UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
Departments of Educational Policy Studies, and Sociology

EPS/Sociology 908
Spring, 2012

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Office hours: Thursday, 2:30-4:30 p.m., and by appointment.
Room 208, Education Building


Course Description

Education policy is increasingly at the center of social policy worldwide, and it represents an increasingly salient force in shaping education outcomes and experiences. This course will bring sociological perspectives to bear on the substance of education policies. We will ask such questions as “What sociological assumptions do current policies and policy proposals embody? Are those assumptions sound?,” and “What do sociological perspectives suggest about the feasibility and likely consequences of current policies and policy proposals?” Some of the topics will be selected in advance by the instructor; others will be dictated by student interest.

The seminar presupposes that students have taken an introductory course in sociology of education (e.g., EPS/Sociology 648), or have otherwise acquired familiarity with basic literature in the field. It also presumes the ability to read and understand sources that include multivariate quantitative analyses at the level represented by e.g., Sociology 361, Educational Psychology 761, and Public Affairs 819. Students who do not have this background should consult with Professor Olneck about supplementary source material to pursue.

Course Format

Seminar discussion, with considerable student responsibility for discussion leadership.

To avoid distraction, computers may not be used during class. Please plan to take notes by hand.

Assignments, Examinations, and Grading

The course requires consistent attendance, completion of assigned readings prior to class meetings, class participation, and responsibility for discussion leadership. It also requires an approximately 25-page seminar paper (exclusive of bibliography; 1" margins, double-spaced, 12-point font) applying sociological analysis to an education policy problem or issue.
Papers may entail original empirical research or secondary analysis of existing data sets, or it may rest on secondary sources. **Students must have selected a paper topic, in consultation with Professor Olneck, by the end of the third week of the semester (i.e. by February 10th). Students must have submitted a tentative paper bibliography by the end of the ninth week of the semester (i.e. by March 23rd).** The paper bibliography must identify one reading to be assigned to the class in conjunction with discussions of students’ paper topics during the last five weeks of the course. **The term papers will be due to Professor Olneck no later than 4:00 p.m. on Friday, May 18th.** The term papers must be submitted on time. Except in cases of serious medical or other emergencies, papers submitted late will be docked one grade for each day late. “I haven’t felt well lately,” “I want to do the best job possible,” “I have three other papers due,” “I began work on the paper late,” “I was studying for prelims,” “I had to go to a wedding or a conference,” and the like, will not be considered emergencies.

Beginning with Week 3 (February 9th), two to three students will be asked to assume responsibility for initiating class discussions. The responsibility of these students will be to highlight briefly what is centrally important in each of the readings, to identify briefly ways in which readings may be related to one another, and to pose at least one question of clarification, and one question of argument or critique related to each reading that the group can address. The emphasis here is on initiating discussion, not making lengthy presentations. Students responsible for initiating class discussion should be sure to have coordinated their efforts with one another, and, if possible, with Professor Olneck, **by no later than Wednesday afternoon**, and should e-mail the discussion questions to the class at soc908-1-s12@lists.wisc.edu on Wednesday evening.

Weeks 13-16 (April 12, 19, 26*; May 3, 10) will be devoted to discussions led by students about their paper topics and research to date, and will be accompanied by one reading per topic. The number of paper topics discussed during these weeks will range from two to three, depending upon final course enrollment. *Note: The class meeting for April 26th will have to be rescheduled due to instructor’s professional conflict.

Class preparation, engagement, participation, contribution, and discussion leadership will count toward 35 percent of your grade, and the seminar paper will count toward 65 percent of your grade.

**Readings**

Students should purchase the following two books, which have been ordered at University Bookstore on State Street Mall: Anthony S. Bryk & Barbara Schneider, *Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement* (Russell Sage, 2005 [2002]), and James P. Spillane, *Standards Deviation: How Schools Misunderstand Education Policy* (Harvard University Press, 2006 [2004]). Heinz-Dieter Meyer & Brian Rowan (eds.), *The New Institutionalism in Education* (SUNY Press, 2007) is recommended for purchase, as well. These books will also be on 3-hour reserve at College Library, Helen C. White Hall, 600 N. Park Street.
All other readings will be on electronic reserve. Electronic reserves are accessed by logging into MyUW, and clicking on the “Learning” tab, and, then, under that, clicking on the “Course Resources” tab. Next to each of the courses for which you are registered that have reserves, there will be a “Library/Reserves” link that will take you directly to the reserve reading for those courses, EPS/Sociology 908 included. Please print out the readings, so that you can underline if you wish, make marginal notes, and, most importantly, have copies of the readings available during class.

*Please note that the Schneider, and Walters readings for Week 1 are to be completed by the time of the first class meeting.*

**Special Accommodations**

I wish to fully include persons with disabilities in this course. Please let me know if you need any special accommodations in the curriculum, instruction, or assessments of this course to enable you to participate fully. I will try to maintain the confidentiality of the information you share with me. Students with special needs are encouraged to contact the McBurney Disability Resource Center, 905 University Avenue (263-2741), for information concerning campus disability-related policies and services.

**Course Outline**

(Topics, readings, and schedule are subject to announced change by the instructor.)

**Week 1**  
**Introduction**  
(Jan. 26)


**Recommended:**


**Week 2**  
**Perspectives on Policy and Practice**  
(Feb. 2)


Recommended:


Week 3 Social Capital and Family-School Relationships (Feb. 9)


Recommended:


**Week 4** Social Capital as Trust in Schools (Feb. 16)


**Week 5** “New Institutionalism” and School Change (Feb. 23)


**Recommended:**


**Week 6** Curricular Standards as a Means to Reform Teaching
(March 1)


**Recommended:**


**Week 7  School Choice / Marketization / Privatization**

(March 8)


Christopher Lubienski, Charisse Gulosino, & Peter Weitze, “School Choice and Competitive Incenti

Recommended:

Week 8 Testing for Accountability: Schools and Classrooms (March 15)


**Recommended:**


**Week 9 Testing for Accountability: Political Economy Perspectives**

(March 22)


Routledge, 2008.

**Recommended:**


**Week 10**  (March 29) **Can / Does Expanding Education Enrollment Advance Equality of Education Opportunity and Reduce Inequality?**


**Recommended:**


**Week 11**  
(April 5)  
**No Class -Spring Break**

**Week 12**  
(April 12)  
**Can / Does Expanding Education Enrollment Advance Equality of Economic Opportunity and Reduce Inequality?**


**Recommended:**


**Weeks 13 - 16  Student’s Paper Presentations, with Pre-Assigned Accompanying Reading**
(April 12, 19, 26*; May 3, 10). *Note: The class meeting for April 26th will have to be rescheduled due to instructor’s professional conflict.*