Social Context of Schooling
PPOL 8689
Thursdays 4-6:45
Fall 2014

Catalog Description
The purpose of this course is to examine the ways that social structural forces (such as social class, race, and gender), institutions, and organizations constrain, shape, and interact with educational processes and outcomes.

Course Objectives
The central objectives of the course are (1) at the theoretical level, to advance the understanding of theories of education and society; (2) to review the major substantive research regarding socioeconomic, gender, and racial stratification; community and family dynamics as they relate to educational processes and outcomes; (3) at the policy level, to acquire knowledge about the ways educational institutions intersect with other social institutions like the family, the economy, the polity; and (4) to critically evaluate the education policies that follow from these perspectives.

Course Description and Overview
The tension between human agency and social structure is a core theme in social science literature: individual behaviors both reflect and refract social forces. School-related behaviors are shaped by and influence social structure. On the one hand, individuals think and choose to act—these social forces do not determine their behavior. Yet, people do not always control the material circumstances of their lives, the choices they perceive, or the social parameters of their existence. Individuals’ gender, social class background, organizational affiliations, religion, race, and ethnicity shape the choices people have and affect their decisions. The tension between human agency and social structure is clearly evident when we examine education from a sociological perspective. The social context of schooling can be viewed metaphorically as a double helix: the inner strand represents human agency, the outer strand involves the social structure, and the interaction between the two strands results in the individual and societal educational phenomena about which we will study this semester.

Course Description and Overview


Additional required readings will be available from the instructor as indicated in the syllabus.

Grades:

1. **Class attendance and participation:** 5% Attendance, writing, and discussions are an essential component of your grade. You are expected to do the reading in a timely fashion in order to participate in a thoughtful way. Your participation grade will be either (a) excellent: your comments, questions, oral summaries of the readings, integration of readings with prior course discussions and readings, and responses to other students reflect a high level of thought and familiarity with the materials; (b) acceptable: your comments, etc. reflect an adequate level of thought and preparation; (c) unacceptable: either you are absent or your comments, etc. do not reflect an adequate level of preparation. If you are absent more than three times, you may not receive credit for the course. Absences due to religious holidays do not count in this total.

2. **Photo Essay: 10%** This assignment is designed to jump-start your sociological imagination about the social context of K-12 schooling.

    Consider key social forces such as race, gender, ethnicity, social class, small groups, social stratification, power, privilege, prestige, conflict, etc. Choose one of these social forces to be the thematic focus that you will illustrate through photographs of your selected school for your photo essay.

    First, choose a school that will permit you to visit it briefly. Ideally, it will be a school in your neighborhood. The school can serve students from pre-kindergarten through high school. It can be public or private. I prefer that you focus on K-12 schools, rather than institutions of higher education but a college or university is permissible.

    Second, take a series of 15 photos that coherently illustrate how your thematic focus manifests at your chosen school. You may use a digital camera, the camera in your mobile phone, or a disposable camera.

    Third, your photo essay should include about 5 pages of text describing the school, why you chose it, and your theme and how the photos illustrate it. Provide hard copies of your 15 photos, a brief commentary about each one, a description of the process you encountered gaining access to the school, and an interpretation of what you learned from this exercise.
about how your selected social force appears to operate in that school. Incidentally, students in my previous classes love this assignment. It is an easy way to combine your left and right brain strengths and just doing it according to the specifications I provide earns you a grade of 100%.


4. **Midterms: 30%** Three times during the semester, you will write a take-home midterm that will be focused on a group of readings and class discussions. Each exam is worth 10% of your course grade. The essay will be no less than 2 and no more than 3 pages of brilliant prose typed in double-spaced 12-point font. I will provide written details of my expectations and criteria for grading the exams.

5. **Weekly Summaries of Readings: 10%** Each week you will summarize the required readings in an essay that is no more than three pages double-spaced 12 pt. font [it can be less than three pages]. The purpose of this assignment is for you to consider the readings in light of the topic for the week. This essay should be both descriptive and critical. As the semester unfolds, you will be able to address how the readings build upon the previous ones, etc. I will collect the essay at the beginning of each class and return them to you the following week (note: the essays will provide you with good notes for midterm reviews).

