

Schools and Society (SOC 254)

Classroom: Stevenson 1308

Class Hrs 1:10 to 2:25 Tue • Thu

Office Hrs 4:00-5:00 Tue • Wed

Dr. Richard N. Pitt

311 Garland Hall

322-7530

Webpage: <http://majorsmatter.net/schools>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed to introduce students to theory and research in the sociology of education regarding the role of education in contemporary societies. The course, which consists of lectures, readings, class discussions, daily writing assignments, and final presentations focuses on the question of how schools are organized and how variation within and between schools affects individuals and society. The five major subtopics that will be covered are theory and philosophy; stratification between and within schools; student culture and behavior; educational transitions; and higher education.

TEXTS

The main texts for this course are as follows: Arum and Beattie's *The Structure of Schooling: Readings in the Sociology of Education* and Spring's *American Schools*. The books are available in the bookstore. Unless otherwise marked, all of the readings listed in the syllabus are from these texts. There are additional readings online. To access them, go to the course webpage and click on the paidiea memo link. You will need Adobe Acrobat to read/print the articles. I encourage you to just download them all at one time instead of waiting until they are the assigned reading. These readings will be marked in the syllabus with a superscript "R".

REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

The grade in this class is based on your performance on the following forms of evaluation. Each of you starts with an "A" (450 points) and you move down from there. The buffer for each letter grade is 50 points. Pluses and minuses are earned in the 15 point margins at the top/bottom of the letter grade range. **You will receive an A- at 429 points.** Once you go below the threshold for any given grade, there is NO way to go up. In the past, the average grade on any given assignment has been 78-80%. Your continued enrollment means that you understand and accept this grading policy. Unless otherwise noted, all assignments should be single-spaced, 1" margins, in Times or Times New Roman font, and have no more than a one line header with your name, the date, and the assignment.

A's=400-450

B's=350-399

C's=300-349

D's=250-299

F's=0-249

A) Attendance: As much of the learning taking place in this class will happen during the two and a half hours we have together each week, I take attendance very seriously. We will, therefore, take roll in each class session within the first five minutes of class. Each of you is allowed two (2) absences this semester. No other absences—whatever the explanation, excuse, or emergency—will be accepted. If you miss class beyond those two absences, your grade in the class will drop 50 points automatically for each additional absence. It is YOUR responsibility to alert us to the fact that you're there if you come in late and you must do it by the end of the class that you were late for.

B) Examinations (2 @ 100 points): I would like for you to master the theoretical underpinnings of this class at the following levels of understanding: (1) basic knowledge, (2) comprehension and understanding, (3)

application, and (4) analysis and comparison. You will have two 3-essay take-home examinations. Starting the first day of class, I will provide a list of possible questions that will appear on these two examinations. Five of those questions will appear on the essay exam; you will choose a subset of them to answer. There will be no surprises—if you prepare all of these questions, you will not only find that you have reviewed the course material, but you will also recognize the essay exam when you receive it. In fact, I might even encourage you to look at the questions at the end of each week and sketch out an answer while the material is fresh in your mind. No one ever takes me up on that suggestion, but it would certainly reduce your stress around the time the exam is actually due. The theory exam is due on **October 4** and the midterm is due on **November 15**. Both exams are due BY EMAIL (*schools@majorsmatter.net*) no later than 4pm.

C) Mini-Projects (4 @ 25 points = 100 points): Every couple of weeks, I will offer an activity designed to get you to think about how these theories may be put into practice in your own life. You are to participate in 4 of the 5 activities and write a two-page response to the questions I raise about the experience. If you do five of these, we will drop the lowest grade. The due dates for mini-projects are **September 1, September 22, October 20, November 3, and December 1**.

D) Educational Autobiography (150 points): You will write a 6 page examination of your own educational career, being careful to use some of the sociological concepts we discussed in class (and mentioned in the readings). This paper should be a thoughtful, creative, synthetic, well-written analysis of your educational career as seen through the eyes of someone who is familiar with some basic concepts and research in the sociology of education. During the day scheduled for the final (**December 10**), each of you will present your autobiography in a poster presentation, similar to a science fair presentation. Alternately, you can bring a laptop and present your presentation as a Powerpoint presentation . . . but be aware that, in the past, grades on these were lower. The papers are worth 100 points and the presentations are worth 50 points; your classmates will assist with the grading of the presentations. The paper is due on **December 8**.

OTHER IMPORTANT THOUGHTS

Academic Excuses: With the astonishing incidence of sickness and death that invariably occurs just around due dates, my policy is to let you know in advance that anything turned in late will lose 20 points for every day it is late. The first 20 points are lost when the assignment is due. I **will not respond** to emails requesting extensions. It would be a mistake for you to wait until the weekend before an exam or mini-project is due to begin working on it. In my experience, ANYTHING can and often does go wrong. Part of my job as an educator is to teach a hidden curriculum (see lecture on September 6) that encourages some discipline on your part. This policy is a function of that curriculum.

