

Shelby Leigh Smith

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Education

University of Southern California

Expected 2026

Ph.D. in Urban Education Policy – Rossier School of Education

- **Dissertation Committee:** Adam Kho, Ph.D. (Chair); Julie Marsh, Ph.D.; Joseph Waddington, Ph.D.
- **Dissertation Title:** Are there public benefits to educational privatization?: Three essays on the equity, efficiency, and outcomes of K-12 school choice policies

Master of Public Policy – Price School of Public Policy

University of California – Irvine

2021

B.A. Social Policy and Public Service – School of Social Sciences

Research Interests

I study the priorities and outcomes of K-12 education policies that promote educational privatization with projects that focus on charter authorizing, school voucher policies, and district contracting practices. To do so, I use a combination of econometric, natural language processing, and qualitative approaches. The goal of my research is to inform state- and district-level policy decisions that support equitable student outcomes.

Publications

Peer Reviewed Journal Articles

- Smith, S. L.** (2025). From gatekeepers to gateways: Possibilities for equitable charter authorizing. *Journal of School Choice*. <https://doi-org.libproxy1.usc.edu/10.1080/15582159.2025.2575614> (CiteScore: 2.1)
- Smith, S. L.**, Dawson-Amoah, M., Pardo, N., Alonso-Morris, E. A., & Kho, A. (2024). Public school choice options in the United States. *Encyclopedia*, 4(1), 60-78. <https://doi.org/10.3390/encyclopedia4010006>
- Dawson-Amoah, M., **Smith, S. L.**, O'Neal, D., Clay, I., Alonso-Morris, E. A., & Kho, A. (2024). Understanding the education policymaking process in the United States. *Encyclopedia*, 4(1), 46-59. <https://doi.org/10.3390/encyclopedia4010005>
- Tong, T., **Smith, S. L.**, Fienberg, M., & Kho, A. (2023). Charter schools: An alternative option in American schooling. *Encyclopedia*, 3(1), 362-370. <https://doi.org/10.3390/encyclopedia3010022>

Book Chapters

- Smith, S. L.**, Ramos Martinez, I. M., Xe, T., & Castellanos, J. (2025). Supporting the development of students' scholar activist identities: A teaching team's collaborative autoethnography. In R. Rantz & L. McNulty (Eds.), *Developing culturally responsive curriculum in higher education* (pp. 279 - 302). IGI Global Scientific Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4018%2F979-8-3373-2955-0.ch015>

Research Briefs

- Kho, A., **Smith, S. L.**, & Zimmer, R. (2025). *Tennessee charter school performance during and after the COVID-19 pandemic*. Martin School of Public Policy & Administration, University of Kentucky. <https://bit.ly/charter-covid>
- Kho, A., **Smith, S. L.**, & Lauen, D. L. (2024). *Do authorizer evaluations predict the success of new charter schools?* Thomas B. Fordham Institute. <https://fordhaminstitute.org/national/research/do-authorizer-evaluations-predict-success-new-charter-schools>

Manuscripts in Submission

Under Review

- Kho, A., **Smith, S. L.**, & Zimmer, R. From disruption to recovery: Charter school performance during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. [Preprint in Annenberg EdWorking Papers](#)  Under review at *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*. (Dissertation Paper)
- Kho, A., **Smith, S. L.**, Dhaliwal, T. K., Huerta, A. H., Torres, G., & Marsh, J. Building restorative school cultures: Insights from peer mediation programs in elementary and middle schools. Under review at *Journal of Educational Change*.

Invited Future Publications

- Smith, S. L.**, Kho, A., & Zimmer, R. (Forthcoming). Charter school authorizers. In D. Harris (Ed.), *Live Handbook of Education Policy Research*. Association for Education Finance and Policy.
- Smith, S. L.**, Kho, A., & Zimmer, R. (Forthcoming). Economics of charter schools. In S. Bradley & C. Green (Eds.), *Economics of Education* (3rd ed). Elsevier.
- Zimmer, R., Kho, A., & **Smith, S. L.** (Forthcoming). *Charter schools and authorization in California*. Getting Down to Facts III, Stanford University, Policy Analysis for California Education.

