

WESTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
Department of Sociology

SOC 361
Sociology of Education
Fall 2013, MWF 2:30-3:50pm
ES 80

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Course Overview

This course presents a range of sociological problems related to the education system, and introduces a set of theoretical and methodological tools to serve as a foundation for analyzing these problems. We will ask questions such as: How do economic and cultural hierarchies become retranslated as educational hierarchies? How do educational hierarchies, in turn, sustain and/or transform existing social hierarchies exogenous to the education system? These general questions will be explored within the specific contexts of school socialization processes, parent/school relationships, curricular tracking, choice of major, degree attainment, among other topics.

One of the central theoretical concepts of this course is that of *trajectory*. The concept of trajectory generally implies movement through space as a function of time. In this course we will extend the concept to movement through *social space* under the influence of various (and often intersecting) forces. Thus, a key problematic in this course will be to uncover the multiple trajectories through which students and parents navigate the education system, and to understand how these trajectories systematically structure the inequitable distribution of resources needed to flourish in modern social structures. Although we will focus significant attention on the interactions between these trajectories and historically marginalized actors, it is my hope that you will use this opportunity to interrogate your own educational trajectory and the forces shaping its intensity and direction(s).

Class Format

The format of the class meetings will be a hybrid of Socratic lecture, seminar-style discussions, and problem solving workshops. When lecturing I will often initiate a dialogue by posing questions to individual students at random. Be prepared for questions. During seminar-style discussions we will work in groups to raise critical questions and formulate connections across the course material. In addition, I will pose problems through case studies in order to provide you with opportunities to apply theoretical and methodological tools to analyze key questions in the sociology of education. Finally, at times throughout the quarter we may have a guest lecturer and for one or two meetings I will be facilitating the class remotely via Skype.

Learning Objectives and Modes of Evaluation

The following represent the primary learning objectives for this course:

1. To gain a substantive understanding of the problems sociologists of education seek to solve and the tools they use to solve them;
2. To practice this craft of problem solving through model-building and case study analysis;
3. To understand how educational practices and trajectories differentially impact students

- based upon race, gender, class and other social positions;
4. To take intellectual risks through course assignments and discussions and to engage in forms of participation that are personally challenging.

There are multiple ways in which I will evaluate the extent to which you are exhibiting growth related to each of the four learning objectives: participation in class discussions and assignments, a mid-term and final exam, and two short papers. The grading weight for each mode of evaluation is listed in parentheses.

1. Participation in class discussions and assignments (15%):

The participation dimension assumes that you regularly arrive to class having closely read and critically thought about the assigned readings. While I will not be taking a daily “roll call,” I will be taking note of who comes to class prepared (i.e. having read and thought about the readings) and who actively participates during in-class assignments and activities. I am primarily concerned with the substance of your participation, not the frequency. I will pay specific attention to how your participation varies across class formats and activities, and how effectively you participate during these situations. Please note that I do not equate participation with talking. Effective participation includes actively listening to your peers, thinking, and making substantive contributions to discussions.

It is no secret that some students prefer to speak often while others prefer to listen and engage internally. This is fine. However, in an effort to foster broad participation, at times I may ignore some frequent participants while calling on those who speak up less frequently. To do so I will randomly call on students and engage in dialogue. Thus, for each class you should come prepared to answer a variety of question styles such as (but not limited to): recall questions about the readings (e.g., “What is the correspondence principle as articulated by Bowles and Gintis?”), analytical questions (e.g., “How might Bourdieu’s theory of social action explain the processes and outcomes of curricular tracking?”), and reflective questions (e.g., “How does Ogbu’s theory of culture compare with your own educational experiences?”).

We will complete a variety of in-class assignments and activities. For example, at times I will present you with a case study problem in which you will be asked to work in groups to analyze and interpret the data. In other instances I will present you with a question or series of questions and ask that you work alone and respond in writing. These assignments will be turned in at the end of class and you will receive full credit if it is evident that you have engaged in problem solving using the tools from the course. There will not be opportunities to make up assignments due to absence except in cases of a family emergency or illness.

