diverse communities in a time of continued physician shortages.


The event:


“Drawing with Light” commenced with an onsite research talk at the University of Arizona Health Sciences Library on Oct. 15, 2025. The exhibit engaged viewers about the importance of diversity in medical school and the physician workforce, while calling attention to the critical issue of wellbeing during physician training.



PHOTOVOICE
DRAWING WITH LIGHT:
International Medical Learner Experiences in U.S. Academic
Medical Centers Through Informed Photography

OPENING EVENT Wed., Oct. 15, 12-1 p.m.

 Health Sciences Library, Room 2101, 1501 N. Campbell Ave
Library hours for the public: Mon.-Fri., 8 a.m.-5 p.m.

 UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES
Health Sciences Library

lib.arizona.edu/hsl

Recent Publications from Division Members

Erin Michaels

The risk of closure and repression in schools

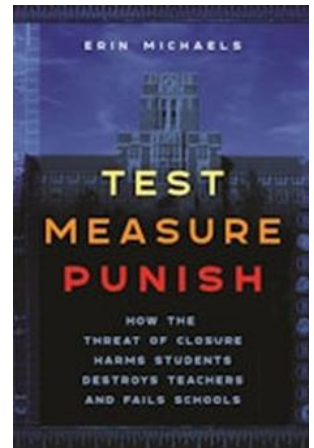
In the last two decades, education officials have closed a rising number of public schools nationwide related to low performance.

These schools are mainly located in neglected neighborhoods with high concentrations of poverty.

Despite this credible threat of closure, relatively few

individual schools threatened with closure for low performance in the United States

are actually shut down. Yet, as Erin Michaels argues, the looming threat is ever present. *Test, Measure, Punish* critically shifts the focus from school shutdowns to the more typical situation within these strained public schools: operating under persistent risk of closure.



Many K-12 schools today face escalating sanctions

if they do not improve according to repressive state mandates, which, in turn, incentives schools to put into place nonstop test drills and strict student conduct rules.

Test, Measure, Punish traces how threats of school closure have distorted education to become more punitive which disproportionately impacts—even targets—Black and Latinx communities and substantially hurts student social development.

This book addresses how these new punitive schooling conditions for troubled schools reproduce racial inequalities. Michaels centers her research in a suburban upstate

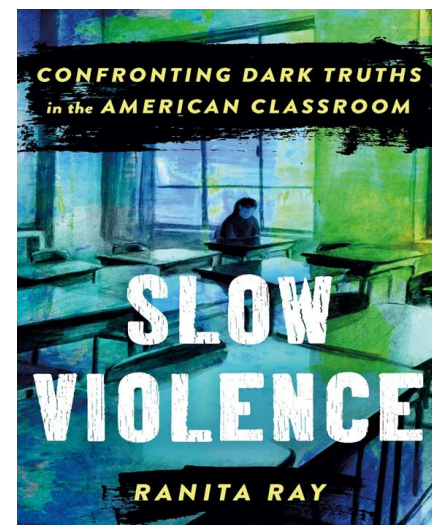
New York high school serving mainly working-class Black and Latinx students. She reveals a new model of schooling based on testing and security regimes that expands the carceral state, making the students feel dejected, criminalized, and suspicious of the system, their peers, and themselves. *Test, Measure, Punish* offers a new theory of schooling inequality and shows in vivid detail why state-led school reforms represent a new level of racialized citizenship in an already fragmented public education system.

Michaels, Erin. 2025. *Test, Measure, Punish: How the Threat of Closure Harms Students, Destroys Teachers, and Fails Schools*. NYU Press.

Link: <https://nyupress.org/9781479823390/test-measure-punish/>

Ranita Ray

Ranita Ray's new book [Slow Violence: Confronting Dark Truths in the American Classroom](#) is a powerful exposé of the American public education system's indifference toward marginalized children and the "slow violence" that fashions schools into hostile work and learning environments. In 2017, sociologist Ray stepped inside a fourth-grade classroom in one of the nation's largest majority-minority districts. She was there to conduct research on the lack of resources and budget cuts that regularly face public schools. However, a few months into her immersion, a disturbed Ray recognized that that greatest impediment to students was the "slow violence" that preys on their minds, bodies, and spirits at the hands of teachers and administrators who are charged with their care. Ray goes beyond timeworn discussions about the school-to-prison pipeline, funding, and achievement gaps to directly address what happens behind the closed doors of classrooms, introducing a compelling—and crucial—new perspective into the conversation about our education system as well as racial and gender inequalities. The book was a finalist for Columbia School of Journalism's 2024 Lukas Work-In-Progress Award. For those who want to use it for their classrooms or read with a group here is a [teaching/reading guide!](#)



Dr. Evangela Q. Oates (SSSP member) served as editor, along with **Drs. Erin Doran, Dimpal, Jain, and Patrick Sullivan** for a special issue, Critical Race Theory and Community Colleges: Historical Foundations & Contemporary, in *New Direction for Community Colleges*. It's the first journal issue (that we know of) that centers on CRT as it relates to community colleges. In this time of chaos, disinformation, swamp expansion, and the amplification of ignorance and cruelty as aspirational qualities of character, we hope to counter the attacks on CRT through these examinations of the framework and how its tenets may serve as beacons of liberation for those leading, teaching, advocating for, and studying at community colleges. Use the link below for access to the issue.



Visit: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/toc/15360733/2025/2025/209-210>

Charles Bell, Ph.D.

Associate Professor

Department of Criminal Justice Sciences

Illinois State University

I recently published an article that explores the financial and social costs parents endured as they challenged harmful school restraint and seclusion practices in legal proceedings.

Visit: <https://dsq-sds.org/article/id/6665/>

- **Zehra Sahin Ilkorkor's** "Comparison of Bias-based Bullying and Non-bias-based Bullying: Prevalence Rates, Impacts on Students, and the Buffering Role of Social Support" received the 2025 SSSP Educational Problems Division student award.

- **Now is published in:**

Aggression and Violent Behavior (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2025.102091>).