SOCI 905
Educational Inequalities and Policies in Comparative Perspective

Spring 2019
Oldfather Hall 707, Fridays 2pm-4:30pm

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Office Hours
Th 2-4pm, Fri after class
or by appointment

COURSE OVERVIEW
Two main goals shape the structure and content of this course. First, as an integral part of the graduate program in Sociology, I have designed it for students with interests in social stratification/inequality. Many of the readings assigned will help students prepare for the “comprehensive exams” in these areas. More generally, the course will help prepare students to conduct research and teach courses in this field. As such, I expect students interested in taking this course to have solid background training in Sociology (theories and methods), though not necessarily expertise in the area of Sociology of Education. If you already have such expertise, this course will deepen your understanding of the field (and help you focus your own research energies). I cordially welcome students from other departments and academic units. That said: If you have no background in the sociology of education and/or plan to take the departmental comprehensive exam in inequalities/stratification, please follow the literature suggestions on p. 4 of this syllabus.

Second, this seminar focuses on examining educational inequalities by using an explicitly comparative-historical and an international approach to. In the process, this seminar addresses several questions: (1) How do Sociologists explain the role of education in society? In other words: What are the main theoretical frameworks we employ? (2) What do we know about the determinants of access to educational opportunities? We begin by exploring how students’ ascribed and family background characteristics shape opportunities to learn, and how these unequal opportunities hold consequences for educational outcomes. (3) Beyond these micro-level dynamics, what do we know about the causes of educational inequalities? In particular, what do we know about the meso-level, organizational dynamics that shape inequalities outside of, within, and between schools and school systems? (3) What consequences have policy reforms had e.g., on educational inequalities and related outcomes? Our primary substantive focus will be on the intended and unintended (or at least unanticipated) consequences of several waves of policy reforms, as well as the changing social and cultural contexts that have shaped these dynamics. This includes the rise of public school alternatives (e.g., charter schools, homeschooling), efforts to address persistent gaps in educational opportunities and outcomes, and the contemporary accountability movement. Depending on the substantive interests of seminar participants, content may focus primarily on the K-12 system, or shift to include current dynamics affecting higher education.

Nota bene: This course reflects my own areas of expertise in the field. This course is not designed for students primarily interested in pedagogy and didactics, curriculum/program evaluation, or those with a primary interest in social psychological causes/consequences of educational outcomes. If this is what you are looking for, I would be happy to direct you to suitable courses and faculty mentors.
The structure of the course reflects the following main questions:

1. **Weeks 1 through 4:** How do Sociologists explain the role of schooling in society? In other words: What are the main **theoretical frameworks** we employ? What methodological and practical implications do these frameworks have for empirical research?

2. **Weeks 5 through 7:** Taking an explicitly comparative perspective, what can we discern about the determinants of **access to education**, across time and space? What role have policies and political conditions played? Who has shaped these policies, their development and implementation? What consequences, intentional and otherwise, have educational policies had on social stratification?

3. **Weeks 8 through 14:** Focusing on the social context of education, what do we know about the causes and consequences of **unequal educational opportunities and outcomes**? In this section, we will explore inequalities outside of, within, and between schools by considering issues that span the micro-macro continuum. We will see how students’ ascribed and family background characteristics shape opportunities to learn, and how these unequal opportunities hold consequences for academic outcomes.

4. **Weeks 15 and 16:** Where do we go from here? This section will focus on the potential strengths and weaknesses of **policy reforms** aimed at improving educational outcomes and/or reducing inequalities.

**GROUND RULES**

I reserve the right to change any aspect of the syllabus.

**Student Code of Conduct:** The student code of conduct applies to all aspects of the course, including but not limited to assignments. If you are unfamiliar with it, please visit [http://stuafs.unl.edu/ja/code/three.shtml](http://stuafs.unl.edu/ja/code/three.shtml), paying close attention to section 4. **By attending this class you agree to adhere to the academic honor code.**

**Professionalism:** I welcome and encourage input from a wide range of viewpoints. However, I will not tolerate disruptive behavior or discourteous manners and speech. So as to create a classroom environment in which everyone may feel comfortable participating in discussions, it is expected that no audio or video recordings of class will be made without the prior knowledge and consent of the instructor. Students with disabilities for which reasonable accommodation would include making such recordings should work with the Services for Students with Disabilities office and the instructor to make arrangements. This also means: **Please TURN OFF your cell phones, pagers, etc. Unless you have a professional reason to need access to your phone (e.g., you are a first responder), I consider it disruptive, inconsiderate, and disrespectful when these devices are used during class. I retain intellectual property rights to my lectures, and your peers have privacy protections under FERPA -- both are violated when you record without consent or permission. In class, I will explain the consequences failing this expectation will have for you -- in which case I do reserve the right to lower your course grade.**

