Sociology of Education (SOC 104A)
Summer 2023 Session II M, T, W, Th, 6:30-8:30 PM Zoom Only

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Course Description

This is a discussion-based undergraduate seminar devoted to examining sociological theories concerning, primarily, education in the United States. You will be asked in this course to think critically about the purpose of schooling in an unequal society and to question schools as neutral, meritocratic institutions. Through close readings of sociological case studies of schooling, students will consider questions such as: How and why do educational outcomes and experiences vary across student populations? What role do schools play in a society's system of stratification? How do schools both contribute to social mobility and to the reproduction of the status quo?

This course examines these questions through the lens of social and cultural theories, and employs empirical research to study how social inequalities are reproduced or ameliorated through schools. Topics that will be covered include: neighborhood and school segregation; peer culture; social networks; elite schooling; the interaction between home, society and educational institutions; the dynamics of assimilation for students from immigrant communities, and education systems outside the U.S.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Develop a sociological toolkit to analyze contemporary educational issues and demonstrate an awareness of policies and practices that need reform.

- Understand how structural forces and cultural processes contribute to unequal opportunities, experiences, and achievement outcomes for students along lines of race/ethnicity, class, gender, and immigration status.

- Identify uses and limits of different theoretical models–not only for understanding social inequality in educational achievement and opportunity, but also for reducing it.

Course Format and Expectations

The course will primarily be discussion-based, although I will sometimes give brief introductions to provide you with further context about the assigned readings. This format therefore requires an active and participatory approach on the part of each student. Students are highly encouraged to share their own experiences navigating and interpreting their educational experiences, but are also expected, when possible, to apply the different theories learned in class to analyze those experiences or relate them back to the broader class conversation. Seminar sessions will typically begin with a short overview by the instructor, followed by student discussion of the assigned readings. Some of the readings are conceptually challenging and will require intellectual effort to fully comprehend. For this reason, much of our collective discussion will be focused on "unpacking" the articles and considering their significance for the problems that concern us.

You should have completed the reading(s) prior to class each week, and be prepared to participate in whole-class and small group discussions about the readings. I encourage you to **skim-read** the texts to 'get the gist' of what they are about and then slow down and read more carefully when you encounter something that you find interesting or important. Regular attendance and participation in class discussions is expected, and will not only impact your grade, but also enhance your understanding of the material and aid your preparation for course assignments.

Guiding Questions

The assigned texts require both critical and thoughtful reflection. In both discussions and assignments, we will critically evaluate theories and readings with the following questions in mind:

- How does the author explain inequality in educational opportunity or outcomes?
- What relationship does the author see between educational inequality and social inequality?
- What does this body of research say to us about how to reduce inequality in educational outcomes or opportunities?
- How do the readings vary in terms of the positions they take, the arguments they make, or the implications that emerge from their positions?
- How convincing are their arguments and the evidence they provide in support of them?

Graded Course Requirements

1. **Attendance** (25%). By just showing up to class, you will have received full credit on attendance.
2. **Class participation** (25%). You will be evaluated on not only the quantity, but also the quality (i.e., evidence that you completed the reading and gave it some thought) of your contributions to class discussion.

3. **Discussion questions** (10%). Each student will be responsible for posting *at least one* discussion question or a comment about one of the readings on LATTE prior to each class. Though I certainly welcome them, discussion questions need not be profound or insightful; I appreciate straightforward, clarifying questions as well.
4. **Final project: Individual paper** plus **group presentation** (40%). Each student will be responsible for submitting a final project consisting of both individual and group elements. The purpose of the final project is to examine an educational problem or case in light of the theories we have studied in class. We will brainstorm possible final project topics in Week 2 of class and assign each student to a group of two to three based on shared interests.
    a. **Individual paper** (25%): Write a 6-8 page double-spaced paper using *at least two course readings* to consider how well the theories we have studied explain the issue or topic in question. In doing so, consider the question: what are the uses and limits of each theory for explaining the issue you have chosen to examine?
    b. **Group presentation** (15%)**:** Students will co-design and deliver a 15-minute group presentation on their topic, to be presented during the Final Exam period designated for the class. Group presentations should synthesize the arguments and information from each member's individual paper.

Deadlines:

- **Thursday, August 10:** Group presentation due by 9 am via email

- **Sunday, August 13:** Papers–individual and group–are due via LATTE by 11:59 PM

Course Policies

Absences: Students must attend each class meeting. Absences must be rare, imperative, and excused in advance.

Participation: Active, thoughtful, and responsive participation is expected of all students. It is your responsibility to learn to speak and to improve your participation in scholarly settings; it is my obligation to help you do so. If you discover in the early weeks of the course that you are having difficulty finding your voice, please set up an office hours appointment with me.

Late Submission Policy: All deadlines are firm. Extensions will only be granted under exceptional circumstances. Assignments not turned in by the due date will receive no credit.

