

Student's Name

Professor's Name

Course Name/Code

Date

### **Graduate School Essay Example for Northwestern: Education and Social Policy**

I became a teaching assistant by accident. A professor in the psychology department at DePaul University needed help running a section of her introductory course mid-semester, and I was a junior with an open Tuesday afternoon. What I did not expect was to find that explaining psychology to first-year students required me to understand it in a way the coursework alone had not. I started doing research on learning. I stopped thinking of teaching as incidental.

After graduating I joined a nonprofit focused on educational equity in Chicago's south and west side schools, where I spent two years as a research assistant studying the relationship between chronic absenteeism and long-term academic outcomes. Working under Dr. Shawn Thibodeau, I helped design and administer a survey instrument measuring the barriers that drove absenteeism among middle school students: transportation, health issues, and caretaking responsibilities for younger siblings. The findings informed a district-level attendance intervention that is currently in its second year of implementation.

What the research could not do was tell us whether the intervention was working the way we intended. That question, the gap between program design and actual implementation, is why I am applying to Northwestern's program in Education and Social Policy. Professor David Chen's research on the implementation of equity-focused school reforms maps directly onto the question I have been working with for two years. I want to develop the evaluation methods to study whether and how policy translates into changed conditions in actual classrooms, not just in district documentation.