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## SOC380: EDUCATION AND AMERICAN CULTURE

Fall 2008

Tuesday, 12:30 – 3:20 pm: SSB 321

**Course Purpose and Description:** To perpetuate itself, a culture must thoroughly socialize its young. Complex societies, like the U.S., rely upon families, religion, and schools to provide primary socialization -- but only schools are under the control of elected officials and their representative communities. Hence, schooling is a primary nexus of American cultural contestation -- that is, it is a critical arena in which competing visions of who America is (or should be) clash. Examining education and its related social processes, then, provides much insight into American culture, its cultural processes, and its complex institutional relationships. Knowledge of these issues will be of value to any U.S. resident, but particularly to those who wish to deepen their understanding of the cultural foundations and complexities of U.S. education.

This course “provides an overview of the cultural significance of, and complexities involved in, educational processes and institutions today. Special attention given to opportunity, equality, and mobility issues” (*from the TCNJ catalog*). To achieve these goals, this course will provide students with diverse opportunities to observe and consider education and American culture. Opportunities will include two mandatory field experiences, readings from a variety of challenging texts, guest speakers, documentaries, and course discussions. We will focus on six questions: 1) what does education in the U.S. reveal about American culture (past, present, and future)? 2) who succeeds in the U.S. educational system, who doesn't, and why?, 3) how ought we direct our attention and resources if we are to make U.S. schools the pathways to opportunity we want them to be? 4) how does U.S. schooling compare? 5) in what ways do families, religion, and education work together, in what ways do they conflict, and how has this changed over the past 30 years?, and 6) is higher education a game, a credential, a life-transforming experience, a business, or a religion?

### Learning Goals:

*Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:*

- Use key concepts (e.g., culture, socialization, opportunity structure, credentialism, social capital, mobility, formal organization) to analyze American education.
- Apply key concepts and theories to observation and analysis of public, religious, and private schools.
- Critique the functionalist (or status quo) models of American education, using empirical evidence and social reproduction theories.
- Articulate the complex web of relationships among American schooling, power/politics, race/ethnicity, religion, social stratification, and economic opportunity.
- Critique social reproduction (or critical) models of American education, using empirical evidence and human capital theory.
- Explain the relationships among U.S. educational expansion, degree inflation, and increased educational inequality.
- Compare aspects of the U.S. education system with systems of similar democracies (e.g., England, Germany), and contrast aspects of the U.S. system with forms of education in the developing world.

- Use the results of prior school reform efforts to evaluate the pre-conditions and breadth of effort necessary to bring about successful school reform today.
- Describe some of the many ways U.S. religion supports, challenges, and ignores U.S. education, both presently and historically.

**Required Readings:**

Denise Clark Pope. *Doing School*.

Jay MacLeod. *Ain't No Makin' It*.

Melinda Bollar Wagner. *God's Schools: Choice and Compromise in American Society*.

Naomi Schaffer Riley. *God on the Quad*.

Peter W. Cookson, Jr & Caroline Hodges Persell. *Preparing for Power*.

*Students must also read the following articles:*

David Brooks. "The Organization Kid." *The Atlantic Monthly*

ETS. "America's Perfect Storm."

James Traub. "What No School Can Do." *New York Times Magazine*

Lisa Coryell. "I have a dream reunion." *Trenton Times*

Marty Nemko. "America's most overrated product: the BA" *Chronicle of Higher Education*

Paul Tough. "What It Takes to Make a Student." *New York Times Magazine*

Sam Roberts. "In a generation, minorities may be U.S. majority." *NY Times*

Steven Brint. 3 chapters from *Schools and Societies*.

Tim Clydesdale. "Cognitively Sharp, Intellectually Immune." Ch. 5 from *The First Year Out*

William Henry. Excerpts from *In Defense of Elitism*. Anchor Books.

Winnie Hu. "Where the Race now begins in Kindergarten." *NY Times*.

*The professor also reserves the right to add articles throughout the course (and you have the right to suggest the same), based on the course of our class discussions, student interest, and current events.*

**Course Policies:**

1. *Attendance and Participation:* Students demonstrate their commitment to learning by regularly attending class, by arriving *on time* and *staying for the full class period*, by contributing usefully to class and e-discussions, by doing their part to create an atmosphere of respectful and serious learning, and by *reading the assigned material in advance of the class*. You will be expected to so express your commitment in this class, with one-fourth (250 points) of your final grade based on your blog posts and comments, and an additional portion (50 points) of your final grade based on your class readiness & participation. You may also expect that I will start class promptly, end on time, answer your questions fully and respectfully, return your exams and papers in a timely manner, and be available to meet with you during my office hours.

