

EPE 773-402—*Market Dynamics, Politics, and American Education*
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SYLLABUS

The Idea Behind the Course

A prominent feature of social, economic, and political life in the U.S. during the 1980s and 1990s has been renewed confidence in the ability of markets and private sector players to regulate the provision of goods and services. In response, governments at all levels have reduced their workforces and contracted with businesses to do things those governments used to do themselves. Likewise, competition has been introduced in various sectors—such as public utilities—that had formerly been monopolistic in orientation. And in general, large corporations and organizations have reorganized and become more streamlined and decentralized, in the belief that these changes promote efficiency and allow workers to function more autonomously.

These same ideas are increasingly being applied to the education sector, which has traditionally relied upon indirect political means for controlling public schooling. Various critics on both the political right and left have charged that typical education systems and bureaucracies are too cumbersome and unresponsive to meet the needs of education “consumers”—students and their parents—and that the best antidote is to unleash market forces into the public school arena. Proposals for doing this range from encouraging magnet school expansion and intradistrict public school transfers to full-blown voucher plans that allow both public and private schools to compete for students and the funding each one represents. The latest and most rapidly proliferating approach for introducing market dynamics into public education has been the charter school, an arrangement in which a state allows individual schools to operate with fewer government rules and restrictions, but such schools must also demonstrate that their students are meeting academic achievement goals.

By and large, however, Americans remain hesitant to rely upon market forces to solve public school problems.

In this course we will grapple with the problems and prospects of using market dynamics to improve American education. We will explore several key questions.

- What gave rise to the traditional centralized and politically controlled public school system, and what are its strengths and weaknesses?
- What *is* the concept of the market, and how would it apply to public schooling?
- What are the various approaches developed so far for introducing market forces into the public school sector?
- What research evidence is available about how effective these approaches are at improving schools?
- What are the chief arguments *against* using market forces in public schools?
- What do Americans believe about political and market controls of public schooling?
- What are different states and localities doing with regard to markets and schools?
- And, how do market dynamics operate within the higher education sector?

Reading Materials:

We will use the following three books for the course, along with sundry other articles and book chapters (listed in the schedule below):

John E. Chubb and Terry M. Moe, *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1990)

Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970)

Paul Hill, *Reinventing Public Education* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1997)

Recurring Themes:

While the readings and our general discussions will focus rather directly on markets and their relationships to educational institutions at the K-12 and postsecondary levels, we will also frequently touch upon a number of related themes that will surface but not be addressed by lengthy reading assignments. Students should keep these themes in mind, however, and be sensitive to them as they emerge in readings and class sessions:

- Markets and race (or racial politics)
- The relationship between markets and culture
- Markets and social class
- Markets, social capital, and community

Course Requirements:

Every student in this course will be expected to undertake four primary tasks.

- 1) Students will be responsible for completing the assigned readings, and should come to class prepared to discuss them. This is not a lecture course, but a seminar setting, in which we analyze and discuss the concepts, arguments, and evidence presented in the readings.
- 2) Students will each take responsibility for summarizing for the class the readings for one session (limit summaries to about 10 minutes, please). A sign-up sheet will be distributed at the beginning of the semester. The point here is to capture and communicate the argument(s) and evidence presented in the readings as concisely as possible, and to suggest fruitful lines of discussion for the class to take in response.
- 3) Early in the semester each student will engage in a modest writing assignment. Choose one item—a journal article, book chapter, or an entire book (for the ambitious)—from the resource/bibliography list supplied, and compose a four-page

essay that summarizes and critiques the argument(s) and evidence, and that relates the material, inasmuch as this is possible, to the topics we will have taken up in the course to that point.

- 4) Finally, each student will be expected to generate a research paper of approximately 15 pages in length. Possible paper topics will be discussed early in the semester, and can be tailored to suit the interests of the individual student. Considerable flexibility will be allowed, but the topics *must* involve markets and education. Topics should also be chosen early in the semester, because a *DRAFT* of the paper *must* be turned in by class on December 2. Within a few days of your submission, I will provide you written feedback on the paper. A revised version of the paper will then be due to me during finals week. Your grade will be contingent upon the overall quality of the paper, and on the extent to which your revisions addressed by comments on the draft.

Grading Standards

In terms of weights ascribed to the various tasks just outlined, I will attribute 50% of the course grade to the paper, another 25% to your class participation and preparation, and 15% each to the short writing assignment and the oral presentation to the class.

In general terms, here are the guidelines I will be using to assign grades. Student work that is clearly deficient in terms of substantive content, argumentation, and writing style will be given a C or below. Work that meets basic standards of performance, that fulfills essential requirements, will be given a B. Work that demonstrates a clear grasp of the subject matter, does so articulately and elegantly at both the conceptual and practical levels, and that represents exceptional accomplishment, will be given an A.

The Course Sequence:

August 26—Introduction...Consideration of the burning question, “Why bother?”, and its evil twin, “Who Cares?”

September 2—Emergence of the Market Concept; Clarifying Terms...

- Adam Smith, Selections from *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of The Wealth of Nations*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976: 17-33; 62-71; 474-495.
- Robert Hielbroner, “The Economic Revolution,” in *The Worldly Philosophers: The Lives, Times and Ideas of the Great Economic Thinkers*. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1986: 18-41.
- Charles E. Lindblom, “Authority Systems: Strong Thumbs, No Fingers,” and “The Limited Competence of Markets,” in *Politics and Markets: The World’s Political-Economic Systems*. New York: Basic Books, 1977: 65-89.

