Sociology of Education
ED349.01 / SC 568.01

Fall 2009
Thursday 4:30-7:00 PM
Room 204, Campion Hall

Instructor:
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I: The Course

The big question for this course is what is schooling for in modern society? Conventional sociological studies have concluded that schooling affects socialization, discovery of new knowledge, and economic opportunity. These arguments seem so simple and rational. Yet, there is still great inequality among people. Are some people simply incapable or unlucky?

Contrary to conventional arguments about schooling, inequality is fostered by the lack of access to particular cultural resources and proper institutional ties. Further, one’s success in education is influenced by access to these resources and networks and therefore success of the child in schooling is very much an outcome of the type and accessibility of resources in environments. While this course presents a variety of sociological perspectives of schooling, it focuses on the idea that schooling in modern society is related to cultural functions. Throughout the semester, we will debate these questions and try to seek some useful explanations for the nature of cultural and value functions of schools and schooling generally.
II. Course Requirements

The course requirements consist of two take-home examinations, short reviews of two films, and class participations. Please note that student participations with respect to weekly reading assignments are important to this course. The following table provides an outline of each requirement. More details will be provided in class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Summary of requirements</th>
<th>Due date</th>
<th>% of grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>Participation in general class discussions and in class exercises, including summaries of readings</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mid-term Exam</td>
<td>Take-home exam distributed in class on October 15</td>
<td>29-Oct</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film discussion paper</td>
<td>A summary paper on “Mean Girls,” class discussion</td>
<td>12-Nov</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film discussion paper</td>
<td>A summary paper on “Educating Rita,” class discussion</td>
<td>3-Dec</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>Take-home exam distributed in class on December 3</td>
<td>16-Dec</td>
<td>40%</td>
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Graduate students who are interested in substantive research issues in the sociology of education may negotiate to write a paper for the course instead of taking the two take-home examinations. The topic and the scope of the paper may be negotiated with the instructor within the first four weeks of the course.

III. Textbooks


IV. Other Materials:

A number of papers and excerpts from books can be found in the reserve room of O’Neill Library. You may also retrieve these items from the library’s Online Course Reserves. These reserve items are marked with an (*).

The films, “Mean Girls’ and “Educating Rita,” are available on reserve in the Media Center in O’Neill Library.

V. Course Topics and Readings

**September 10 - Introduction**

An introduction to the course with a summary of major propositions in the sociology of education.

**Introductory remarks and course overview**

- Requirements for the course, textbooks, and other logistics related to the course.
- Assignments will be discussed.

**Introduction to major perspectives in the sociology of education**


**Reading (to be read after the first class meeting):**


**September 17 - Schooling and economic structure**

Why are some children trapped in poverty? There is belief that children are equally innocent and therefore deserving of the same opportunities, yet there is deep inequality of schooling. What are some structural reasons for such inequality? How are the conditions of poverty reproduced over generations? How does poverty relate to education?

**Reading:**


**Optional Readings:**


**September 24 - Schooling and cultural and social capital**

Recent research on education has explored the relationship between educational success and forms of capital other than wealth. This research has focused on cultural and social capital.
Reading:


Optional Reading:


Note: This is an important seminal reading and I encourage you to try to read as much as you can. Graduate students should try to read this.

October 1 - The Formal and “Hidden Systems” in Schools: Rules, Curriculum, Texts and Language

What really happens in school? How do school norms influence self-perceptions of students? How does the curriculum function in contemporary schools? How do textbooks reflect an ideology that represents the interests of dominant social groups? Do linguistic forms, symbols, and other expressive means affect inequality in education?

Reading:


Optional Reading:


October 8 - Social class environments and education

Reading:

Annett Lareau, Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life, Pages 1-8, 163, and 164 and chapters 2, 7, 8, and 10.

Optional Reading:


October 15 - Race and Schooling

How does race affect the self-perception of ones’ achievement? Does the level of social capital matter in achievement among minority groups?

Reading:


October 22 – Mid-semester examination questions distributed in class.

October 22 - The impact of abilities in producing life-long outcomes

What does research tell us about child development and adult quality of life? How do family environments affect the cognitive and non-cognitive abilities of children? Do social investments at different ages produce different outcomes? What impact do the different levels of schooling have on subsequent outcomes for children? What, if anything, from psychological and economic insights, might benefit from a sociological approach?

Reading:


- Undergraduate students need only read pages 289 through 315, but would benefit from reading the rest of the paper as well.
- Graduate students need to read all of the paper, including appendices, notes, figures, and tables.


October 29- MID-SEMESTER EXAMINATION PAPERS DUE at beginning of class.

October 29 - Schooling and high stakes testing

American policy makers are increasingly interested in using standard examinations to assess individuals and schools. What are the intentions driving standardized testing? What are the outcomes of such testing? Are there any unintended consequences of such
testing? Are there better ways of testing or should testing be done away with altogether?

What does inequality in education mean in Japan? Why are high schools so important to Japanese society? How does the culture of examination systems in Japan shape social norms and lives of children? How do other modern societies use examination systems to bring about educational reforms?
Readings:


November 5 - Film assignment distributed in class: “Mean Girls.”

November 5 – Stratification within schools

How do schools generate caste-like status groups among students? Who fits in and who stands out in school? How is power distributed in school? How do consumerism and capitalism influence an informal status system in schools? Discuss a cultural form of inequality in school?

Reading and film viewing:


Optional reading:


November 12 – “Mean Girls” discussion paper due at beginning of class.

November 12 - Schooling and the reproduction of the social elite
Contrary to the view that schooling is morally consensual and socially integrative, how does schooling engender class conflict and the oppression of others? Does social class make any differences in schooling? How does the culture of a social class explain the behavior of youths with respect to the school authority? How does schooling shape different life styles and lead to different cultural consequences?

Readings:

David Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise*, Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, and 5.


November 19 - Film assignment distributed: “Educating Rita.”

November 19 - Schooling and reproduction of the social elite, continued

How does schooling prepare students for power and privilege by tracking students according to status origins? What does “prep crucible” mean? How does that affect students’ life pathways after schooling?

Readings:


November 26 – Thanksgiving holiday.

December 3 – “Educating Rita” film discussion paper is due at beginning of class.

December 3 - Meritocracy in transformation

While the old meritocratic machinery is changing, do prestigious institutions substitute the role of reproduction of privileged groups? What happens to class origins, ability, and test performances? Do character and leadership matter for elite schooling?
Readings:


December 10 – Final examination questions distributed in class.

December 10 - Summary

Why does schooling matter in modern society? What are the lessons from the material covered in this class? How can society solve persistent inequality problems?

Readings:


December 16 - Final Examination paper due to Professor Youn’s office, Room 226 Campion Hall. (Only paper copies will be accepted – no electronic submission.)