Education 751: The Social Context of Schooling
Fall 2013

Class meetings: Thursdays 1-4 in 2328 School of Education Building

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Office hours: By appointment

Course Overview
This course introduces graduate students to key approaches and issues in the study of schooling, with special attention to the social, cultural, political, economic, and institutional dynamics of educational processes. Historically through today, Americans have tasked schools with addressing a diverse array of societal challenges. These challenges range from closing a range of achievement gaps, to instilling children with particular sets of moral and civic values, to preparing them for the workforce and future life success. Where schools fall short, our remedies for the "problems" of schools often attempt to alter the social contexts in which students, teachers, administrators, and parents interact. How, then, can we productively understand and investigate the relationship between schools and social structure? This course draws upon multiple theoretical perspectives but is grounded in the premises that (a) what is taught in school matters for what children learn and do and (b) that multiple causal mechanisms can influence educational processes and outcomes.

We will focus on the formal K-12 educational system in our readings and together explore the following three themes: the purposes and organizational structures of schooling; inequality and mechanisms of reproduction and change in schooling; and the challenges of changing the familiar structures of schooling. Throughout the course, we will examine the processes through which schools instantiate and reinforce the existing social structure. We will also engage with the theories of change that underpin specific education policies and reform efforts designed to advance equity and other goals in society.

Course Goals
In this course, we examine major theoretical lines of analysis used to study the relationship between schools, the people that inhabit them, and the environment. This course aims to strengthen your ability to:

- Understand and be able to describe key frameworks and concepts relevant to the study of schooling and educational processes.
- Critically assess the affordances and limitations of insights provided by different theoretical perspectives on the relationship between education and society.
- Write knowledgeable about the mechanisms and relationships assumed in specific education policies by drawing on these theoretical perspectives.

Course Evaluation
Your grade from this course will come from two types of writing assignments and participation in class discussions.
1. Analytic Essays (3, each worth 15% of final grade): For each 6-page, double-spaced essay, you will present a theoretically-grounded analysis of a topic or issue raised across a set of readings. The main goal of these essay assignments is to make sure you understand and can use the theoretical perspectives introduced in this course. A successful essay will respond to the prompt by critically drawing course readings together, rather than just summarizing the readings. A second goal is to support your continued development as a writer. You will upload each essay assignment to CTools for review during in-class peer review team meetings (see participation, below), and for grading by the instructor the following week.

**Note:** For each analytic essay, I will provide a prompt on the date listed in the syllabus. You may choose to write in response to my prompt or design your own guiding question.

2. Seminar Paper (40% of final grade): For this 20-page, double-spaced paper, you have 3 options, outlined below. The overall goal of this assignment is for you to conceptually review and critique the empirical scholarship on a topic of interest to you (and related to the social context of schooling). In other words, this assignment is a conceptually-oriented synthesis of the literature on a topic you choose. For example, you might use this assignment to dig into the empirical literature investigating: bilingual education programs, local or state-level responses to standards-based accountability policies, desegregation efforts, parent engagement programs, the relationship between teachers and student outcomes, or programs designed to support high school-to-work or college transitions. I expect you to use specific examples from the readings you select and course materials to support your argument in the paper you submit.

Three assignments during the semester will inform your paper: (1) a 1-page proposal that outlines the topic you plan to investigate (September 19th); (2) an annotated reference list (7-10 key empirical studies) (November 6th); and (3) an in-class briefing describing your preliminary findings (December 12th). The final paper is due on December 17th.

- **Option A:** This paper has two parts. In Part 1, you will describe the causal mechanisms asserted to be most important for the empirical case you explore. In this section, you will discuss how the studies you have identified characterize “the way things are” and opportunities for change. In Part 2, you will evaluate the materials you described in Part 1, based on themes emerging from class discussions and materials from the course.

- **Option B:** With my permission, you may develop an alternative paper format that advances your dissertation work or professional goals. For example, it may be helpful to develop a research prospectus on a topic related to themes covered in this course. If you plan to pursue this option, please email me to set up an appointment.

- **Option C:** Master’s students may submit a paper crafted in the form of a grant proposal.

Participation in class discussion, including discussion facilitation on your selected reading and peer feedback teams (15% of final grade): Completion of assigned readings is key to the exchange of ideas and new ways of thinking that lead to an engaging and stimulating seminar. You are expected to carefully read the assigned readings before class. I encourage you to take notes on the main ideas and arguments, as well as connections you see with
other readings and your own experiences. Please come to class prepared to discuss the
guiding questions posted on CTools for each class session and let me know, via email, if you
will be absent. In addition:
  • For discussion facilitation, you will lead a class discussion for your classmates
    around one reading of your choice.
  • For peer feedback team meetings, you are expected to carefully review and discuss
    your classmates’ essays during class.