Working Papers

- Smith, S. L.**, Fienberg, M., Dawson-Amoah, M., & Clay, I. An inequitable distribution of teacher talent: How micropolitics shape the master schedule. In preparation for submission to *Leadership and Policy in Schools*.
- Kho, A., **Smith, S. L.**, & Zimmer, R. Charter school enrollment before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic. In preparation for submission to *Education Finance and Policy*.
- Kho, A., Pardo, N., **Smith, S. L.**, & Rabovsky, S. Alternatives for whom? Trends in alternative school enrollment and student characteristics. In preparation for submission to *AERA Open*.
- Kho, A., **Smith, S. L.**, & Lauen, D. L. Do authorizer evaluations predict new charter schools' success? In preparation for submission to *Educational Policy*.

Other Active Projects

The Choice No One Talks About: Charter Authorization Decisions (Dissertation Paper)

- **Collaborators:** Adam Kho
- **Role:** Web scrape 527 applications, develop and deploy natural language processing analysis of applications, regression analysis of authorizer priorities and student achievement

Are We Just Padding Pockets?: Cost-Benefit Analysis of Universal Voucher Eligibility (Dissertation Paper)

- **Role:** Estimate monetary value associated with student achievement outcomes

Urban AI Unlocked: Transforming District Systems for Equitable AI Integration

- **Collaborators:** Patricia Burch (PI), Junmin Byon, & Alvin Makori
- **Role:** Web scrape NCES LEA IDs for over 9,000 districts, connect contract data to NCES CCD data, content analysis of master service agreements

The Quiet Revolution of School Vouchers and ESAs

- **Collaborators:** Julie Marsh (PI), Margaret Dawson-Amoah, Mariana De Franca Steil, Jeimee Estrada-Miller, Desiree O'Neal, & Akunna Uka
- **Role:** Review literature on private school policies, interview school and policy leaders

Research Positions

Research Assistant – *Rossier School of Education, USC*

2022-Present

Contributed to research efforts on following grants:

- *Charter School Performance and Practices After the COVID-19 Pandemic*. MIT Blueprint Labs. PI: Ron Zimmer. \$309,520.
- *Charter School Enrollment and Performance Before, During, and After the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Tennessee State Collaboration on Reforming Education. PI: Adam Kho. \$302,275.
- *Hattie's Influences on Student Achievement Under an Institutionally Racist System: What Works for Black and Brown Students?*, William T. Grant Foundation. PI: Adam Kho. \$600,000.
- *Do Charter Authorizer Evaluations Predict School Success? Evidence from North Carolina.*, Thomas B. Fordham Institute. PI: Adam Kho. \$30,000.
- *Perceived Impacts of Conflict Resolution Education on Student Outcomes*. Western Justice Center. PI: Adam Kho. \$25,000.
- *Hattie's Influence on Student Achievement Under an Institutionally Racist System: What Works for Black and Brown Students?* University of Southern California. PI: Adam Kho. \$30,000.

Funding

External Research Grants

Under Review

Co-Principal Investigator, *The Choice No One Talks About: Charter Authorization Decisions*. MIT Blueprint Labs Charter School Research Collaborative. PI: Julie Marsh, University of Southern California. \$75,000.

Not Funded

Co-Principal Investigator, *The Choice No One Talks About: Charter Authorization Decisions*. MIT Blueprint Labs Charter School Research Collaborative. PI: Julie Marsh, University of Southern California. \$75,000.