Readings: Please do not be put off by the extent of the readings. My expectation is that you **skim-read** all materials, slow down and read more carefully when you come to something that is really interesting, and we will discuss key points in class. Try to skim-read the following week's or day's material in preparation for each class (before rather than after class), and focus on those that you find compelling. All students are expected to come to class with access to a copy of the

assigned readings in hand. Students must be able to access and refer to whatever page numbers and texts come up in class discussion.

Disability Services: Brandeis seeks to welcome and include all students. If you are a student who needs accommodations as outlined in an accommodations letter, please talk with me and present your letter of accommodation as soon as you can. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting accommodations, please contact Student Accessibility Support at (781) 736-3470 or access@brandeis.edu

Schedule of Meetings and Readings *** All materials for this class have been made available on LATTE or are accessible online through Electronic Reserves***

Week 1 (7/10-7/13)

Course Overview

7/10   Introductions

Conceptualizing the Relationship Between Social and Academic Inequality

7/11   Hill, H. C. (2017). The Coleman Report, 50 years on: What do we know about the role of schools in academic inequality?. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *674*(1), 9-26.

Gordon, L. N. (2017). If opportunity is not enough: Coleman and his critics in the era of equality of results. *History of Education Quarterly*, *57*(4), 601-615.

Historical Roots of Racial Inequality in Urban Education

7/12   Delmont, M. F. (2016). *Why busing failed: Race, media, and the national resistance to school desegregation* (pp. 54-76). Univ of California Press.

Rothstein, R. (2015). The racial achievement gap, segregated schools, and segregated neighborhoods: A constitutional insult. *Race and social problems*, *7*, 21-30.

Residential Segregation and Inequality Between Schools

7/13   Shedd, C. (2015). *Unequal city: Race, schools, and perceptions of injustice* (pp. 1-18). Russell Sage Foundation.

Week 2 (7/17-7/20)

Social Reproduction Theory

7/17   Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. (2011). Preface to the 2011 Edition, Chapters 1-5. In *Schooling in capitalist America: Educational reform and the contradictions of economic life* (pp. ix-xii; 3-148). Haymarket Books.

7/18   Carter, P. L., & Welner, K. G. (Eds.). (2013). Tracking, Segregation, and the Opportunity Gap: What We Know and Why It Matters. In *Closing the opportunity gap: What America must do to give every child an even chance* (pp. 169-180). Oxford University Press.

Golann, J. W. (2015). The paradox of success at a no-excuses school. *Sociology of education*, *88*(2), 103-119.

7/19   Binder, A. J., Davis, D. B., & Bloom, N. (2016). Career funneling: How elite students learn to define and desire 'prestigious'' jobs. *Sociology of Education*, *89*(1), 20-39.

Social & Cultural Capital Theory

7/20   Edgerton, J. D., & Roberts, L. W. (2014). Cultural capital or habitus? Bourdieu and beyond in the explanation of enduring educational inequality. *Theory and Research in Education*, *12*(2), 193-220.

Lareau, A. (2015). Cultural knowledge and social inequality. *American sociological review*, *80*(1), 1-27.

Week 3 (7/24-7/27)

"Oppositional Culture" and Segmented Assimilation Theories

7/24   Fordham, S., & Ogbu, J. U. (1986). Black students' school success: Coping with the "burden of 'acting white'". *The urban review*, *18*(3), 176-206.

Harris, A. L. (2006). I (don't) hate school: Revisiting oppositional culture theory of Blacks' resistance to schooling. *Social Forces*, *85*(2), 797-834.

7/25   Portes, A., & Zhou, M. (1993). The new second generation: Segmented assimilation and its variants. *The annals of the American academy of political and social science*, *530*(1), 74-96.

7/26   Portes, A., Fernandez-Kelly, P., & Haller, W. (2005). Segmented assimilation on the ground: The new second generation in early adulthood. *Ethnic and racial studies*, *28*(6), 1000-1040.

7/27   Lee, S. J. (1994). Behind the model-minority stereotype: Voices of high-and low-achieving Asian American students. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, *25*(4), 413-429.

Week 4 (7/31-8/3)

Critical Perspectives on Education

7/31   Waiting for Superman documentary by Davis Guggenheim

8/1   Freire, P. (2014). Chapter 2. In *Pedagogy of the oppressed: 30th anniversary edition* (pp. 71-86). Bloomsbury Academic & Professional.

8/2   Hooks, b. (1994). Introduction: Teaching to Transgress. In *Teaching To Transgress (1st ed.)* (pp. 1-11). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203700280

8/3   Guest Speaker TBD

Week 5 (8/7-8/10)

Comparative Perspectives in Education

8/7   Ripley, A. (2013). *The smartest kids in the world: And how they got that way*. Simon and Schuster.

8/8   LeTendre, G. K., Hofer, B. K., & Shimizu, H. (2003). What is tracking? Cultural expectations in the United States, Germany, and Japan. *American educational research journal*, *40*(1), 43-89.

8/9   Work on individual papers/group meetings for final project

8/10   Group presentations and wrap-up