

CFPR SEMINAR SERIES



March 31, 2026
12:00 – 1:30PM



Chairperson:
Mu Zheng
CFPR Deputy Director
CFPR Steering Committee Member
Sociology & Anthropology



NUS AS7
The Shaw Foundation Building
Level 6 Seminar Room, 5 Arts Link
Singapore 117570



<https://fass.nus.edu.sg/cfpr/seminars-workshops>

The Role of Graduate Education in the Rising Wage Premium for Professional and Managerial Occupations, 1980–2019

A large part of the rise in U.S. wage inequality over recent decades comes from a widening gap between professional/managerial (PM) and other occupations (NPM). We examine the trend in this gap from 1980 to 2019 highlighting the role of graduate degrees. Using a decomposition-of-change technique, we show that the increased gap between NPM and PM in the proportion of their workers with graduate degrees explains approximately 20% of the growth in the wage premium for having a PM occupation. We find that wage returns rose modestly for having a BA/BS degree and dramatically for having a graduate degree. Regarding effects of education on holding a PM job, returns to having a BA/BS went down while returns to having a graduate degree stayed high. We discuss how our findings fit predictions from economists' model of skill-biased technological change, a broader perspective positing the growth of the knowledge economy, and a sociological theory positing increasing Credentialism.

Speaker

Professor Paula England
New York University Abu Dhabi

Professor Paula England is Dean of Social Science and a Professor of Social Research and Public Policy at NYU Abu Dhabi. One branch of Professor England's research concerns gender inequality at work and at home; she has written on the sex gap in pay, occupational segregation, how couples divide housework, and the wage penalty for motherhood. She has also studied changing family patterns in the US and how social class affects unintended and nonmarital births. Professor England was President of the American Sociological Association in 2014–2015 and was editor of the American Sociological Review in 1994–1996. In 2018, she was elected to the US National Academy of Sciences.