Academic Etiquette: As a sign of respect to your fellow classmates, please avoid walking in late or leaving early. Please **TURN OFF CELL PHONES and PAGERS** before class. Respect the views and opinions of others. Avoid talking when others are making a point. You will have your chance. Try to avoid destructive criticism. However, constructive criticism is welcomed. Don't read the paper, check your Facebook page, talk to your friends, etc. during class. If I or the teaching assistant discover you abusing your freedom to use laptops, we will disabuse you of that freedom and bar their use in class. **DO NOT LEAVE CLASS UNTIL CLASS HAS ENDED!** Not only are those things disrespectful and disruptive to your classmates and me, but they also limit your ability to understand the material.

Academic Integrity: Vanderbilt's Honor Code governs all work in this course. Any Honor Code violation will be taken up with the Honor Council and it is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the provisions of the Code. If you have any doubts about applications of the Honor Code, please ask me and/or consult the Honor Council's web page. Uncertainty about the application of the Honor Code does not excuse a violation. Plagiarism is easily detected and **WILL NOT** be tolerated. If I suspect that plagiarism has taken place, you will receive no credit for the assignment.

“I’ll Do Anything”: Don’t wait until the last minute to ask questions about the material covered in this class. Also, please come by our offices to review your papers and exams. Don’t wait until the end of the session to worry about your grade. An emergency on your part does not constitute one for us. Oh yeah . . . and the time for “I’ll do anything to raise my grade, Professor Pitt” is on the date things are assigned, not the last weeks of the semester.

Curriculum Units

Unit 1: Theory and Philosophy

August 25: Course Introduction

- *Religion and Authority In Colonial Education* (Ch. 2 in Spring text)

August 30: What Is Sociology of Education?

- *Nationalism, Multiculturalism, and Moral Reform* (Ch. 3 in Spring text)

September 1: Mass Education History I

Mini-Project One Is Due!!

- *The Ideology and Politics Of The Common School* (Ch. 4 in Spring text)
- *The Common School and The Threat Of Cultural Pluralism* (Ch. 5 in Spring text)

September 6: Functionalism Theory

- Bowles and Gintis’ *Beyond the Educational Frontier* (Ch. 11 in A&B)
- Meyer’s *The Effects Of Education As An Institution* (Ch. 42 in A&B)

September 8: Conflict Theory

- Collins’ *Functional and Conflict Theories of Educational Stratification* (Ch. 10 in A&B)
- *Scientific School Management: Testing, Immigrants and Experts* (Ch. 10 in A&B)

September 13: Status Attainment and Social Mobility

- Turner’s *Sponsored and Contest Mobility and the School System* (Ch. 3 in A&B)
- Sorokin’s *Social and Cultural Mobility* (Ch. 2 in A&B)

September 15: Human Capital

- Becker’s *Human Capital* (Ch. 5 in A&B)
- Rosenbaum and Binder’s *Do Employers Really Need More Educated Youth?* (Ch. 41 in A&B)

September 20: Social Capital

- Coleman and Hoffer’s *Schools, Families, and Communities* (Ch. 7 in A&B)
- Bryk and Schneider’s *Trust In Schools* (Ch. 13 in A&B)

September 22: Cultural Capital

Mini-Project Two Is Due!!

- Lamont and Lareau’s *Cultural Capital* (Ch. 6 in A&B)
- Carter’s *Straddling Boundaries* (Ch. 27 in A&B)

September 27: Schools As Systems

- Chubb and Moe’s *An Institutional Perspective on Schools* (Ch. 44 in A&B)
- *Globalizing The American School: From Nixon To Obama* (Ch. 15 in Spring text)

Unit 2: Stratification Within and Between Schools

September 29: Urban, Suburban and Rural Schools

Midterm Examination I Is Due!!

- Orfield and Lee's *Brown At 50* (Ch. 16 in A&B)

October 4: Public, Private and Parochial Institutions

- Cookson and Hodges' *The Chosen Ones* (Ch. 12 in A&B)
- Renzulli and Roscigno's *Charter Schools and the Public Good* (Ch. 48 in A&B)

October 6: FALL BREAK ** NO CLASS

October 11: Tracking

- Gamoran's *Is Ability Grouping Equitable* (Ch. 22 in A&B)
- Oakes' *The Distribution of Knowledge* (Ch. 21 in A&B)

October 13: Race

- Fordham and Ogbu's *Black Students' School Success* (Ch. 27 in A&B)
- Tyson et al's *It's Not A Black Thing* (Ch. 26 in A&B)

October 18: Gender

Mini-Project Three Is Due!!

- Bettie's *Exceptions To The Rule* (Ch. 24 in A&B)
- ^RMickelson's *Why Does Jane Read And Write So Well?*

Unit 3: School Culture and Behavior

October 20: Culture of Adolescents I

- ^RKinney's *From Nerds To Normals*
- Pascoe's *Dude You're A Fag* (Ch. 35 in A&B)

October 25: Culture of Adolescents II

- ^REckert's *Jocks and Burnouts*
- Willis's *Elements Of A Culture* (Ch. 22 in A&B)

October 27: NO CLASS WORK ON YOUR MINI-PROJECT FOUR

November 1: Discipline and Delinquency

- Newman's *Testing The Theory* (Ch. 38 in A&B)
- Arum's *Judging School Discipline* (Ch. 45 in A&B)

November 3: Teachers

Mini-Project Four Is Due!!

