

SYA 4930: Sociology of Education

University of Florida
Spring 2024

Meeting time/place: MWF, 9:35 AM -10:25 AM / Pugh 120

Instructor: AJ Alvero, aalvero@ufl.edu

Office/Hours: MW, 11:00 AM – 12:00 PM / Turlington Hall 3344. If those times don't work, I can meet virtually at other times/days.

Course website: <https://elearning.ufl.edu> (Canvas)

Overview:

Education is a fundamental feature of all human societies associated with a litany of life outcomes and trajectories. In the US however, educational opportunities are often not evenly distributed in ways that track with many other forms of social inequality. This class starts with this idea to discuss equity in education and how resources, opportunities, and outcomes are not equally accessible in and through schools. Education is a major topic across the social sciences, and in this course we will draw primarily from the sociology of education literature. To complement the sociology readings, we will also explore relevant materials from education research, popular media, data visualizations, and our own lived experiences. In this way, the course should be of interest not just to sociology students but also students in education, other social sciences, and anyone else interested in learning more about education and current conceptions of its limitations.

Course Objectives

After taking this class, students will be able to:

- Analyze, critique and interpret sociological scientific literature
- Effectively communicate the complexities and inequities described in the sociology of education
- Identify, explain and apply basic issues and debates in US educational systems

Readings:

All of the reading materials for the class will be made available as PDFs on Canvas. They comprise a mix of academic articles presenting theories and/or empirical evidence for social patterns in education; legal documents pertaining to key cases regarding education; popular media in the form of blog-posts, op-eds, and newspaper articles; and some forms of interactive media and visual representations of educational processes and outcomes.

The course materials will therefore prepare students to engage with national and regional discourse on education across different domains.

General Expectations

Come on time, attend every class, complete all readings, share in the presentation of specific readings, submit every written assignment on time, and participate actively throughout the class sessions. Class discussions and activities will assume that students completed the assigned readings.

Assignments

Bi-weekly assignments:

Bi-weekly written work (4 in total) due every other Sunday for most of the term. Each writing assignment can focus on two or more readings for the respective week(s). Readings must be from the current and/or previous week. Each written piece should be 2-3 pages, double spaced. Include a list of references as active URLs at the very end of the document. The writing assignments will be graded based on completion, whether the submission followed the format described below, engagement with the course materials, and the depth of the writing.

- **10% of the words: Short synopsis of the readings, at max several sentences.** Should *briefly* and *succinctly* describe the main argument or point of the readings, evidence for the argument, and what the respective conclusions are. Practically, this helps me understand how you understood a given reading and helps you practice synthesizing information.
- **90% of the words: Engaging and extending the argument(s) or point(s) from the readings.** After identifying the main argument, come up with a formal response. This can take several different forms: agreeing or disagreeing with the main argument/point/finding/etc. and explaining why; comparing and contrasting the key ideas relative to other/prior readings; etc.

Next, write about the implications of the readings in other contexts. This can be done by connecting the readings key ideas with your own schooling experience, other sociological studies, other trends in education, etc. This will require some independent research but is an opportunity to make the readings relevant to your ideas and interests in education. This is also an opportunity to build theory: ideas and frameworks that explain social phenomena.

Due dates for writing assignments:

1/21

2/4

2/18

3/3

Late policy: Aside from any approved extensions by me, assignments must be submitted by each date at 11:59PM. Assignments submitted after will be docked 10% for each late day (excluding weekends) up to 50%.

In other words, since each assignment is due on Friday night, you will have until the following Friday night to submit the assignment for partial credit.

If you ever foresee any issue or obstacle towards submitting your assignment on time, your default move should always be to contact me.

Final project:

In lieu of a final paper, we will instead have research poster presentations that will be presented during the final class sessions. The final project will be done in groups of two. Each project will comprise independent research on an issue, study, or theory related to the class. Topics will be selected by students and approved by me several weeks before the presentations.