**Visitors:** I welcome visitors who attend as personal guests of students and by invitation of the instructor. Please ask your host to introduce you to me before the start of class. I expect guests to adhere to the same ground rules that apply to students. The university’s Trespass Policy (Regents’ Policy 6.4.7) states: “The areas of University academic, research, public service, and administrative buildings of the University used for classrooms, laboratories, faculty and staff offices, and the areas of University student residence buildings used for student living quarters are not open to the general public. Any person not authorized to be or remain in any such building area will be deemed to be trespassing on University property, and may be cited and subject to prosecution for criminal trespass in violation of Neb. Rev. Stat., § 28-520 or § 28-521.”
Americans with Disabilities Act: Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) works with students to develop academic accommodations to meet their needs, including for mental health disabilities such as depression and anxiety. Students registered with SSD are encouraged to contact the instructor for a confidential discussion of their individual needs for academic accommodation. It is UNL policy to provide flexible and individualized accommodation to students with documented disabilities that may affect their ability to fully participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. To receive accommodation services, students must be registered with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office, 132 Canfield Administration, 472-3787 voice or TTY. For further information regarding UNL policies in this regard, please visit http://www.unl.edu/equity/ or call (402) 472-2322.

Gender-Neutral Bathrooms: The closest one is Andrews Hall 126F, 127. See other gender-neutral bathrooms on campus at involved.unl.edu/unl-gender-neutral-bathrooms.

Lactation Rooms: There is a lactation space on the 7th floor in Oldfather Hall. Additional information about lactation spaces is available at http://www.unl.edu/chancellor/policymemoranda/20090901-Lactation-Policy. Student learning outcomes will be assessed as follows:

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
Grades:
UNL does recognize a B- as a passing grade for graduate courses. Grading scale:
97 – 100% = A+
90 – 92% = A-
87 – 89% = B+
83 – 86% = B-
80 – 82% = C+
77 – 79% = C-
73 – 76% = C
70 – 72% = C-
67 – 69% = D+
63 – 66% = D
60 – 62% = D-
0 – 59% = F

Attendance and Participation: 20% of grade
Regular attendance in class: If you miss more than three classes during the semester, I reserve the right to lower your grade. Punctuality is key. Late arrival counts as an absence. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to obtain notes from your fellow students. 10% of course grade.

Active participation in class: This includes being attentive and participating in class discussions. I expect students to come to class prepared. This includes having read the materials for each class before we meet. 10% of course grade.

I encourage you to participate actively and constructively. Should imbalances arise (i.e., some students talking a lot and some students never talking), I will actively seek a wider range of participation. Irregular attendance will affect your course grade negatively, as will sheer physical presence combined with mental absence.

I expect students to come to class prepared; this includes having read the materials for each class before we meet. Everyone is expected to complete the required readings; presenters are also expected to complete the supplemental readings. In addition to participating in class on a regular basis, students will turn in several written assignments, give in-class presentations, and write a final paper.

Written Assignments: 30% of final grade
This course is designed to provide students with an overview of theoretical and empirical research in the field. The best way to learn new material and retain it is through critical evaluation--i.e., discussion and writing. In the best possible scenario, this course will influence your research interests for years to come. More pragmatically, it should also prepare you for a possible prelim specialty area. For this purpose, students will turn in a total of three critical syntheses of a week’s worth of required readings (more
summaries do not suffice). Varying in length, these short essays are due at the beginning of each class. These reflective essays will comprise 25% of your final grade. I will discuss explicit guidelines in class.

#1 Critical Synthesis - Theory paper: 10% of final grade
The first paper is due by start of class on February 15 (WEEK 5). The previous week marked the end of the theory section. The purpose of the paper is to have you compare/contrast/critique elements of 2 theoretical frameworks of your choice with regard to their usefulness in explaining social movement dynamics (n.b: you need to come up with a good question for your paper on your own, or in consultation with me). That paper should be about 5 pages long and will count for 10% of your final grade. More details in class.

#2 and #3 Critical Syntheses - Additional: 20% of final grade
Throughout the rest of the semester, you will do 2 more critical syntheses on topics of your choice. To help you pace yourself, I require that you submit one paper in Feb/March and one in April. Shoot for 5 pages each; each paper is weighted equally, together comprising 20% of your final grade. Do not let these short papers interfere with research requirements due at the end of the semester. I do not accept late assignments.

To practice your comprehensive exam writing skills, you will reflect on and integrate the readings. This means: relate them to each other (where feasible), to readings from other weeks or even other classes (where feasible) and pay close attention to the theoretical frameworks on which they draw. Use this lens to ascertain how/why arguments complement or contradict each other.