6. **Research Paper: 25%**. After we agree upon your topic, you will write a 15-20 page (plus references) research paper that is due at the end of the semester. The topic must be approved by the instructor and relate to the central themes of the course. During final exam week’s class (December 15), you will orally present the key findings from your paper. Your presentation is part of your paper’s grade. Details will follow. The overall grade you receive for the paper will be based on four parts:
   1) we discussed the topic and I approved it;
   2) you submitted a rough draft;
   3) you submitted a final draft that responded to the critique and feedback that I provided in the rough draft, and
   4) you presented your paper to the class.

A few additional points about my course:

* This course has very heavy reading, discussion, and writing commitments. Your enrollment in the course signifies your acceptance of these commitments. Note about reading: I assume that you will read all footnotes/endnotes in a book or article.

* This course centers on instructor-led student discussion of the materials. Any comments you make should be linked back to readings, lectures, or other relevant materials provided by the instructor. While your lived experiences are valuable, you are encouraged to limit personal anecdotes to those you can connect with readings or other course materials.
• I will enforce the UNC-Charlotte Code of Student Academic Integrity. You are responsible for knowing what infractions are considered unethical behaviors and violations of the code, especially regarding plagiarism (using others’ words without citing the author). If you are uncertain, ask me to clarify the issue for you.

• You are encouraged to use nonsexist, nonracist language in any written work you produce in the course.

• I encourage you to challenge other students, your readings, and me if you are so moved. Informed and logical challenges are most welcomed. This is healthy and will intellectually invigorate our course and your learning.

• During the semester I may be absent from class for professional reasons on occasion. If I am, I will arrange for a colleague to lead it during my absence.

COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1  August 21  Introduction to the Course and Overview of the Topics, Readings, and Assignments.
Introduction of the instructor, the class members.

Week 2  August 28  History, Theory, & Methods in Sociology of Education
READINGS: ABF, Ch. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 50; Annette Lareau, Unequal Childhoods, Pp. 259-78;

Week 3  September 4  Social Class and Education
READINGS: ABF, Ch. 21, 22, 23, and 24

Week 4  September 11  Education, Opportunity, and Social Stratification
READINGS: Annette Lareau, pp. 279-285 (Lareau’s Appendix C); ABF, Ch. 12, 13, 14, and 15; Samuel R. Lucas (2001). "Effectively Maintained Inequality: Education Transitions, Track Mobility, and Social Background Effects." American Journal of Sociology (available from instructor)
Photo Essay Due

Week 5  September 18
Social Class, Educational Processes and Outcomes: Families and Communities

Week 6  September 25
Adolescents, Society, & the Schools
READINGs: ABF, Ch. 36,37,38,39, and 40
1st Midterm Due [covering weeks 1-5]

Week 7  October 2
The School as a Complex Organization
READINGs: Charles Bidwell "The School as a Formal Organization," (available from instructor); ABF, Ch. 42, 43, and 44
Research Paper topic due

Week 8  October 9
Teachers and Teaching
Critique of Golden & Katz The Race Between Education and Technology due

Week 9  October 16
Topics in Race, Ethnicity and Immigration

Week 10  October 23
Race/Ethnicity and Oppositional Cultural Framework
Week 11  October 30  Segregation, Desegregation, and Diversity: Do They Matter?
2nd Midterm Due [covering weeks 6-11]

Week 12  November 6  Gender, Sexuality, Educational Processes and Outcomes
READINGS: Mickelson, 1989,"Why Does Jane Read and Write So Well?: The Anomaly of Women's Achievement" Sociology of Education; "Girls & Math in Iceland" TIME magazine; ABF, Ch. 32, 33, 34, and 35

Week 13  November 13  Educational Policy: Equity-Oriented Reforms:
(Educational Adequacy [Leandro] suits, Bilingual Education, Title I, Title IX, Affirmative Action, etc.), Market-Oriented School Reforms (Choice, Standards & Accountability, No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, Common Core)
READINGS: ABF, Ch. 11, pp. 499-532;
"Multiple Choice: Charter School Performance in 16 States," CREDO, Stanford University, 2009 [available from instructor]; ABF, Ch. 47, 48, and 49.
Rough Draft of Research Paper Due

Week 14  November 20  Issues in Higher Education
Annual Review of Sociology (available from the instructor)
Critique of Arum & Roksa Academically Adrift Due

Week 15  November 27  Thanksgiving
Week 16  December 1*  3rd Midterm Due [covering weeks 12-14]  
Week 16  December 4  Reading Day  
Final    December 11  Presentation of Research Paper Findings 
          Final Version of Research Paper Due  

* Because our last class meeting is scheduled on the university's reading day, I am asking you to turn in your take-home midterm the day before.