Internal Research Grants

USC Rossier Internal Research Funds Grant (\$3,000)	2025
USC Rossier Internal Research Funds Grant (\$499)	2023
UCI Research Opportunities Fellow (\$3,000)	2020
UCI Research Opportunities Fellow (\$2,075)	2019

Travel Grants

USC Professional Development Grant (\$500)	2025
AEFP Roe L. Johns Student Travel Grant (\$400)	2025
AERA Innovative School Transformation and Reform SIG Travel Grant (\$300)	2025
AERA School Effectiveness and School Improvement SIG Travel Grant (\$120)	2025
AERA Division L Graduate Student Travel Grant (\$120)	2025
APPAM Graduate Student Travel Grant (\$70)	2024
USC Professional Development Grant (\$500)	2024
USC Price Travel Grant (\$300)	2024
USC Rossier Dean's Professional Development Grant (\$250)	2024
USC Professional Development Grant (\$500)	2023
USC Price Travel Grant (\$300)	2023
USC Rossier Dean's Professional Development Grant (\$250)	2023
AEFP Roe L. Johns Student Travel Grant (\$145)	2023

Scholarships

USC Price Dean's Merit Scholarship (\$100,000)	2021
David Rosten International and Community Service Scholarship (\$2,000)	2020

Conference Presentations

- Kho, A., **Smith, S. L.**, Dhaliwal, T. K., Huerta, A. H., Torres, G., & Marsh, J. A. (2025, April 26). *Building restorative school cultures: Insights from peer mediation programs in elementary and middle schools* [Paper presentation]. American Educational Research Association Annual Conference, Denver, CO.
- Kho, A., **Smith, S. L.**, & Zimmer, R. (2025, March 14). *Tennessee charter school performance during and after the COVID-19 pandemic* [Paper presentation]. Association for Education Finance & Policy Annual Conference, Washington, DC.
- Kho, A., **Smith, S. L.**, & Zimmer, R. (2024, Nov. 23). *Charter school performance during and after the COVID-19 pandemic* [Paper presentation]. Association for Public Policy and Management Fall Research Conference, National Harbor, MD.
- Smith, S. L.**, Dawson-Amoah, M., Tong, T., Pardo, N., Alonso-Morris, E. A., & Kho, A. (2024, Nov. 23). *The shifting missions of choice schools in the United States* [Poster presentation]. Association for Public Policy and Management Fall Research Conference, National Harbor, MD.
- Smith, S. L.**, Ramos Martinez, I. M., Xe, T., & Castellanos, J. (2024, April 12). *Supporting the development of students' scholar-activist identities: A teaching team's collaborative autoethnography* [Paper presentation]. American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, Philadelphia, PA.
- Smith, S. L.**, & Aguilar, J. (2024, April 13). *Racist logics in educational countermovements: A critical policy discourse analysis* [Roundtable presentation]. American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, Philadelphia, PA.
- Feinberg, M., **Smith, S. L.**, Dawson-Amoah, M., & Clay, I. (2024, April 13). *Enacted micropolitics in teacher course assignment* [Roundtable presentation]. American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, Philadelphia, PA.
- Smith, S. L.** (2023, Sept. 1). *How does racism present in educational policy? A critical policy discourse analysis of Arizona's ban on Mexican American studies* [Poster presentation]. American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Los Angeles, CA.
- Smith, S. L.** (2023, March 25). *The impacts of Upward Bound participation eight years after scheduled high school graduation* [Paper presentation]. Association for Education Finance and Policy Annual Conference, Denver, CO.
- Smith, S. L.** (2021, June 30). *Palestinian identity in Arab Israeli schools: An examination of psychosocio-cultural factors influencing teachers' cultural pedagogy* [Paper presentation]. International Association for Intercultural Education Annual Meeting, Online.

Media Coverage

Tennessee charter school performance during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

- [Ohio Gadfly Daily](#), [Thomas B. Fordham Institute](#) [🔗](#), [Tennessee Firefly](#) [🔗](#), [The News-Enterprise](#) [🔗](#), [Show-Me Institute](#) [🔗](#), [Mackinac Center for Public Policy](#) [🔗](#)

Do authorizer evaluations predict the success of new charter schools?