2. *Papers and Examinations:* Students demonstrate their academic seriousness by turning in all papers and assignments on time, and by rigorously maintaining the highest standards of academic writing. This includes (but is not limited to) spelling, grammar, style, documentation, and format (thus, papers & assignments should be, except where noted, typed on 8.5x11 inch white paper, double-spaced, with 1 inch margins and a 10-12 point typeface, stapled in the upper left-hand corner--*no manila/plastic/cardboard covers, please*). Dedicated students for whom this presents a challenge will avail themselves of the college's writing tutors. *Please note I have strict word limits:* it is far harder to write a brief, focused paper than to write a long one - allow plenty of time for editing and rewriting. I have VERY high standards about written work!

a. *All assignments must be turned in on time.* Overwork, personal struggles, and the like are important issues, and I encourage you to avail yourselves of your residence staff, student development staff, or the college's counselors for help in these matters. Such issues, however, do not constitute a valid excuse for lateness. Neither do variations on "the computer ate my paper," "I can't get the computer to print," or "Didn't you get my paper in the mail?" count as valid excuses. Valid excuses are a death in the immediate family or

severe illness (which I will confirm with family members, the Dean of Students, &/or the Health Center). Late papers are *severely* penalized (i.e., ½ letter grade for papers not turned in *at the start of class*, 1 letter grade for papers arriving after class on the day assigned, 2 letter grades the following day, 3 letter grades the day after that). Papers and assignments must be turned in on time. Thanks to SOCS, I can see exactly when you submitted your assignments to me.

b. Likewise, *examinations must be taken at the scheduled time*. Only those with official TCNJ activities (e.g., field trips, athletic teams), or the valid reasons specified above, may reschedule their examinations. No make-up exams will be given to students who notify the professor *after* the exam has taken place, unless they were incapacitated and physically unable to call beforehand (i.e., unconscious in a hospital). Make-up examination format is at my discretion (usually an oral examination).

c. *Plagiarism/Cheating* will be prosecuted to the fullest extent possible. Don't be foolish--you don't want me as your adversary. I have respect for the student who accepts the consequences of poor preparation and turns in his/her *own* work. Do what is honorable and right.

3. *Grading*: Your course grade will be based on the following points:

Class Readiness & Participation	50
SOCS Blog Posts & Comments	250
Field Experience Papers (2 @ 100)	200
Exam 1	200
Exam 2	<u>300</u>
TOTAL	1000

Grade distribution is as follows: 930-1000=A, 900-929=A-, 870-899=B+, 830-869=B, 800-829=B-, 770-799=C+, 730-769=C, 700-729=C-, 670-699=D+, 600-669=D, less than 600=F.

4. *E-mail & SOCS*: I will be making extensive use of e-mail and the course website on SOCS. Remember, if you don't use your TCNJ e-mail address, put in a forwarding order so that you'll receive notices (you are required by college policy to check your TCNJ e-mail for notices, etc.)

### **Course Assignments:**

1. *SOCS Blog*: You will each need to create a blog on the SOCS website for this course, and post to it regularly during the semester. Specifically, you will *post twice each week* to your blog, and you will also *comment twice each week* on a classmate's blog. A blog, of course, is a website on which individuals can post thoughts, musings, reflection, opinion, and arguments – and invite others to comment on their posts. Your course blogs will be visible to everyone else in the course, including your professor, but they are not accessible to those outside the class. Your posts should average 150-250 words, and your comments about others' posts should be at least 75 words. Of course, you don't need to agree with each other or with me, but you will be expected to be civil. By the end of the semester, you should have at least 25 posts to your blog and at least 25 comments on others' blogs.

OK, so what should you post to your blog about? Here are some suggestions. On the first page of the syllabus, you'll find 6 overarching course questions. You can blog about these. You can also blog about texts/readings, films shown in class, guest speakers, my comments in class. You can even be daring (occasionally) and blog about stuff outside of class – e.g., a news article or op-ed; a movie; or an observation. What I'm looking for with this assignment is: evidence of your ability to engage thoughtfully with the class materials/issues, to think analytically and critically, to make integrative/synthesizing connections, to demonstrate that you've read the assignments, and to consider the implications of what you are learning. As a general rule, *you shouldn't post about the same source/issue/topic more than twice* – be sure to vary your "stimuli," and *at least ½ of your posts should be about the course readings*. As for comments on others' posts, I will ask you to spread around your attention here as well. There are 25 students in the class, so no one student should receive more than 2 comments from you.