An optimal way to approach all three writing assignments is to start out with a question. You may but do not have to ask a question that encompasses all readings, nor do you need to write several questions (or answers) for different readings. One good question and one comprehensive answer will do. Draw on all relevant materials from this course to answer your question and feel free to draw on related, relevant materials you have encountered in other seminars. Just make sure you stick to the issue you raised in the beginning.

In-Class Presentations: 20% of grade
Your active and constructive participation in seminar throughout the semester contributes 10% to your final grade. In addition, each student will give two oral presentations during the semester (in pairs, if class size permits). Each presentation is worth 10% of your final grade. We will discuss explicit presentation guidelines in class and in individual consultations. As part of these presentations, you will provide your peers with integrated summaries to the week’s readings. (More in the spirit of prelim preparation!) Please make these summaries available by email to every seminar participant BY 1:00 P.M. the day of class. Your one-page summaries per reading should discuss the research question, methodology and findings of each required reading and explain how it fits in the theoretical and empirical literature at large.

Rather than thinking of this as giving a lecture, the purpose of your presentations should be to lead class discussion that day and to involve your peers in an in-depth debate about the readings and the subject matter. Working in pairs, you will lead the course for that week. It might make sense to do presentations the same weeks for which you plan to turn in your critical syntheses.

Research Proposal: 30% of final grade
The final paper, which will comprise the remaining 30% of your course grade, should be modeled after a grant proposal. Depending on the student’s status, this may be a pre-dissertation, dissertation, or even post-doctoral grant proposal. In selecting your audience/agency for this mock-proposal, you will be able to choose between different formats. Part of your challenge will be to figure out who your audience and
thus your potential grantors might be. Examples include e.g., NSF, MacArthur, SSRC, Aspen, Fulbright, or Lilly. More detailed information on different funding agencies and their priorities is forthcoming.

The main purpose of this assignment is to help you integrate things learned in this seminar while advancing your own research agenda. Some advanced students may decide instead to write a dissertation chapter or provide an ongoing research project with the theoretical framework necessary to submit a paper for publication. In either case, your final product must go beyond providing a literature review and include a methods/research design component.

The length of these proposals will vary depending on their purpose, but you should aim for 10 pages, single spaced. The due date for the final paper/grant proposal is **Friday, April 26 (at NOON)**. I will not accept late papers.

- To help you get an early start on this paper, please **discuss your initial research project idea with me by the end of January**. Discuss your revised idea with me before **March 15** (Friday before Spring Break).
- **Evidence that you completed CITI training (Human Subjects/IRB certification) is due by February 28.**
- **An initial 5-page prospectus of your final paper/proposal is due right after Spring Break -- on Tuesday, March 26. Please distribute it electronically to all course participants.**
- **Please provide your peers with constructive written comments on their own proposals by the beginning of class on March 29. In class on March 29, we will discuss each proposal.**
- **The final version of your grant proposal is due by NOON on Friday, April 26.** Not negotiable.

**READINGS**

1. **GENERAL ADVICE:**
   If you have no background in the sociology of education, I strongly urge you to read, in advance, at least two introductory sources we typically assign at the undergraduate level:

**Required Books: (assigned partially, also available on library reserves)**

**Recommended Classics (especially if you plan to take the comprehensive exam):**


2. WEEKLY READING ASSIGNMENTS

*Please note that reading loads can be uneven across weeks* – please plan accordingly. You are expected to master comprehension of the readings on your own.

**Electronic readings (articles, chapters, excerpts):**

Articles/chapters are placed on e-reserves and will be made available via our Canvas site. So are book excerpts, unless they exceed fair use policies, in which case the book is listed in its entirety below. If you have questions regarding the items placed on reserves, either electronically or otherwise, please contact the librarian, Zachary Eden, at zeden1@unl.edu, or contact me.

The required books should be available at the UNL Bookstore. If not, feel free to order them online with your favorite vendor. Or look for new/used copies online. All books are also on short-term reserve at Love Library.

Readings noted in green are also featured on the Sociology Department’s comprehensive exam list (area of inequalities).

Readings noted in purple are also featured in the Grusky reader (a central part of the comprehensive exam reading list in the area of inequalities).
CLASS SCHEDULE

WEEKS 1-4: What are the main theoretical frameworks in Sociology of Education?
This section aims to introduce students to the major paradigms in the sociology of education. We will roughly follow the historical trajectory and paradigm changes, though evidence of all approaches persist over time. Main question: How do we explain the persistence of (and changes in) patterns regarding access to education, educational outcomes and stratification?

- Please discuss your initial research project idea with me by the end of January.

