

Ferguson Lecture

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“Professor Ronald Ferguson Delivers Lecture Concerning Educational Inequality in the United States”

On Monday, October 10, 2011, Ronald Ferguson, a senior lecturer at Harvard’s Kennedy School and Harvard’s Graduate School of Education presented on how to make schools more equitable. Ferguson who works to close the racial achievement gap in the United States began the speech with a poem. The subject of the poem had experienced troubles at school due to low self-esteem, but when encouraged, the student made significant academic and extra-curricular gains. This poem was in keeping with the theme of the lecture. Ferguson spoke of how to achieve equity in schools along with excellence. Ferguson believes that for this change to occur that America will need to make not only lifestyle changes, but cultural changes.

Ferguson remarked that national graduation rate has not increased on average since 1960. To begin increasing graduation rates, Ferguson proposed a national challenge to jumpstart efforts to turn failing schools around. He thinks that this effort can cross partisan lines because of the urgency of improving national test scores. Ferguson showed a chart comparing American math and science scores to other developed nations. America’s scores were on the lower end of the chart. Ferguson then showed scores divided by racial groupings. The scores of minority groups in the United States were far behind those of other developed nations. Ferguson explained why these trends were problematic for the United States and its future.

To start attacking the problems of failing test scores, schools and teachers, Ferguson showed another chart where he maps out solutions to these problems. The diagram has different bubbles for teachers, parents, peers, employers and community. Ferguson stressed the importance of involving all of these groups in schooling. He believes that cooperation between these groups can improve educational outcomes in the United States. Ferguson noted that not all students in the United States are college-bound, but by involving possible employers, students who are not on the college track can find gainful employment by developing skills in high school. Ferguson emphasized the need for more proactive parenting in lower-income and that these parents can take steps to growing their child’s intellect at a young age by engaging them in school work.

Ferguson concluded his lecture by telling the audience that America needs a social movement to improve schools and attain educational equity. For better outcomes for American students, the public needs to become more proactive in schooling not just a few concerned individuals and organizations. When questioned about how to implement these goals during the question and answer period, Ferguson discussed some tactics to improve teaching and to make peer culture more focused on learning rather than distractions such as clothing.