- Apple's *Teaching and "Women's Work"* (Ch. 33 in A&B)
- *Organizing The American School: Teachers and Bureaucracy* (Ch. 6 in Spring text)

November 8: Vocational Education

- *High School, Junior High School, and Vocational Guidance and Education* (Ch. 9 in Spring Text)

November 10: Educational Transitions - Work

- ^RRay and Mickelson's *Restructuring Students for Restructured Work*

Unit 4: Free At Last, Free At Last!! Beyond High School

November 15: Community Colleges

Midterm Examination II Is Due!!

- Brint and Karabel's *Community Colleges and the American Social Order* (Ch. 43 in A&B)
- ^RRosenbaum et al's *Warming Up The Aspirations Of Community Colleges*

November 17: Educational Transitions – Non Mainstream Postsecondary Options

- ^RBridges et al's *Student Engagement And Student Success At Historically Black And Hispanic-Serving I's*
- ^RKinzie et al's *Women Students at Coeducational and Women's Colleges*

November 22: THANKSGIVING BREAK ** No Class ** Enjoy Your Break!

November 29: College Admissions

- Stevens' *Creating A Class* (Ch. 46 in A&B)
- *The Scholastic Aptitude Test and the Educational Testing Service* (in Ch. 13 of Spring text)

December 1: College Majors and Curricul

Mini-Project Five Is Due!!

- ^RPitt and Laster's *Hypo- and Hyper-Selectivity: Double Majors and Liberal Arts Course-Taking*

December 6: Post-Baccalaureate Options

- ^RMartin's *Social Capital, Academic Achievement, and Post-Graduation Plans At An Elite Private University*

December 8: Student Life

- Bogle's *Hooking Up: Sex, Dating and Relationships On Campus* (Ch. 39 in A&B)
- Grigsby's *College Life Through The Eyes Of Students* (Ch. 40 in A&B)

CRITICAL EDUCATION AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Writing a critical autobiography can be a powerful way to develop what C. Wright Mills calls “the sociological imagination.” This project asks you to be “critical”—to analyze carefully and make judgments—about your educational experience. You can start anywhere and end anywhere. You might reflect on this paraphrase of John Muir's words regarding the environment: “When you pick out everything to look at, you find it is hooked to everything else in the universe.”

Your challenge is to write a coherent essay relating your schooling experience to specific course concepts, readings, and happenings in the world and the schools as you have moved through this bureaucratically orchestrated passage to adulthood. You will be evaluated on how well you have been able to relate social-structural factors and issues to your own experience.

Since you cannot say everything, you will have to pick a theme, an issue, or an experience that was transformative or repetitive as a way to organize your paper. You need to address issues of class, race/ethnicity, and gender—though one of these may be a stronger focus of your paper. I'm not giving (or requiring) any set approach or topic, and you may focus on historical contexts, describe your feelings of anger or triumph over adversity, comment on the power of social location to shape your educational experience, describe aspects of the research process itself, or any number of other ways to describe your experience.

BUT . . . this is more than just an opportunity to simply “tell your educational story.” It is important that you recognize my challenge to integrate course materials and maybe even some outside research in order to approach your memories critically. For example, was Eckert's article the epitome of how student subculture functioned at your school? Did you experience Ogbu's “acting white” hypothesis or Mickelson's “pollyanna” theory of female school success. Were you one of Cookson and Hodge's “Chosen Ones”? Would you have liked to be? Which theory explains your educational career best: functional, conflict, human capital, cultural capital, community capital? Would you say that none did and that there is some other theory at work? Remember, the point of this assignment is to help you move beyond catharsis to some level of competency as critical sociologists and participant observers of the life stories you tell.¹

What will I expect from the papers and how will they be graded? The papers are to be no less than six (6) pages. As usual, the paper should be single-spaced, have one inch margins, and have page numbers as a footer. The font should be Times or Times New Roman and nothing bigger than 12 point. The paper is worth 100 points. The grading criteria is as follows:

- 90 points Development: The balance in your paper between “the story”—that is, your description of the experience, your telling of the tale—and your sociological analysis should be weighted towards the “critical” more than the “autobiographical.” I will be looking at how well you describe your experience (i.e., with concrete facts and vivid details), but will be more interested in how well you analysis your experience in the context of what we've discussed about educational theory, stratification, student sub-cultures, and transitions beyond compulsory education. I expect explicit references to course concepts and readings with no less than 5 academic bibliographic references.
- 10 points Mechanics: Is the paper free of spelling, typographical, and grammatical errors? Are sources correctly cited throughout the paper and in the bibliography. Use APA documentation style for citations. I will take off 1/4 a point for every error. Every time I teach this class, I have students whose course grade drops as a result of this one issue. There's not much excuse for handing in a paper with 20 errors, yet I get papers with that many errors on the first page. Don't let this be you.

¹ This project and project description is adapted from Rosemary Power's “Using Critical Autobiography to Teach the Sociology of Education” in *Teaching Sociology* (1998), 26, 198-206.