EDUCATION IN AMERICAN CULTURE
EPE 301 (Section 004)
FALL 1998

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Office Hours: Monday 9:00 — 11:00 a.m. and by appointment

ABOUT THE COURSE…

Few topics are more controversial, and quintessentially political, than those involving the education of our nation’s school-age children. Most countries, the U.S. included, consider education to be a primary function of government, one that should be supported and operated through organized, collective action. They have therefore devoted considerable public resources to fund elementary, secondary, and postsecondary school systems, and have also developed elaborate governance structures to link schools and institutions to political bodies, and therefore indirectly to the voting public.

Beyond general agreement that we should have publicly supported schools, however, there is little consensus about many of the issues that have been raised in our pursuit of an effective school system. To what extent should schools transmit cultural knowledge and values, in addition to providing the academic skills necessary for individuals to function well in our increasingly complex socio-economic system? How do we balance the needs of educators to use their professional judgment in curricular and behavioral matters with the rights of parents to manage the lives of their children? What role should the public schools—or universities—play in addressing social problems or divisions within society that have been associated with differences of race, class, gender, or religion among people groups? How do we hold teachers, principals, and other school personnel accountable for their performance without overburdening them? Should we make more use of market mechanisms to keep public schools from becoming inefficient and unresponsive? Should the federal government attempt to direct state level education policies, or leave such decisions to states and localities? The list of questions and concerns regarding education policy, broadly defined, goes on and on.

This survey course is designed to help college students grapple with these and other issues that face all those who think long and hard about education and its place—past, present, and future—in American culture. It is a “big picture” course, designed to promote critical reflection and discussion regarding the role and nature of education in our society. We will examine American education from a variety of perspectives, e.g., historical, political, economic, and sociological, in pursuit of a greater understanding of the enterprise of schooling in this country. Students will also engage in a field experience, which will allow them to reflect on the material covered in a real-life setting.
COURSE OBJECTIVES...

At the conclusion of this course, students should be able to:

- Speak and write intelligently and thoughtfully about the fundamental issues of policy, culture, and politics involving American education.
- Describe in some detail the various arguments made by those who take different positions on these salient issues, and be familiar with some of the individuals who have made these arguments.
- Appreciate how education policies change as historical, political, and cultural conditions change.
- Understand how different disciplinary perspectives on education in American culture can be valuable in helping us think about issues.
- Articulate for themselves more clearly than before what they believe about the role of education and educational institutions in contemporary American culture.

TEXTS AND RESOURCES

The following books have been ordered:


Additional readings will be on reserve in the Education Library (Dickey Hall, second floor), and will be listed in the syllabus or on supplemental reading lists provided in class.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING POLICY

Although I will be spending some class time relaying information to you, a considerable portion of our time together on Tuesdays and Thursdays will be spent discussing the assigned readings as a group, or in small groups. It is therefore imperative that you complete the readings before you arrive. It is also important that you come on a regular basis—I will be following the University’s attendance policies and monitoring your involvement in course sessions as necessary. Students must also each take a turn at summarizing for the class portions of the reading materials, and offering suggestions for discussion topics. Students will also be engaging in field experiences over the course of the semester, and will be reporting to the class on the result of those activities.
In addition to regular class attendance and participation, your grade will be based upon your performance on several written and oral assignments.

- Oral report on reading selection; 3 page written summary 15%
- Mid-term take-home essay exam, 8-10 pages 30%
- Final take-home essay exam, 8-10 pages 30%
- Field experience oral report; 3 page written summary 15%
- General class participation 10%

If you are interested in earning extra credit, you may see me about arranging to prepare a 3 page book review and critique, which will be worth an extra 10%.

COURSE SCHEDULE…

Week 1

August 27 (#1) Introduction; discussion of syllabus, assignments

Week 2


Week 3


September 10 (#5) Cont.: Chapters 3 & 4, pp. 60-109, Tyack and Cuban.
Week 4


Week 5

September 22 (#8) Class structure and American education: Chapter 4, pp. 78-105, Spring; Donna Langston, “Tired of Playing Monopoly?” in *Class and Inequality*, pp. 110-120.


Week 6


Week 7


Week 8

October 13 (#14)  Multiculturalism, Chapter 6, pp. 146-167, Spring.


Week 9

October 20 (#16)  Monopoly vs. the Market, Chapter 7, 171-194, Spring.


Week 10


Week 11


November 5 (#21) No Class (Conference)

Week 12

November 10 (#22) Cont. discussion of culture and society, Chapters 4-7, Steinberg

November 12 (#23) No Class (Conference)

Week 13

November 17 (#24) Cont. discussion of culture and society, Chapters 8-10, Steinberg.


Week 14

November 24 (#26) Field experience written reports due

November 26 No Class (Thanksgiving Break)

Week 15

December 1 (#27) Field experience oral reports

December 3 (#28) Final exam distributed; Field experience oral reports
Week 16


Week 17

December 15 (#31) Final exam due