Five times during the course of the semester I will review your posts and comments and issue you a grade. You can receive a maximum of 50 points each time I grade your posts and comments. Be sure to keep up with the 2 posts, 2 comments per week rate. When I grade, I'll be checking for that as well as the substance/quality of your work. Should you fall behind, be sure to catch up - I will take that into consideration in subsequent grading. Finally, be patient with this assignment and tell me if you have ideas about improving it - this is the first time I'm doing this, so we're all learning here. I reserve the right to alter this assignment during the course of the semester, if need be.

2. *Field Experiences & Papers*: It would be a crime to teach this class and never take advantage firsthand of the vivid examples of educational processes & organizations that surround us. Hence, we will do two **mandatory** field trips. *You must attend these field trips*. One trip will last for a full Wednesday (7:00 am to 6:00 pm), and the other will occur noon thru 5:30 pm on a Tuesday. Specific information will be distributed in class as the details are settled for these trips; and be prepared to help pay for the cost of bus transportation.

You will also write a 750 word (double-spaced) paper of "*reflections and connections*." That is, a paper in which you *reflect* upon what you observed/experienced - how the field experience helped you understand or see things in a new or more vivid way (if true) - and in which you *connect* your observations/experience with concepts discussed in course readings and other related materials. Again, no more than 750 words, and it is due in the SOCS dropbox on the date indicated. The best papers identify one or two key observations and then make thoughtful connections to the texts, key concepts, and possibly other course materials (a guest speaker, documentary). The worst papers present one's emotional reactions only, write long lists of things that were observed, and lack any connection to course texts.

3. *Exams*: There will be two essay examinations. The first will be an in-class, open-book examination. The second exam will be a take-home exam. You will receive questions for the second exam on the final day of class, and will submit them using the virtual dropbox on SOCS by the start time of the final examination.

**Course Schedule:** (tentative; the professor reserves the right to adjust)

Date:	What's happening:	What's due:
Aug 26	Course Welcome "Hard Times at Douglass High" 113 min.	P Tough "What it takes ..."
Sept 2	<i>NO CLASS; FOLLOW MONDAY SCHEDULE</i>	<i>2 wks of reading on the 9<sup>th</sup> - so do ½ this week</i>
9	Schooling in Sociological Perspective	MacLeod Ch 1-8 (read Ch 2 slowly); ETS "America's Perfect Storm"
16	Schooling & Inequality Frederick Wiseman's "High School" 85 min.	Brint Ch 7; MacLeod Ch 9-11 & Appendix; Coryell
23	Educating Distinct Populations	Cookson/Persell- Prologue & Part 1; Henry excerpt; Mathews; Nemko; Riley- Intro & Ch 1-2
Sept 30	Religion, Culture, & Education	Riley- Ch 3-8; Wagner- Ch 1-3

Course Schedule continued

<b>Date:</b>	<b>What's happening:</b>	<b>What's due:</b>
Oct 7	Review & Discussion; <b>IN CLASS EXAM begins at 2 pm</b>	Riley- Ch 9-10; Wagner- Ch 4
8*	<b>MANDATORY FIELD TRIP 7:00 AM-6:00 PM</b> to Philadelphia Public Schools (am) and Philadelphia Biblical University (pm)	<i>Note: dress for walking outside</i> <i>Field Trip paper is due to SOCS on Oct 17 by 5 pm</i>
14	<i>No Class; Fall Break</i>	
17*	<i>*Not a class day; SOCS Due Date</i>	Field Trip paper due to SOCS on Oct 17 by 5 pm
21	Education & Elites	Brooks: "The Organization Kid"; Cookson/Persell- Part 2; Winnie Hu article
28	Education & Elites, con't. <b>MANDATORY FIELD TRIP; NOON to 5:30 pm</b> to Lawrenceville Prep School	Cookson/Persell- Part 3; Pope- Preface, Ch 1-3 <i>Note: dress for walking outside</i> <i>Field Trip paper is due to SOCS on Nov 7 by 5 pm</i>
Nov 4	Education & Upward Mobility "Secrets of the SAT" 60 min	Pope- Ch 4-7 + Epilogue
7*	<i>*Not a class day; SOCS Due Date</i>	Field Trip paper due to SOCS on Nov 7 by 5 pm
11	<i>Guest Presentation</i> American Higher Education "Declining by Degrees" 120 min.	Clydesdale- Ch 5; Riley Ch 11-12 + Concl.
18	<b>**Class cancelled in lieu of Field Trips**</b>	Wagner- Ch 5-12
25	Education in Comparative Perspective	Brint- Ch 2 & 3
Dec 2	Final Discussion & Course Wrap-up	Traub article; Roberts article
Final exam period	<b>Take Home Exam Due to the SOCS dropbox at the start of the scheduled exam time</b>	<i>See Final Exam Schedule on-line</i>