September 9— Disappearance and Reemergence of Markets in Education

- David Tyack and Larry Cuban, “Progress or Regress?” In *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995: 12-39.
- Paul E. Peterson, “Monopoly and Competition in American Education,” in William H. Clune and John F. Witte, eds., *Choice and Control in American Education Volume 1: The Theory of Choice and Control in Education*. Philadelphia: The Falmer Press, 1990: 47-75.

September 16— A Classic Pro-Market Argument: Chubb and Moe, the Critique

- John E. Chubb and Terry M. Moe, *Politics, Markets, and America’s Schools*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1990: 1-68.

September 23— Cont., Chubb and Moe, the Evidence

- Chubb and Moe: 69-140.

September 30— Conclude, Chubb and Moe, the Solution

- Chubb and Moe: 141-229.

October 7— Anti-Market Rejoinders

- Jeffrey Henig, “How Market-Based Plans Will Fail,” in *Rethinking School Choice: Limits of the Market Metaphor*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994: 174-195.

- Donald Moore and Susan Davenport, “School Choice: The New Improved Sorting Machine,” in W.L. Boyd and H.J. Walberg, eds., *Choice in Education: Potential and Problems*. Berkeley, CA: McCutchan Press, 1990.

October 14— Reconciling Markets and Politics: Hirschman’s Approach

- Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970: 1-61.

October 21— Conclude, Hirschman

- Hirschman, 62-126.

October 28— Debating the Effectiveness of Market Approaches to Public Schooling

- Rolf K. Blank, Roger Levine, and Lauri Steel, “After 15 Years: Magnet Schools in Urban Education,” in Bruce Full, Richard Elmore, and Gary Orfield, *Who Chooses? Who Loses? Culture, Institutions, and the Unequal Effects of School Choice*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1996: 154-172.
- Timothy Young and Evans Clinchy, “How Effective Is Choice in Public Education?” *Choice in Public Education*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1992: 20-38.

November 4— New Twists I: Charter Schools

- Louann A. Bierlein, “The Charter School Movement,” in Diane Ravitch and Joseph P Viteritti, eds., *New Schools for a New Century: The Redesign of Urban Education*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997: 37-60.
- Amy Stuart Wells, *Beyond the Rhetoric of Charter School Reform: A Study of Ten California School Districts*. UCLA Charter School Study. UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies. 1998: 1-19; 60-63.

November 11— New Twists II: The Privatization Option:

- Paul Hill, *Reinventing Public Education*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997: Chapters 3-5.

November 18—Markets and Higher Education I

- Thomas J. Kane, “Lessons from the Largest School Voucher Program: Two Decades of Experience with Pell Grants.” In Bruce Full, Richard Elmore, and Gary Orfield, *Who Chooses? Who Loses? Culture, Institutions, and the Unequal Effects of School Choice*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1996: 173-185.

- David Riesman, “The Free Market, ‘Marginal Differentiation,’ and Restrictions on Diversity,” in *On Higher Education: The Academic Enterprise in an Era of Rising Student Consumerism*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1998: 197-224

December 2—Markets and Higher Education II [Draft of Course Paper Due—No Assigned Readings]

December 9—Final Class: Guests Discuss Choice

Course Paper

I consider a graduate course, particularly a seminar, to be an intellectual excursion into ideas, social scientific concepts, historical and contextual information, evidence, various methods of inquiry, and an array of important arguments. The benefits a student derives from such an experience are related to the vigor with which he or she engages in the material.

The research paper, typically pursued during the latter stages of a course, is rather a culminating intellectual exercise. It should be taken seriously and thoughtfully, not something cobbled together at the last minute—hence a considerable portion of the course grade hinges upon the paper. And it should reflect both the knowledge gained during the semester’s study and the research conducted by the student into a particular aspect of the broader topic that is at the center of the course.

Students should eschew the view that the research paper is just another course requirement. It should be viewed, instead, as an opportunity to hone writing, conceptualization, and argumentation skills that will be *necessary* for adequate completion later on of both qualifying exams and a dissertation.

As students ponder and then pursue the work that leads to the paper for this course, they should keep several things in mind:

- Argument...As I read papers, I will be looking—above all—for the *argument* you are making about your chosen topic. It is easy, especially when engaging in a historical project, to provide ample narrative description and neglect development of an argument. Yet social science is largely about making effective arguments.

- Organization...Pay particular attention to the way you structure your paper, the way you sequence your discussion. Your material should follow some type of logical sequence, and transitions within the essay should be as smooth as possible. Background is important too. You do not need a five page preamble, but you do need to provide a basic context for the paper. And you need, as well, in the first few pages, to devote at least one good paragraph to a summary of what is ahead.

- Narrative/Prose...Please try to write as cleanly and crisply—even elegantly—as you can. If you have not learned them to this point, add the skills of rewriting and editing to your personal “portfolio” of capabilities.

- Feedback...As noted in the syllabus, I will read a draft of your paper a few weeks before the end of the semester, and you will make revisions to the draft based on my comments. This process of external feedback and input is how intellectual work is—or should be—done, and you should become used to this process and how it functions.