2. Midterm and Final Exam (25% each / 50% total):

There will be two exams during the quarter. These exams are meant to test your level of sophistication in applying the conceptual tools from this course toward solving problems germane to sociology of education. The exams must be completed on the date listed in the syllabus unless the date is rescheduled. Make up exams will not be distributed unless you are experiencing a family emergency or have a documented illness. Please see me as soon as possible if the latter situations arise. Additional information will be provided prior to the exams.

3. Critical Review Essay (15%)

For this paper you will be asked to critically analyze one article from the syllabus. Your analysis will include a discussion of the key questions raised by the author(s), the sources of data and methodological tools used to address the questions, the findings from the analysis, and the claims made in relation to the results. My expectation is that your paper will be approximately 1,200 words (~4 double-spaced pages with 1-inch margins and 12-pt. Times New Roman font). Additional details will be provided in class.

4. Argumentative Paper (20%)

The intent of this writing assignment is for you to draw from the course material to build an argument concerning school practices or policies. Your argument may be constructed around empirical evidence related to, say, curricular tracking, or you may decide to build a theoretical argument through deductive reasoning, for example. About two weeks prior to the due date I will provide two or three questions from which you may choose to respond to one. My expectation is that your paper will be approximately 1,500 to 2,000 words (~5-7 double-spaced pages with 1-inch margins and 12-pt. Times New Roman font).

Texts

There is one required text for this course (available at the WWU Bookstore):

Tyson, K. (2011). *Integration interrupted: Tracking, black students, & acting white after Brown*. New York: Oxford University Press.

In addition to this text there are numerous journal articles and chapter selections posted on the Canvas site. Do not hesitate to contact me if you have any problems accessing or downloading the readings.

Specific Accommodations

If any student requires specific accommodations please do not hesitate to speak with me at any point during the quarter. This includes those accommodations related to the curriculum, instruction, assessments, or any other factors that would otherwise prohibit your full participation in this course. Any questions or concerns students have about this matter will be held confidential to the best of my ability. Students with special needs are encouraged to contact disAbility Resources for Students (DRS): Old Main 110, 516 High Street, 360.650.3083, <http://www.wvu.edu/depts/drs/> for information concerning campus related policies and services.

Notes Regarding Academic Dishonesty

All instances of academic dishonesty will be addressed according to standard University procedures. Please familiarize yourself with these expectations:

<http://catalog.wvu.edu/content.php?catoid=5&navoid=463&print>).

You also should become familiar with the *Student's Guide to Avoiding Plagiarism* on the Department of Sociology's web page: <http://www.wvu.edu/soc/guides.shtml>

Important Dates

1. Critical review essay: Friday October 11, 2013
2. Exam 1: Friday November 1, 2013
3. Argumentative paper: Wednesday November 20, 2013
4. Final exam: Wednesday December 11, 2013 (3:30-5:30pm)

Estimated Course Outline (subject to change)

Week 1

9-25-2013 Course Introduction and Overview

9-27-2013 Key questions in the sociology of education

1. Schneider, B. (2003). Sociology of education: An overview of the field at the turn of the twenty-first century. In M.T. Hallinan, Gamoran, A., Kubitschek, W., & Loveless, T. (Eds.), *Stability and change in American Education: Structure, process, and outcomes* (pp. 193-226). New York: Percheron Press.
2. Sadovnik, A. (2007). Theory and research in the sociology of education. In *Sociology of education: A critical reader* (pp. 3-21) New York: Routledge.

Week 2

9-30-2013 Theoretical foundations

1. No assigned reading (review/complete readings from 9/27)

10-2-2013 Organizational contexts of schooling

1. Meyer, J. W. and Rowan, B. (1978). The structure of educational organizations. In M. Meyer & Associates, *Environments and organizations* (pp. 78-109). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

10-4-2013 Primer on education policy

1. No assigned reading

Week 3

10-7-2013 Socialization, schooling, and capitalism

1. Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. (1976). Education and personal development: The long shadow of work. In *Schooling in capitalist America: Educational reform and the contradictions of economic life* (1st ed.) (pp. 125-148). New York: Basic Books.

10-9-2013 Organizational perspectives on socialization

1. Brint, S., Contreras, M. F., Matthews, M. T. (2001). Socialization messages in primary schools: An organizational analysis. *Sociology of education*, 74(3), 157-180.

