Modern educational systems are situated at the intersection of culture, politics, and social stratification. As Pierre Bourdieu noted, “the sociology of education is a chapter, and not a minor one at that, in the sociology of knowledge and the sociology of power.” This seminar will provide an opportunity to evaluate some of the major theories and significant empirical literature, both historical and statistical (books and journal articles), on the structure and effects of educational institutions. While much of our focus will be on higher education in the US, it is unfruitful to study it in isolation from inquiries into lower levels of American education or without comparisons to other countries.

The course is designed as an advanced level think-tank seminar. Our discussions will be informed by a class “blog.” Our seminar “blog” will provide a forum for weekly critical engagement with our readings. Every seminar participant is expected to post at least one comment, using no fewer than 200 words, on one or more of our readings for the week. In addition, every student is required to post at least one comment (not shorter than 25 words) on another student’s entry for that week. Students should read all of the posts before our class discussion.

Grades will be based on the quality of one’s blogging (20%), verbal contributions (20%) to the seminar, by a midterm (20%), a final exam (25%), and a data analysis memo (15%).

The ethics of the academic community, with respect to intellectual honesty and integrity, require of us all that we do not plagiarize or use another person’s argument without providing full scholarly credit. If you have any confusion as to what constitutes plagiarism, please see me or look at the English department’s home page for guidelines. The rare memory slip, when we imagine some brilliant expression to be our own creation, happens to us all; but deliberate plagiarism is a violation that earns one a permanent “F” in a class, and possibly worse (suspension or expulsion) from the Judicial Affairs Court at Wake Forest.

Readings: There are books and various Sakai on-line items required for this class. The readings for each week are listed on this syllabus.
AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT
According to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, individuals with a physical or mental impairment ("disability") are entitled to equal access, integration and the provision of reasonable accommodation by Federally-supported institutions like Wake Forest University. The University is required to make "academic adjustments" for qualified disabled persons. These adjustments may include modifications to academic requirements as are necessary to ensure that such requirements do not discriminate against a qualified handicapped student. Adjustments may also include modifications to course examinations or other procedures for evaluating students' academic achievement. If these Section 504 protections apply to you, or you think that they might apply to you, please contact the Learning Assistance Center (336.758.5929) within the first two (2) weeks of the semester.

SYLLABUS ADDENDUM: CONTINGENCY PLAN IN THE EVENT OF A PANDEMIC FLU

In the event of a pandemic flu outbreak, we will continue to “meet” as a class through electronic media such as e-mail and the World Wide Web. If those media are not available to us, we will use the U.S. Postal Service and/or telephones to communicate back and forth. I have already collected the necessary contact information from you (your evacuation address, cell phone #, e-mail address), and will provide my home address and cell phone number to you in the event this plan is put into place.

You will continue to do the course readings as specified for each day on the syllabus, and I will provide you with questions in advance related to that material. You will submit written responses to those questions in lieu of having a class discussion. Those responses will count toward your class participation grade. The other written assignments for the class will not change. The syllabus already provides you will all of the information you need to complete those assignments.

Of course, we will make other adjustments, as necessary, to the course requirements in order to get through what will undoubtedly be a very disruptive event in our individual lives and in the life of the university itself. If you have any questions about this plan, please let me know.

Week One for Us Starts on January 27 (yes, the 27th, since classes start on Tuesday January 14 and January 20 is a holiday, Martin Luther King Day, so this reflects two weeks’ worth of work):

Read: all of Amanda Ripley’s The smartest kids in the world. Watch the film (if you haven’t already, or read the book if you don’t care to get the DVD), Waiting for Superman. It’s in our library. I’ll get it placed on reserve.

Also read: from our Sakai resources, “Finland Comprehensive School and PISA, 2002”.


Assignment: Based on those three items, write a bullet point memo listing four problems with US schools, k-12 only. Along with those problems give a reason why the problem exists and what a solution might look like.

For example, you could say that one problem is resource disparities between schools. One school district may have twice the money to spend per student as another school district. Source of the problem: local property taxes provide the majority of funds for individual schools which assures that affluent neighborhoods have resource rich schools and poor neighborhoods have resource starved schools. Possible solution: redistribute all school funds at the state level equally on a per-student basis.

Give me at least four problems, reasons why, and potential solutions. Send them to me as a word document attached to an email. You may send them at any time, but all are due by Saturday 5pm, January 25.

Monday February 3: Charter school debate; Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital

Readings all on Sakai:
- Hoxby on Charter schools in New York.
- Stanford report card on charter schools 2009.
- Stanford report on charter schools, 2013: 17-40
- Stanford report on charter schools in NYC.

Monday February 10: Week Two: Teacher Quality, TFA, and Assessment Problems

Readings all on Sakai: (looks like a lot but it’s only 5 papers, all the rest are short newspaper pieces.)
- *Teacher value added by great ones, Harvard study, Jan 2012.
- *Qualifications in NY Schools, NBER paper.
- *Teach for American in NC, NBER paper.
- Harvard Teach for America graduate’s reflections, Harvard Magazine.
- Rubber Room hangover still protects Teachers in NYC, NYT.
- Teacher evaluation system in DC designed by Jason Kamras, NYT.
- Teacher Assessment and how to cheat at it, NYT.
- Teacher evaluation difficult and distracting, NYT.
- *School choice and voucher movement.
- Teacher Education in bad shape, NYT.

Monday February 17: SES, family strategies, and social capital

Readings:
Monday Feb 17:
- Neighborhood and Schools Effects on educational attainments.
- Family ed investment strategies and SES.
- Coleman on achievement in private and public schools.
- Math and English achievements in Catholic and public schools.
- High school drop out rates, informational report.
- Private school characteristics, informational report.

Please note:

This sample syllabus covers only the first four weeks of the 2014 semester. Other topics and readings depend on the interests of the seminar’s participants and any new cutting edge reports that came out in the last six months.

The last four class meetings of the semester are spent doing a data memo using SPSS and the “National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen (NLSF), which consists of students from 28 elite colleges and universities who were first interviewed in 1999 and were interviewed again during each spring semester until spring 2003 (Massey et al. 2003).” This quote describing the data is taken from a published article produced by a student of mine last semester. Students with interesting results are encouraged and assisted by me, well beyond our time together in seminar, to publish in a peer-reviewed academic journal. Prospective employers and graduate school programs are very impressed by an undergraduate/graduate with a publication.