Greetings from the Director

As alumni, you are spread all over the country and the world. We send you this newsletter to transport you back to Stanford briefly to see what we are up to. Imagine the wettest winter on record in California and you will know how grateful we are to see the sun as we head into Spring Quarter. POLS Projects are taking shape and students are turning their attention to the job market. As I write this, we have come through another Admit Day and have formed the POLS Class of 2018—our 15th! I hope you will enjoy reading about our new POLS Equity Speaker Series, and some thoughts I've had about equity in schools. As always, we would love to have an update from you and a visit if you can make it.

POLS Equity Speaker Series

Last summer, I asked incoming POLS students if they would like to help me design and coordinate a speaker series focused on equity issues. Several students volunteered and we put together our inaugural events that include alumni, faculty, and outside guests. Our goal is to help the GSE community learn about diversity challenges through presentation and open discussion. This year we scheduled five events:

- **Ahmmad Brown (MA/MBA 2015)**—diversifying a consulting firm unit to serve a diverse clientele more effectively
- **Dahlton Brown (BA/POLS MA 2016), Sharen Kickingwoman (BA/POLS MA 2017), J’Sohon Lee (POLS MA 2015), and Karen Biestman (Associate Dean and NACC Director)**—lives and challenges of Native American students in the US education system
Jeff Duncan-Andrade (Associate Professor, SFSU; Board Chair and Founder, Roses in Concrete Community School) and Rob Smith (Associate Professor, George Mason University; former superintendent, Arlington, VA)—addressing achievement gaps in schools and school systems

Cal Gonzales (Executive Director at Morgan Stanley), Nolan Highbaugh (General Counsel for the KIPP Foundation, Stanford Law School 2000), and Anthony Antonio (Stanford GSE Associate Professor)—personal stories on the influence of SummerBridge for college access.

Geoff Cohen (Stanford GSE Professor) and public school teachers—experience with wise interventions in classroom and schools (scheduled for Spring 2017)

Our heartfelt thanks go out to the students who helped organize these events and the presenters who gave their time generously to make it happen. Each experience has been richly rewarding for all who have attended.

Speaking of Equity . . .
Achievement gaps are never far from my mind because I have interviewed superintendents about them, written about them, built simulations around them, and read about them frequently. Why is it so difficult to generate equitable educational outcomes? I think a key reason is that different students live in different worlds—some privileged and others much less so. I witnessed this in mundane ways every day I was principal of a comprehensive high school. Students from moderate to low income families rode the public bus system to within a few blocks of school, then walked in large groups through the wealthy neighborhood in which the school was located. On their way, wary neighbors peered at them through windows as students from wealthy families passed them in their expensive cars. They all attended a school that celebrated diversity and generated gratifying outcomes for many, but we had persistent achievement gaps that make me wonder: How could we have better addressed the affective needs of students who probably felt alienated by a high school designed to serve privileged students? The key, I think, is to make inside-the-school experiences as diverse as the student body. I’m not certain how to do that, but I think evidence of a genuine effort would be diverse learning formats, support systems, and social experiences that would adapt to the needs of the students, rather than requiring different kinds of students to fit into the same mold.

What I am saying is not particularly new or profound, but what alarms me is that we appear to be separating more than ever, probably reducing our understanding of those not just like us. There is a great deal of research about re-segregation in the US, but I recently read an accessible, vivid book, *Searching for Whitopia*, by Rich Benjamin (Hachette Books). Ten years ago this African-American author lived for three months at a time in this country’s least diverse, whitest communities in an effort to understand the effects of extreme separation. He writes about the experience with a good dose of humor (e.g., describing the affection hunting enthusiasts displayed
toward him personally while espousing their white-supremacist beliefs), but it brought me back to my principalship. We hope that schools will bridge the gaps—social and academic—that adults create in their real estate purchases, beliefs, and fears. If we are to have any chance of making that happen, we will need to find synergy between cognitive and affective learning that teaches all of us—students, teachers, staff, and parents—how to live together rather than apart.

Sincerely,
David

Greetings, POLSters! It's that crazy time of year when we've just finished putting together next year's cohort of 35. We're excited by the high caliber applicant pool and an increasing number of strong international applicants from countries ranging from Singapore to Australia to Colombia to Great Britain.

One of my favorite things about this job is seeing students through the entire Stanford cycle—recruitment, admissions, POLS and beyond. I'm amazed and humbled to watch you leave the GSE "nest" and venture out to do great work.

I recently reconnected with alumnus Steve Straka, (POLS '12) and was reminded about the wonderfully varied paths POLSter take. After POLS, Steve continued to work in test prep and college admissions consulting while also writing, developing, financing, and producing movies. He recently co-produced the film Growing Up Smith, a story about an Indian family who moves to America with hopes of living the American Dream. While their 10-year old boy, Smith, falls head-over-heels for the girl next door, his desire to become a "good old boy" propels him further away from his family's ideals (The film was originally released in February.)

Steve read the script nearly a decade ago and it's combination of humor and
depth stuck with him. When he was given the opportunity by a supporter to finance any movie he wanted, he knew that he wanted it to be *Growing Up Smith*. What drew him the most was that *Smith* dealt with issues such as immigration and ethnicity but in a way that doesn't preach.

As the process of making an independent film is quite long and uncertain, Steve cited Dan McFarland's Organizational Analysis class for teaching him about dealing with so many competing interests and goals, even when all are partners pushing for a common project. On a few of his most trying days, he recalled thinking, "This is straight out of an Organizational Behavior case study! The ability to see issues through a variety of lenses was something on which I relied on a daily basis, and my POLS experience definitely played a role in helping deliver what I think is a quality film on a limited budget." Steve would like to continue making movies that matter, that impact people beyond mere entertainment.

Please drop me a note about what you're up to (kuboyama@stanford.edu).

Emi Kuboyama
Associate Director
Once again we'll be presenting our annual capstone *POLS Talks* every Friday in May in Lathrop 282, 8:30-11:20 a.m. (note the change in location and time from last year). Topics include: Preschool Partnerships, Research Practice Partnerships, and Restorative Discipline. Everyone is welcome to attend. Check the GSE Calendar for details.