WEEK 1
January 7 Start of classes (Monday)
January 11 First Class Meeting NO DISCUSSION LEADER (RW leads)
Classics from the Functionalist Tradition

WEEK 2
January 18 The Functionalist Tradition, Contd.
DISCUSSION LEADER: ________________________
Coleman, J. & T. Hoffer. “Schools, Families and Communities.” Ch. 7 in Arum and Beattie reader.
WEEK 3
January 21  MLK Day (No classes on Monday)

January 25  Class and Status-Based Traditions

DISCUSSION LEADER:

Bourdieu, P. “Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction.” Ch. 6 in Arum and Beattie reader.

WEEK 4
February 8  Organizational and Institutional Theories

DISCUSSION LEADER:

**WEEKS 5 to 7: What determines access to education?**

This section is designed to help you see the “big picture.” Questions about inequalities in educational outcomes (attainment, achievement etc.) are based on the assumption that educational opportunities are accessible and affordable. But this premise is questionable. We will spend one day examining how access to education differs across countries, and three days on how it has differed historically in the U.S.

Please remember: Evidence of CITI Training (Human Subjects) is due by February 28.

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**WEEK 5**

**February 15**

**Access to Education: Comparative International Evidence**

**DISCUSSION LEADER:** ________________________________


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**WEEK 6**

**February 22**

**Access to Education in Historical Perspective: Race and Ethnic Politics**

**DISCUSSION LEADER:** ________________________________


WEEK 7

March 1  Access to Education in Historical Perspective: Gender Politics

DISCUSSION LEADER: _______________________________

Solomon, B. 1985. “The Collegiate Education of Women... 1920-1940” (ch. 9) in In the Company of Educated Women.

WEEKS 8-14: What are the causes and consequences of educational stratification?

For the next seven weeks, we will explore inequalities outside of, within, and between schools by considering issues that span the micro-macro continuum.

- Please remember to discuss your revised idea with me before March 15 (Friday before Spring Break).
- An initial 5-page prospectus is due right after Spring Break on Tuesday, March 26. It will be electronically distributed to all course participants.
- Please provide your peers with constructive written comments on their own proposals by the beginning of class on March 29. In class on March 29, we will discuss each proposal.

WEEK 8

March 8  The “Other” Forms of Capital: Cultural, Social, “Oppositional”?

DISCUSSION LEADER: _______________________________

WEEK 9

March 15

YOU CHOOSE THE TOPIC:

OPTION A: Curriculum Differentiation

DISCUSSION LEADER: _______________________________

Ainsworth, James W. and Vincent J. Roscigno. 2005. “Stratification, School-Work Linkages and
Vocational Education.” Social Forces 84:257-84.
Condron, Dennis J. 2007. “Stratification and Educational Sorting: Explaining Ascriptive Inequalities in

OPTION B: Disciplinary Policies/School-to-Prison Pipeline

DISCUSSION LEADER: _______________________________

88:3:181-201.
Lindsay C. and C. Hart. 2017. “Exposure to Same-Race Teachers and Student Disciplinary Outcomes for
Mittleman, J. 2018. “A Downward Spiral? Childhood Suspension and the Path to Juvenile Arrest.” Soc of
Ed 91:3:183-204.

WEEK 10

March 17-24

SPRING BREAK – HEADS UP!

- 5-page prospectus is due by 5pm on Tuesday, March 26. Please distribute electronically to
  all course participants.
- Constructive written comments to all your peers due by 2pm on Friday, March 29. Please
  distribute electronically to all course participants.
WEEK 1
March 22  School Segregation

DISCUSSION LEADER: ________________


WEEK 12
March 29  GROUP DISCUSSION OF EACH PROPOSAL.
• Each participant gets 5 minutes to present their idea, 5 minutes to respond to constructive feedback received, 5 minutes for Q&A. Come prepared.

WEEK 13
April 5  Funding Dynamics

DISCUSSION LEADER: ________________


WEEK 14

April 12  Achievement Gaps

DISCUSSION LEADER: _______________________________


Rothstein, R. 2004. “Introduction” and “Social Class, Student Achievement, and the black-white Achievement Gap” (pp. 1-60) in Class and Schools.


WEEKS 15 and 16: Where do we go from here?

For two weeks, we will place the spotlight on contemporary policy in education, and beyond – with emphasis on the potential and actual, (un)intended consequences they have on social inequalities.

- Your final proposal is due by NOON on Friday, April 26. Not negotiable.

WEEK 15

April 19  Policy Reforms I: “The One Best System?”

DISCUSSION LEADER: _______________________________


WEEK 16  FINAL PAPER DUE TODAY AT NOON.
PLEASE ARRIVE IN CLASS PREPARED AND ON TIME.

April 26  Policy Reforms II: Systemic Ripple Effects

DISCUSSION LEADER: ________________________________