10-11-2013

1. *****Critical review essay due at the beginning of class*****

Week 4

10-14-2013 Reproducing class advantages: Pierre Bourdieu's field theory

1. Lareau, Annette. (2003). Theory: Understanding the work of Pierre Bourdieu. In *Unequal childhoods: Class, race, and family life* (pp. 275-278). Berkeley: University of California Press.
2. Bourdieu, P. (1986). The Forms of Capital. In John Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (pp.241-248). New York: Greenwood Press.
3. **Pages 49-60 in:**
Maton, Karl. (2008). Habitus. In Michael Grenfell (ed.), *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts* (pp 49-65). Durham: Acumen Pub Ltd.

10-16-2013 Childrearing as a classed practice

1. Lareau, Annette. (2002). Invisible inequality: Social class and childrearing in black families and white families. *American Sociological Review*, 67, 747-776.

10-18-2013 Family/school relationships

1. Lareau, Annette. (1987). Social class differences in family-school relationships: The importance of cultural capital. *Sociology of Education*, 60(2), 73-85.

Week 5

10-21-2013 Introduction to tracking

1. Oakes, Jeanne. (1985/2005). Tracking. In *Keeping track: How schools structure inequality*, 2nd edition (pp. 1-14). New Haven: Yale University Press.

10-23-2013 Class, race, and track placement

1. Vanfossen, B. E., Jones, J. D., Spade, J. Z. (1987). Curriculum tracking and status maintenance. *Sociology of Education* 60, 104-122.

10-25-2013 The "effects" of tracking

1. No reading assignment

Week 6

10-28-2013 The social organization of knowledge

1. Ferrare, J. J. (2013). The duality of courses and students: A field-theoretic analysis of secondary school course-taking. *Sociology of Education*, 86(2), 139-157.

10-30-2013 The politics of de-tracking (& Exam review)

1. Yonezawa, S., Stuart Wells, A., Serna, I. (2002). Choosing tracks: 'Freedom of choice' in detracking schools." *American Educational Research Journal*, 39: 37-67.

11-1-2013

1. *****EXAM 1*****

Week 7

11-4-2013 The sources of cultural resistance to schooling

1. Preface, Introduction and Ch. 1 (pp. i-xiii and 3-34) in *Integration interrupted*

11-6-2013 Academic achievement and acting white

1. Ch. 2 (pp. 35-78) in *Integration interrupted*

11-8-2013

1. No assigned reading

Week 8

11-11-2013 **NO CLASS**

11-13-2013 Oppositional cultures in schools

1. Ch. 3 (pp. 79-126) in *Integration interrupted*

11-15-2013 Racialized tracking and sense of belonging

1. Ch. 4 and Conclusion (pp. 127-174) in *Integration interrupted*

Week 9

11-18-2013 Differentiation in higher education

1. Roksa, Josipa. (2011). Differentiation and work: Inequality in degree attainment in U.S. higher education. *Higher Education*, 61: 293-308.

11-20-2013 Inter-generational attainment trends in higher education

1. No assigned reading
2. *******Argumentative Paper Due at the beginning of class*******

11-22-2013 Higher education and the color line

1. Kurlaender, M. and Flores, S. (2005). The racial transformation of higher education. In G. Orfield, P. Marin, and C. Horn (Eds.), *Higher education and the color line* (pp. 11-32). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Week 10

11-25-2013 Gender segregation in higher education

1. Bradley, K. (2000). The incorporation of women into higher education: Paradoxical outcomes? *Sociology of Education*, 73(1), 1-18.

11-27-2013 **NO CLASS**

11-29-2013 **NO CLASS**

Week 11

12-2-2013 Policy alternatives and reforms, part 1: Charter schools

1. Ravitch, D. (2010). *The death and life of the great American school system: How testing and choice are undermining education* (pp. 113-147). New York: Basic Books.

12-4-2013 Policy alternatives and reforms, part 2: The rise of venture philanthropy

1. Saltman, K. J. (2011). From Carnegie to Gates: The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the venture philanthropy agenda for public education. In Philip E. Kovacs (Ed.), *The Gates Foundation and the future of "public" schools* (pp. 1-20). New York: Routledge.

12-6-2013 Connecting the dots: Where do we go from here? (& Exam review)

1. No assigned reading

Week 12

12-11-2013 **FINAL EXAM: 3:30-5:30pm**