Greetings!
As Winter Quarter draws to a close, the grass on the hills is a vibrant green, rain comes and goes, and POLSters have hit their stride. This quarter our newsletter features perspectives from current POLS students, Seminar course assistant, Kyle Beckham, and alumni. I think you will see that we are having a great year.

My work as Director keeps me pretty busy, especially in Winter as we work on admitting another outstanding class for 2016-2017. But I also take time to read, conduct research, and write. Here is a sampling:

**What I Have Been Reading Lately**  
Larry Cuban has a new book, *Teaching History Then and Now: A Story of Stability and Change in Schools*, due out in March 2016 from Harvard Education Press. This book is Larry at his best, combining recollections with historical analysis to demonstrate how efforts to make education meaningful to challenged and challenging students inform current initiatives. Naturally, he also explains what was learned, forgotten, and ignored as reforms have come and gone. For an old social studies teacher like me, he’s telling my story. Aspiring K – 12 leaders and would-be policy makers will find much food for thought and a wealth of wisdom.

**What I Have Been Writing Lately**  
In 2010, Rob Smith, former superintendent in Arlington, VA, asked me to join with him in a project to discover what superintendents have done to narrow achievement gaps in public schools. That invitation has grown into a book we have co-authored, *Striving For Equity: District Leadership for Narrowing Opportunity and Achievement*.
Gaps, to be published in June by Harvard Education Press. We found that superintendents in diverse, well-resourced inner-ring suburban school districts employed organizational learning strategies to make important changes that narrowed gaps. The book provides an insider view of strategy, implementation, and results. [SAVE 20% when you mention sales code SFE16 (OFFER EXPIRES 10/14/16)]

Whatever you have been reading and writing lately, I hope that this edition of the newsletter finds you well and thriving in the effort to improve education for all students.

**POLSters**

Just to keep things lively: What would you do with $200 million? This is the question we put to this year’s POLS class for the inaugural POLS Challenge. No, we didn’t have a massive donation. This was the hypothetical incentive for teams of four to design a means to improve education pre-K – 16 in Santa Clara County. Teams were made up of students with varying interests. Their charge was to conceive comprehensive strategies that would involve pre-K-12 schools, non-profits, and higher education institutions. Students had three weeks to work with their teams before presenting to panels of POLS and MA/MBA alumni on January 22.

Shannon Jibaja (POLs 2013) and Jessica Wheeler Tranchino (MA/MBA 2015) helped us conceptualize a problem-based learning activity that would spark POLSters’ imaginations while bringing them into contact with alumni working in fields they might want to learn more about. Fourteen alumni came from all over the Bay Area and as far away as Boston to serve as panelists. Presentations were creative and focused on making a difference for the county’s neediest children and their families. Expertise from panelists helped us all think more deeply about the very real challenge of making a positive impact on education.

I hope you enjoy the rest of this quarterly newsletter and pass it on to friends of POLS who might not have seen it. May spring come quickly to wherever this finds you.

Sincerely,

David
Hello, POLSters! It’s been great to reconnect with many of you recently. As noted in David’s greeting, the **POLS Challenge** was an exciting morning filled with energy and optimism that culminated with lunch in the CERAS atrium. We were fortunate to welcome back over a dozen POLS and MA/MBA alumni to help
judge the inaugural **POLS Challenge**. We would love to have more of you return next year. Please mark your calendars. Planning has already begun for our next **POLS Challenge on Friday, October 21, 2016**. This new date coincides with homecoming. Please email me at kuboyama@stanford.edu if you are interested in serving as an alumni judge/panelist.

There are several other ways for alumni to be involved with the program. For those of you near campus, we invite you to join us for the 2016 **POLS talks** taking place on five consecutive Friday mornings---**April 29, May 6, 13, 20, 27 from 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 in CERAS 101**. Since 2013, the POLS talks have offered our students an opportunity to bring together their prior professional experience, coursework, internship and field-based research to explore an educational challenge of personal significance. This capstone project is an opportunity for the cohort to share and learn from each other. We also welcome alumni and the greater GSE and Stanford community.

A third way to get involved is through an EdCareers event or job posting. If you haven’t had a chance to see what EdCareers offers alumni, I invite you to visit [https://ed.stanford.edu/careers/alumni](https://ed.stanford.edu/careers/alumni).

Emi Kuboyama
Associate Director

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**Reflections from the POLS Class of 2016**

**Crystal Arrizon**

One of the things that first attracted me to POLS was the flexibility of the program structure. This has allowed me to further my understanding of significant experiences I had in education prior to entering POLS, and to explore a variety of new interests. For example, through my courses I have gained deeper knowledge of the research taking place specifically focused on issues in bilingual education, and of the complexity of challenges faced by leaders across different levels and types of educational institutions. In addition to program flexibility, the small cohort size also influenced my decision to join the POLS program. In the last six months I have had the opportunity to build...
lasting relationships with an incredibly supportive and collaborative group of people. The wide range of backgrounds in the cohort has challenged me to consider alternate perspectives and has enhanced my classroom experience. Also important, I knew that the location of the program would enable me to have an impact in my home community during my graduate school experience. I have been fortunate to continue my relationship with the school in which I taught through the POLS Project and to stay connected to the wide range of innovative work being done Bay Area education.