There are two primary deliverables for this final project:

1. The actual research poster (including a short in-class presentation)
2. A written report providing additional information, details, and reference list

To ensure that each member of each group contributes equally to the project, there will be several check-in assignments leading up to the final submissions. These check in assignments will also require students to connect their final project to weekly readings. This will also break up the final assignment into smaller, more manageable chunks that students will be able to piece together for the final submission. More details about this will be discussed in class.

The poster will be made digitally so we can present them in class. I am agnostic about which software to use, but I do prefer that the format of the poster is simple and follows the style described here: <https://convention.apa.org/blog/rethinking-the-science-poster>

The content of the posters should reflect original, independent research that accomplishes the following:

- Identify an issue related to education: could be something specific, like a high profile court case, or some kind of norm shift, such as the increased presence of racially biased technology in US classrooms.
- Connect an issue to readings/class: how might the issue be framed/understood through the lens of what everyone in the class has read?
- Describe the stakes and outcomes: who stands to gain/lose what? How do these relate to equity and what could be changed?
- Key takeaways and looking ahead: who/what/when/where/why might this issue manifest elsewhere

Students will be given **five minutes** to present their posters. More details will be discussed in class, and any other questions about the final project should be directed to me.

Grading

A 93+, A- 90-92, B+ 88-89, B 83-87, B- 80-82, C+ 78-79, C 73-77, C- 70-72, D+ 68-69, D 63-67, D- 60-62, F 59 and lower

Evaluation

Bi-weekly writing assignments: 50%

Final project: 35%

Attendance and Participation: 15%

Attendance

As noted above, attendance and participation is worth 15% of your final grade. Missing class due to illness, emergencies, etc. is permitted **as long as you contact me ahead of time**. Student-athletes competing as part of official university activities are also excused but likewise must coordinate with me ahead of time.

For more information see [UF's Attendance Policies](#).

Academic Integrity

UF students are bound by [The Honor Pledge](#):

"We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment."

[The Honor Code](#) specifies specific behaviors which violate this code along with respective sanctions.

Academic Accommodations

"Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the [Disability Resource Center](#) (352-392-8565) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

Student Evaluation and Feedback

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

Course Schedule (readings will be discussed in order presented on syllabus)

** Bi-weekly writing assignment due on respective Friday*

Note: Some of the course materials will cover sensitive and politically charged topics. The readings do not reflect my personal views but rather a holistic overview of research and discourse about equity in education informed by my expertise on the subject.

Week 1 (Jan 8) and Week 2* (Jan 15)

- **Holiday: Jan 16, MLK Day, No Class**

- Labaree (1997), "Public Goods, Private Goods: The American Struggle Over Educational Goals"
- DuBois (1935), "Founding the Public School"
- Freire (1970), "Pedagogy of the Oppressed", Chapter 2

Week 3 (Jan 22)

- Rafalow and Puckett (2022), "Sorting Machines: Digital Technology and Categorical Inequality in Education"
- NYT Upshot (2022), "Money, Race, And Success: How Your School District Compares"
<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/04/29/upshot/money-race-and-success-how-your-school-district-compares.html>
- Domina, Penner, & Penner (2017), "Categorical Inequality: Schools as Sorting Machines"

Week 4* (Jan 29)

- Pearman and Swain (2017), "School Choice, Gentrification, and the Variable Significance of Racial Stratification in Urban Neighborhoods"
- reardon and Owens (2014), "60 Years After *Brown*: Trends and Consequences of School Segregation"
- School racial demographics map
<https://geographyedu.org/school-racial-demographics-in-the-united-states/>

Week 5 (Feb 5)

- Dee (2005), "A Teacher Like Me: Does Race, Ethnicity, or Gender Matter?"
- Domina (2006), "Brain Drain and Brain Gain: Rising Educational Segregation in the United States, 1940–2000"
- Pearman and Greene (2022), "School Closures and the Gentrification of the Black Metropolis"

