**EDUCATION 352**

**American School Reform**

Spring 2017

Tuesday 1pm-3:30pm

Room: Stein 526

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Office hours: Tuesday 11am-12pm, Wednesday 12-1:30pm, and by appointment

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| **Course Description** |

How can we improve American public schools? It’s a question that plagues reformers in government, school districts, private foundations, and non-profit organizations, whether they work at the national, state, or local level.

Embedded in that question, of course, are a number of smaller questions. What, particularly, requires improvement? What would improved schools look like? How can we tell which schools need improving? Who should lead the effort? What should the means be? What cost are we willing to pay?

This course will survey current approaches to educational change.  As such, you will explore the current systems and structures that constitute the policy framework, scrutinize the assumptions and ideological underpinnings of different political camps, and examine the dynamic interactions between and among the actors shaping American education.  Additionally, you will look at various reform efforts and models, considering their use in the effort to transform schools.

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| **Course Expectations** |

1. Readings: Do the assigned readings prior to class and be prepared to ask and answer questions in class. As a rule of thumb, shorter readings should be read more slowly and more carefully than longer ones. Please know that it is *very obvious* when you have not prepared for class.

2. Participation: Participation in class and online is important in this class as a way of deepening your understanding of the main ideas of the course and practicing key skills. Useful contributions take a number of forms—building on the comments of others, bringing new points to light, raising questions, carefully listening—but are common in that they foster an environment of discovery. In short, your participation is not merely as an *individual*, but as a *member of a whole*; bear that in mind. Attendance is a requirement; missing more than two classes will require instructor consent and will otherwise adversely affect your grade.

3. Writing: We will do a good deal writing in this class, and you will be asked to complete several different kinds of assignments over the semester. This emphasis on writing reflects the nature of policy advocacy. Additionally, it is designed as a service to you, because writing is so essential in the world beyond college. For much more detail, see the Guidelines for Analytical Writing at the end of the syllabus.

\* While you will not be explicitly evaluated on these course expectations, failure to meet them will adversely affect your ability to fully contribute as a member of the class and, consequently, will impact your grade. Meeting 75% of expectations, in other words, roughly translates to a C.

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| **Grading and Assignments** |

Your course grade will be broken down into the following categories:

1. Media tracking: 25%
2. Memos: 25%
3. Integrated essay: 25%
4. Reform project: 25%

All assignments, unless otherwise noted, should be uploaded via Moodle. Late work for all assignments will be graded down one-third of a grade (i.e. A🡪A-) for each day it is past due.

1. Media Tracking

**Due: February 7 (and April 4)**

This assignment is designed to give you a sense of the national school reform conversation. In service of that aim, you will tracking three media sources over the course of the semester that address the general topic of school reform. Whatever the format of your sources—blogs, websites, newsletters, podcasts, etc.—they should be different in their viewpoints (don’t just choose sources from the political left or the political right).

Due on February 7 is a list of the sources you plan to track. These can change over the course of the semester. But try to avoid that, if possible. Alongside each source you should provide a brief explanation of why you have chosen that source over others—why, in short, is it valuable?

Each week you should read, watch, or listen to your source and write a *very brief* journal entry (roughly 100-150 words for each source). What was covered? Why was it covered? What did you learn? How did it relate to other sources? What, in short, is the national conversation?

Due on April 4 is your collection of journal entries, along with an “executive summary” providing an overview of what you learned about the current education policy climate. The overview should have a clear central point, and you should draw on evidence to support claims.

The executive summary should be roughly 1000 words long and should adhere to the writing tips outlined in the “Guidelines” section of the syllabus.

2. Memos

**Due: February 21, March 14, and March 28**

The purpose of these memos is twofold. First, thy are designed to keep you thinking about course readings and discussions. Education reform is complex business and the more you think about it, the more your views will evolve. Second, they are designed to help you synthesize the readings—pulling together your ideas into something more coherent.

Memos should be between 600 and 800 words in length. And each memo should begin with the phrase: “Here’s where I’m at right now in thinking about school reform:\_\_\_\_\_\_.” Beyond that, the assignment is open-ended. It should, however, be clear and concise; it should have a main idea; and you should use evidence to support your points.

You will be evaluated on a 1-5 scale on the following:

* Your memo meets the word requirement
* Your memo substantively engages course readings
* Your memo has a main point or central theme
* Your memo relies on evidence to support claims
* Your memo reflects the clarity and quality of prose outlined in the “Guidelines” section

3. Integrated essay

**Due: April 18**

For this assignment you will be writing an essay of roughly 1500 words, offering your reader a coherent perspective on school improvement.

In so doing, you should craft a central argument that addresses the following three questions:

1. Why is school reform so hard?
2. In light of that, what are the most promising possibilities for reform?
3. And, ultimately, what is the most that we might hope for in terms of results?

You may address these questions in order. But it is critical that you have a central argument that addresses whatever you have to say about each of these questions. That central argument is your “big idea” (or thesis) about school reform. It must be at the conceptual center of your essay.

Your essay should draw widely on evidence from the course. Insofar as this is an integrated essay, you should demonstrate your comprehension of the “big picture,” rather than diving narrowly into one specific issue. Consider referencing 5-10 of the course readings.