**Tyler Belanga**

I chose the POLS program at Stanford because of its world-class faculty and because I believed it would help me develop my problem solving and leadership skills. Thus far, it has met or exceeded my expectations in virtually every regard. Through POLS, I have expanded my knowledge base, connected with people who share my passions, and discovered strengths I did not know I possessed.

Few days in POLS are easy. I often find myself being challenged by peers and professors to reconsider positions I thought were well-established fixtures of my belief system. I have been asked to determine how lauded school principals, veteran district leaders, and successful social entrepreneurs can do their jobs better. More than once, I have thought, “How am I supposed to know?” The POLS program has taught me that I will not find many easy fixes or absolute truths in education. Rather, I have learned that I must master the valuable and transferable skill set of effectively identifying problems, framing solutions, and inspiring others to action within varying contexts that are never identical. That complexity – the fact that there are no easy answers regarding the achievement of educational excellence and equity – is what drew me to this field in the first place. And as I am continuously pushed outside my zone of comfort in POLS, I can sense my experiences collectively forming a solid foundation upon which I can build a career that is not only personally fulfilling, but also tremendously impactful.

An important thread through my experience has been the companionship of my diverse, accomplished, and thoughtful peers in the POLS cohort. I have heard several faculty members say that POLS students are the ones most likely to change the world. I deeply appreciate the vast potential in those with whom I
have worked in groups, chatted after class, or explored the wonders of the Bay Area. These people inspire me to be better and to push myself in ways I never considered, leaving no doubt that I am exactly where I need to be.

Jacob Lopez

With the transition to local control in California as well as the recent authorization of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), it is an exciting time to work in public education. States and districts now have the flexibility to develop and implement locally designed programs and policies that respond to community needs. To ensure that such initiatives are indeed effective, states and districts will have to generate systems and develop metrics to help track impact and progress. Fortunately at Stanford, I have been educated about how to do these things.

Through the joint degrees in education and public policy (the MA/MPP), I have been able to develop the skills needed for today’s policymaker and education leader. In addition to education, I’ve taken coursework in economics, law, policy, and research methods. Hence, Stanford has provided me with a wide range of opportunities and disciplinary expertise that few universities could match. In the future, I hope to leverage these experiences to help lead public schools.

During my time on the Farm, I have come to learn many lessons about public schools. In between sound bites of “culture trumps structure” and “someone has to fail,” I’ve come to realize that students need adults who listen. Parents, teachers, principals, district leaders, and school reformers should carefully reflect and evaluate whether their beliefs, practices, and policies either support or undermine student learning and development. Hence, for education to improve we need empathetic leaders who not only respond to data, but also take the time to understand students’ needs, interests, and stories.

In coming to Stanford, I made the decision to pursue study in a field that’s highly scrutinized and undermined. My goal in choosing Stanford wasn’t to graduate with the next big idea for an app—though I would say I have a few—it was to obtain the training, mentoring, and leadership skills needed to effectively shape and impact the future of public education.
Kyle Beckham, POLS Seminar Course Assistant

Being a course assistant for POLS has been an enormously positive experience. I feel that I am getting a free master's degree in many ways. The content and structure of the seminar have been useful and applicable to my own life, and though reading and grading the papers of students is sometimes difficult because of time constraints, I'm inspired by the thoughtfulness of the POLS cohort, their collective passion, and the deep and intense thought that they put into their work. I greatly admire the students in the course, and appreciate opportunities to interact and learn from them. From the papers they have written, to their amazing work on the POLS Challenge, the students are what make this such a great program. Though I'm often cynical about educational issues, being a part of POLS has been a breath of reinvigorating fresh air. I'm grateful for the opportunity to work with them and David, who has been so willing to involve me in planning class activities and valuing my knowledge and expertise. I look forward to seeing where everyone ends up and hearing about all of the wonderful things that they will accomplish.

Kyle Beckham is a third year PhD. candidate in the program of Race, Inequality, and Language in Education (RILE). Before coming to Stanford he taught literacy, social studies, media arts and special education for nine years at Downtown Continuation high school, a project-based alternative high school for students at serious risk of dropping out, and taught a year at an alternative school in Oakland.

Alumni Updates:

Shannon Birk Jibaja POLS 2013
Hi POLSters! I recently began a new position at Stanford's Office of the Vice Provost for Graduate Education as the Associate Director of Educational Programs. Our tagline is "Expanding what's possible in graduate education," and we serve Stanford's 9,000+ graduate students (and at times, its ~2,000 postdocs!) with programs, funding opportunities, fellowships, etc. I can only say that it's incredibly exciting and meaningful to be a part of this work. If you're ever on campus, hit me up and we'll grab a cup of coffee! I love meeting POLSters and hearing your stories.

Iona Szkurnik, POLS 2014
I'm passionate about Technology and Education for solving scalable problem! I'm Stanford Graduate School of Education POLS '14 alumna and a fellow of the Stanford Lemann Center for Educational Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Brazil. After serving as Director for Market Expansion at Hapara, a K-12 EdTech Google Global Partner company, executing international growth in LatAm and Europe, I recently joined Mosyle, another top notch start-up, which provides Mobile Device Management solution. My role as Chief Business
Development Officer offers me the opportunity to work across the board with all the company's team. My number one mission in this beginning of the year is to launch our new product aimed to help parents better guide mobile devices use, preparing their kids for the future.