- [The Washington Times](#) [🔗](#), [EdNC](#) [🔗](#)(March), [EdNC](#) [🔗](#)(April), [Flypaper](#), [Thomas B. Fordham Institute](#) [🔗](#), [NC Newsline](#) [🔗](#), [North Carolina Justice Center](#) [🔗](#)

Invited Talks

- Kho, A., & **Smith, S. L.** (2024, June 21). *Do charter authorizer evaluations predict schools success?* [Paper presentation]. California Charter School Authorizers Conference, Irvine, CA. (*supporting role*)
- Smith, S. L.** (2024, March 1). *Co-developing research projects for impact* [Panel discussion]. USC Rossier Research Conference, Los Angeles, CA.
- Smith, S. L.**, Ramos, M., & Xe, T. (2020, Oct. 17). *Advocacy through research: Community support as an undergraduate student* [Powerpoint presentation]. California Student Leadership Conference, Online.

Teaching

University of Southern California

Instructor – <i>Student Learning and Motivation: Succeeding in College</i> Undergraduate Course, 21 students	Summer 2024
Teaching Assistant – <i>Organizations and Policy: Current Issues</i> Ph.D. Seminar, 9 students, led by Dr. Julie Marsh	Spring 2024
Teaching Assistant – <i>Intro to Quantitative Research Methods in Education</i> Ph.D. Course, 6 students, led by Dr. Adam Kho	Fall 2023
Course Assistant & Accessibility Scribe – <i>Economics for Public Policy</i> Master's Course, 53 students, led by Dr. TJ McCarthy	Summer 2022
Course Assistant – <i>Economics for Public Policy</i> Master's Course, 51 students, led by Dr. Mark Phillips	Spring 2022

University of California– Irvine

Course Design Assistant – <i>American Culture</i> Undergraduate Writing Course, led by Dr. Corina Espinoza	Fall 2022
Course Assistant – <i>Social Policy & Public Service</i> Undergraduate Course, 40 students, led by Dr. Corina Espinoza	Winter 2021
Course Technology Consultant – <i>Principals of Social Science</i> Undergraduate Course, led by Dr. Corina Espinoza	Fall 2020
Course Assistant – <i>American Culture</i> Undergraduate Writing Course, Asynchronous, 40 students, led by Dr. Corina Espinoza	Summer 2020
Course Assistant – <i>Field Studies in Social Policy and Public Service</i> Undergraduate Three-Quarter Capstone Seminar, 27 students, led by Dr. Jeanett Castellanos	2019-2020

Invited Guest Lectures

“Applications of Econometric Methods in Education Research” Ed.D. Course at California State University, Los Angeles led by Dr. Theresa Meyerott	Fall 2025
“Introduction to Quantitative Research in Education” Undergraduate Course at University of Southern California led by Dr. Patricia Burch	Spring 2023

Teaching Awards

USC University Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award	2025
USC Rossier Ph.D. Teaching Assistant of the Year	2023-2024

Professional Affiliations

Association for Public Policy Analysis & Management	2023-Present
Association for Education Finance & Policy	2023-Present
American Educational Research Association	2023-Present
American Political Science Association	2023

Service

American Educational Research Association

Graduate Student Reviewer for Conference Proposals	2024 & 2025
Division L Graduate Student Professional Development Committee Volunteer	2024–Present

Association for Public Policy Analysis & Management

Student Ambassador for Annual Research Conference	2024
Session Organizer	2024
Session Chair	2023

USC Rossier School of Education

Ph.D. Student Representative in Faculty Meetings	2024–Present
Ph.D. Peer Mentor	2024–Present
Board Member of Student Community of PhDs in Education (SCoPE)	2024–Present
EdPolicy Hub Developing Responsive Research Conference Volunteer	2023

USC Price School of Public Policy

Panelist for Young Alumni Presentation	2025
Student Ambassador	2021–2023
Mentorship for MPP Applicants	2021–2023

University of California – Irvine

Barnes and Noble College Scholar	2020
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Skills and Competencies

Methods

Quantitative: Regression analysis, econometrics for causal inference, descriptive statistics, natural language processing

Qualitative: Semi-structured interviews, discourse analysis, content analysis, collaborative autoethnography

Software

STATA (proficient): Data cleaning, quantitative analysis, causal inference

Python (beginner): Web scraping, natural language processing, data visualization

Excel (intermediate): Data visualization

Dedoose (proficient): Thematic analysis of textual data

Qualtrics (proficient): Survey design

LaTeX (beginner): Document formatting