Week 6* (Feb 12)

- Von Hippel, Workman, & Downey (2018), "Inequality in Reading and Math Skills Forms Mainly before Kindergarten: A Replication, and Partial Correction, of "Are Schools the Great Equalizer?""
- Engzell, Frey, Verhagen (2021), "Learning loss due to school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic"
- Diversity Data Kids (2020), "Neighborhood preschool enrollment patterns by race/ethnicity"
<https://www.diversitydatakids.org/research-library/data-visualization/neighborhood-preschool-enrollment-patterns-raceethnicity>

Week 7 (Feb 19)

- Baker et al. (2017), "Is School Funding Fair? America's Most Fiscally Disadvantaged School Districts"
- Sosina and Weathers (2019), "Pathways to Inequality: Between-District Segregation and Racial Disparities in School District Expenditures"
- Poverty and Covid-19 Measurement Dashboard,
<http://povertymeasurement.org/covid-19-poverty-dashboard/>

Week 8* (Feb 26)

- ProPublica (2016), "What Abigail Fisher's Affirmative Action Case Was Really About"
- Stulberg and Chen (2013), "The Origins of Race-conscious Affirmative Action in Undergraduate Admissions: A Comparative Analysis of Institutional Change in Higher Education"
- Yosso et al. (2016), "From Jim Crow to Affirmative Action and Back Again: A Critical Race Discussion of Racialized Rationales and Access to Higher Education"

Week 9 (Mar 5)

- Hofstra et al. (2020), "The Diversity-Innovation Paradox in Science"
- The Atlantic (2016), "A University That Prioritizes the Students Who Are Often Ignored"
- Edmonds (2022), "Role Models Revisited: HBCUs, Same-Race Teacher Effects, and Black Student Achievement" [note: this is a working paper]

Week of March 12th

- **Holiday: Mar 9-16, Spring Break, No Class**

Week 10 (Mar 18)

- Combahee River Collective Statement (1977)
- Florida House Bill 999 (2023)
- Wolfram (1997), "Language Ideology and Dialect: Understanding the Oakland Ebonics Controversy"

Week 11 (Mar 25)

- Sterling et al. (2020), "The confidence gap predicts the gender pay gap among STEM graduates"

- Johns et al. (2019), “Transgender Identity and Experiences of Violence Victimization, Substance Use, Suicide Risk, and Sexual Risk Behaviors Among High School Students — 19 States and Large Urban School Districts, 2017”
- NYT (2021), “More Women than Men are Going to College. That May Change the Economy”

Week 12 (Apr 2)

- The Guardian (2018), “Air pollution: black, Hispanic and poor students most at risk from toxins”
- Cremin (2020), “School Policing was Designed to Criminalize Black Students. We Must Follow Black Voices Calling for its Abolition.”
- McGee and Martin (2011), “You Would Not Believe What I Have to Go Through to Prove My Intellectual Value!” Stereotype Management Among Academically Successful Black Mathematics and Engineering Students”

Week 13 (Apr 8)

- EdWeek (2022), “Why Schools Need to Talk About Racial Bias in AI-Powered Technologies”
- Datafied child? Lipton and Williamson (2017), “The datafied child: The dataveillance of children and implications for their rights”
- Moore, Vitale, & Stawinoga (2018), “The Digital Divide and Educational Equity”

Week 14 (Apr 15)

- AP News (2022), "Some school systems pause diversity programs amid pushback"
<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-business-education-race-and-ethnicity-50c02554ffb341073a1da08e336b6fe4>
- Course wrap up and looking ahead
- Class time to work on final projects, I will be present to help

Week 15 (Apr 22)

- **Research poster presentations**
- **Research project reports due**
- **Final day of class: Weds, April 24**

I reserve the right to make small, reasonable alterations to the syllabus as we progress through the semester. Making changes to a course in this way is a common practice and will be communicated to students in a timely manner.