Assignments can be turned in at any time before the deadline.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Deadline (Wednesdays at 12pm)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Seminar paper proposal</td>
<td>September 19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analytic Essay 1 to Peer Feedback Team</td>
<td>October 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analytic Essay 1 Final</td>
<td>October 9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analytic Essay 2 to Peer Feedback Team</td>
<td>October 23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analytic Essay 2 Final</td>
<td>October 30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seminar paper annotated reference list</td>
<td>November 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analytic Essay 3 to Peer Feedback Team</td>
<td>November 27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analytic Essay 3 Final</td>
<td>December 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seminar paper due</td>
<td>December 17 (Tuesday, 5pm)</td>
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**Representing others’ research**

As part of engaging with the readings and the core themes of this course, I expect you to
explicitly draw on ongoing conversations in academic and public discourse in our
discussions and in your writing. When you draw on ideas in others’ research in your written
assignments, please be sure to attribute that work correctly. For guidance about how to do
this, please see the American Psychological Association’s *Publication’s Manual*.

**Recommended Texts**


All other (required) readings will be posted on CTools under the Resources section or
available as electronic books through the UM’s ebrary subscription (available through the
library website).

Note: Based on class interests, I may occasionally adjust required readings. I will announce
any changes in class sessions and post on CTools

**Semester Calendar – Fall 2013**

**Part 1: Introduction and Schooling in America circa 2013**

**Session 1 (September 5th):** Course aims, theoretical frameworks, introductions
Required reading:
and students who don’t fit them. *Teachers College Record, 103*(4), 525–547.
Session 2 (September 12th): Better schools, better tests?
Required readings:

Recommended reading:

• Seminar paper overview handed out in class

Session 3 (September 19th): Achievement gaps in American public schools
Required readings:

Recommended reading:

• 1-page proposal for seminar paper due to instructor (CTools)

Part 2: Purposes and Structures of Schooling

Session 4 (September 26th): Civic and moral purposes of schooling
Required readings:

Recommended readings:
• Prompt for Analytic Essay 1 handed out in class

Session 5 (October 3rd): "Restoring competitiveness": Economic purposes of schooling

Required readings:

Recommended readings:

• Analytic Essay 1 due for peer feedback (CTools) on October 2nd, 12pm

Session 6 (October 10th): The structure of the U.S. school system

Required readings:

Recommended reading:

• Analytic Essay 1 due to instructor (CTools) on October 9th, 12pm

Part 3: Inequality and mechanisms of change and reproduction

Session 7 (October 17th): Structuring inequality and difference within schools

Required readings:

Recommended reading:

- Prompt for Analytic Essay 2 handed out in class

Session 8 (October 24th): Aims and content of curriculum
Required readings:

Recommended readings:

- **Analytic Essay 2 due for peer feedback (CTools) on October 23rd, 12pm**

Session 9 (October 31st): Mediating the curriculum: How teachers teach
Required readings:

Recommended reading:

- **Analytic Essay 2 due to instructor (CTools) on October 30th, 12pm**

**Part 4. Analyzing the challenges and dynamics of changing the familiar structures of schooling**

Session 10 (November 7th): Leading schools for teaching and learning
Required readings:

Recommended reading:

- **Annotated reference list for seminar paper due on November 6th**

Session 11 (November 14th): Teachers’ and students’ expectations of schooling
Required reading:

Recommended reading:

- *Prompt for Analytic Essay 3 handed out in class*

**Session 12 (November 21st): Parents and schooling**

Required readings:
Posey, L.E. (2012). Middle- and upper-middle-class parent action for urban public schools: Promise or paradox? *Teachers College Record, 114*(1), 1-43

- *Analytic Essay 3 due for peer feedback (CTools) on November 27th, 12pm*

**Happy Thanksgiving! (November 28th)**

**Session 13 (December 5th): Better schools, better tests redux**

Required readings:

Recommended reading:

- *Analytic Essay 3 due on December 5th, 12pm*

**Session 14 (December 12th): Synthesis**

Required readings to be assigned based on class interests

- *In-class briefings on seminar papers*
- *Seminar paper due December 17th by 5pm (Ctools).*