You will be evaluated on the degree to which you address the three core questions, the quality of your core analysis, the coherence of your organization, the effectiveness of your examples, and the thoroughness of your execution. And, as always, you will be evaluated according to the criteria laid out in the “Guidelines” section at the end of the syllabus.

4. Reform project

**Presentations May 2**

In this project, you will be working in pairs to form a non-profit policy advocacy group. Your group will work on one issue that it deems to be *most critical* in the world of K-12 education. And your task for this assignment is to assemble a plan for influencing the field.

There will be several components to this project:

1. “About Our Organization”

This should be a few paragraphs, written in plain language for non-experts. Your “about our organization” statement should describe what you are doing and why you are doing it. Look at the websites of other organizations as a model.

**Due**: April 11

2. Press Kit

Your press kit should include your “About Our Organization” page, a page of relevant statistics, a page of “talking points” (the main arguments you would make in a debate), and a page listing the organizations you view as partners.

**Due**: April 25

3. Presentation

You will be presenting to a major foundation that has expressed interest in your work. The head of this foundation has offered you 20 minutes of her time, and she has suggested that she has $50 million that she might contribute to your cause. During this presentation, you will want to show her that your issue is the most important one to fund.

Your presentation should include the following items:

- Data-based discussion about the problem your reform seeks to “fix”

- Discussion of relevant research on your issue

- Discussion of the policy context for this reform (political obstacles, opportunities, etc.)

- Discussion of any real-world examples of your issue “in action”

- Discussion of what you would do with $50 million (what would you spend it on?)

- Discussion of what you propose to accomplish through your work

You should also have handouts for the members of the foundation’s board of advisors. These handouts should reflect each of the items above: statistics, outlines, a budget, etc. You may also wish to include some of the materials from your press kit.

You will also create an “executive summary” of no more than 1000 words that captures the main points of your presentation. This is not due until the exam block for the class.

2/3 of your project grade will be based on your presentation. The other 1/3 of the grade will be based on your written materials. You will receive feedback on your mission statement and press kit, but they will not be graded until you hand in the final versions.

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| **Classes and Readings** |

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| Week 1   * The state of education   Jan. 24 | In class tools:  Primer on American Education  U.S. Department of Education, *The Condition of Education 2016*  Phi Delta Kappan, *Attitudes toward the Public Schools* |
| Week 2   * Addressing home and neighborhood   Jan. 31 | Promise neighborhoods  Lester, *Tipping Neighborhoods to Success*  Hulsey, et al., *Promise Neighborhoods Case Studies*  Full-service community schools  Varlas, “Full Service Community Schools”  Dryfoos, *Full-Service Community Schools* |
| Week 3   * Choice and student assignment   Feb. 7  **Media Sources due** | School assignment policies  Boston Public Schools Student Assignment Task Force Report  San Francisco Unified School District Annual Report  School choice  U.S. Department of Education, *A Commitment to Quality*  CREDO, *National Charter School Study* (Executive Summary)  Wisconsin Policy Research Institute report |
| Week 4   * Smarter school governance   Feb. 14 | Districts  Rumberger and Connell, *Strengthening School District Capacity*  Lake and Hernandez, *Portfolio School Districts Project*  CMOs  Mathematica Policy Research, *Learning from CMOs*  Peyser, “Unlocking the Secrets of High Performing Charters” |
| Week 5   * Resource allocation   Feb. 21  **1st Memo due** | Money  Baker, *Does Money Matter in Education?*  Hightower, Mitani, and Swanson, *State Policies That Pay*  Baker, et al., *Is School Funding Fair?*  Class size and school time  Schanzenbach, *Does Class Size Matter?*  Education Commission of the States, *Learning Time in America* |
| Week 6   * School culture   Feb. 28 | Building culture  Thapa, et al., *School Climate Research Summary*  Picucci, et al., “Shaping School Culture”  The New Teacher Project, *Greenhouse Schools*  Assessing culture  Cohen, et al., “The Challenge of Assessing School Climate,” *Educ. Leadership*  Wagner, *The School Leader’s Tool for Assessing …School Culture* |
| Week 7  March 7 | NO CLASS |
| Week 8   * Curriculum and testing   March 14  **2nd Memo due** | Standards and accountability  Center for Public Education, *Understanding the Common Core Standards*  Figlio and Loeb, “Standards and Accountability”  Forum for Education and Democracy, *Beyond Standardized Tests* |
| Week 9   * Building better school principals   March 21 | The role of principals  Alvoid and Black, *The Changing Role of the Principal*  Wohlstetter and Briggs, “Principal’s Role in School-Based Management”  Mendels, *The Effective Principal*  Recruitment and retention  Chapman, *Recruitment, Retention and Development of School Principals*  Browne-Ferrigno and Muth, “Recruitment and Retention of … Principals” |
| Week 10   * Attracting and training new teachers   March 28  **3rd Memo due** | Recruitment and training  National Council on Teacher Quality, *Teacher Prep Review 2014* (read Executive summary and parts I & V)  AACTE, *The Changing Teacher Preparation Profession*  Elizabeth Green, “Building a Better Teacher”  Alternate routes  Grossman and Loeb, “Learning From Multiple Routes”  Feistritzer, *Teaching While Learning* |
| Week 11   * Promoting teacher growth and development   April 4  **Media Tracking Assignment due** | Supporting new teachers  Goodwin, “New Teachers Face Three Common Challenges”  The New Teacher Project, *Leap Year*  Committee for Economic Development, *Supporting New Teachers*  Professional development for experienced teachers  McLaughlin and Talbert, “Professional Learning Communities”  Thompson and Goe, *Models for Effective and Scalable Teacher PD* |
| Week 12   * Rewarding and retaining high-quality teachers   April 11  **“About Our Organization” due** | Evaluation  Center for Public Education, *Trends in Teacher Evaluation*  The New Teacher Project, *Teacher Evaluation 2.0*  Haertel, *Reliability and Validity of Inferences about Teacher Evaluation*  Retention and development  Ahn and Vigdor, *Making Teacher Incentives Work*  National Council on Teacher Quality, *Teacher Quality Roadmap*  Goldhaber and Walch, *Strategic Pay Reform* |
| Week 13   * Preparing Students for the World of Work   April 18  **Integrated Essay due** | Career and technical education  U.S. Department of Education, *Investing in America’s Future*  Holzer, Linn, and Monthey, *The Promise of High-Quality CTE*  American Institutes for Research, *How Career and Technical Education Can Help Students Be College and Career Ready* |
| Week 14   * Putting it all together   April 25  **Press Kit due** | A multi-pronged approach  Bryk, et al., *Organizing Schools for Improvement*, chapters 2 + 3 |
| Week 15   * Presentations   May 2 | In-class presentations |

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| **Guidelines** |

**Guidelines for Critical Reading**

As a critical reader of a particular text (a book, article, speech, proposal), you should to use the following questions as a framework to guide you as you read:

1. What’s the point? This is the analysis issue: what is the author’s angle?

2. Who says so? This is the validity issue: on what are the claims based?

3. What’s new? This is the value-added issue: what does the author contribute that we don’t already know?

4. Who cares? This is the significance issue (the most important issue of all): is the text worth reading? Does it contribute something important?

If this is the way critical readers are going to approach a text, then as an analytical writer you need to guide readers toward the desired answers to each of these questions…

**Guidelines for Analytical Writing**

In writing papers for this (or any) course, keep in mind the following things that good writers do:

1. Pick an important issue. Why should anyone care about this topic? Pick an issue that matters and that you really care about. In short, make sure that your analysis meets the “so what?” test.

2. Provide analysis. A good paper is more than a catalogue of facts, concepts, experiences, or references; it is more than a description of the content of a set of readings. A good paper is a logical and coherent analysis of a key issue. This means that your paper should aim to *explain* rather than describe.

3. Keep focused. Don’t lose track of the point you are trying to make. Make sure the reader knows where you are heading and why. Cut out anything extraneous to your main point.

4. Aim for clarity. Don’t assume that the reader knows what you’re talking about. Instead, make your points clearly enough that even a lazy reader will get the point. Keeping focused and avoiding distracting clutter will help, as will writing clear sentences and deploying effective “signposts.”

5. Provide depth, insight, and connections. The best papers are ones that go beyond making obvious points, superficial comparisons, and simplistic assertions. They dig below the surface of the issue at hand, demonstrating a deeper level of understanding and an ability to make interesting connections.

6. Support your analysis with evidence. You need to do more than simply state your ideas, however informed and useful these may be. You also need to provide evidence that reassures the reader that you know what you are talking about.

7. Draw on course materials. Your papers should give evidence that you are taking this course. You do not need to agree with any of the readings or presentations, but your paper should show you have considered the course materials thoughtfully.

8. Recognize complexity and acknowledge multiple viewpoints. You should not reduce issues to either/or, black/white, good/bad. Papers should give evidence that you understand and appreciate more than one perspective on an issue.

9. Do not overuse quotation. In a short paper, long quotations (more than a sentence or two in length) are generally not appropriate. Even in longer papers, quotations should be used sparingly. In general, your papers are more effective if written primarily in your own words, using ideas from the literature but framing them in your own way to serve your own analytical purposes.

10. Cite your sources. You need to identify for the reader where particular ideas or examples come from. This can be done through in-text citation: give the author’s last name, publication year, and (in the case of quotations) page number in parentheses at the end of the sentence or paragraph where the idea is presented—e.g., (Schneider, 2011, p. 22); provide the full citations in a list of references at the end of the paper. You can also identify sources with footnotes or endnotes: give the full citation for the first reference to a text and a short citation for subsequent citations to the same text.

11. Take care in the quality of your prose. A paper that is written in a clear and effective style makes a more convincing argument than one written in a murky manner, even when both writers start with the same basic understanding of the issues. However, writing that is confusing usually signals confusion in a person’s thinking. After all, one key purpose of writing is to put down your ideas in a way that permits you and others to reflect on them critically, to see if they stand up to analysis. Take the time to reflect on your own ideas on paper and revise them as needed.