

EDUCATION 273

Urban Education

Fall 2015

TBD

Stein TBD

Jack Schneider

Stein 432

jschneid@holycross.edu

Office hours: TBD

Course Description

What makes a school “urban”? Is it simply being located in a city? Or is “urban” used to imply something else—something about student achievement, or about the racial composition of the student body? What, in short, do people mean when they talk about “urban” schools?

How are urban schools performing? Are they failing, as so many people believe? Are they succeeding? Does failure look the same in urban schools as in other kinds of settings? Does success?

And finally, how might urban schools be stronger? Which characteristic policies and practices limit potential? Where should we be channeling our energies?

These are the chief questions this course will tackle. In considering them, you will develop a rich understanding of urban education in the United States—reality and perception, past and future, problems and possibilities. And though this course is not designed to make you an *expert* in urban education, it will prepare you to have thoughtful, well-evidenced, and nuanced conversations about the subject.

Course Expectations

1. **Readings:** Do the assigned readings prior to class discussions 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. **Field experience:** You will spend observational time in the field for this course, with opportunities to meet with and observe a range of stakeholders in urban schools. You should work to draw on these experiences in your weekly blog posts and in your integrated essay.

3. Participation in class: Participation in discussions, group work, and email 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. Physical and mental attendance is a requirement.

4. Writing: We will focus a great deal on writing in this class, and you will be asked to complete several different kinds of assignments over the semester. 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.

Grading and Assignments

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

1. Introductory assignment: 5%
2. Weekly blog posts: 30%
3. Integrated essay: 20%
4. Final project: 30%
5. Personal essay: 15%

All assignments, unless otherwise noted, should be single-spaced and uploaded to Moodle as Word documents. Label all documents: Your last name + Abbreviated name of assignment

*Late work for all assignments will be graded down one-third of a grade (i.e. A→A-) for each day past due.

1. Introductory assignment

Due: September 5

For this assignment you will write from your own experience, however vast or limited. In no more than 800 words, begin with this line: “Here is everything I know about urban schools;” then detail what you think you understand about urban education.

Because the assignment is so short, you must make every sentence count. Try to pack as many statements into this as possible, elaborating on them as necessary. You do not need to have a thesis statement, but your observations should collect around some central theme. They should build toward a concluding statement that summarizes your knowledge (or lack thereof) of urban schools.

Please DO NOT read any assigned texts for this first assignment. Just sit down and meditate on what you think; then apply your knowledge, beliefs, and values to this piece of writing. There is a reason we are doing this assignment at the beginning of the course.

The assignment will receive a letter grade for the quality of writing, but not for any content (since you have not yet learned anything in this course). Write in sentences and paragraphs, not fragments and bullet points.

2. Weekly blog post

Due: Each Friday by 9am EST (Weeks 2-6 & 10-12)

The purpose of these blog posts is twofold. First, the assignment is designed to keep you thinking about the course readings and discussions. Urban education is a complex subfield and the more you think about it, the more your views will evolve. Second, the posts are designed to stimulate thought for others. That means that you should be reading other people's postings, considering them, and commenting on them.

One half of the class will post each week. The other half will *comment*. Posts should be between 300 and 500 words in length. Comments should be roughly 100 words in length. Comments should *not* merely say "I liked your post, especially the part where..."

None of this needs to be carefully polished, but your writing should substantively use readings from the week—as evidence, as a springboard for a new idea, as a punching bag, etc. Each post should be focused on the themes from the readings.

You will be evaluated on a 1-6 scale on the following:

- Your post meets the word requirement
- Your post substantively uses at least *one* reading (bonus if you draw on field experience)
- Your post offers a distinct take from the posts of your classmates (*some* overlap is acceptable, but you do need to keep an eye on what others write)
- Your post relies on evidence to support claims; in other words, provide an example of whatever it is that you're talking about (but do not conduct outside research)
- Your post reflects the clarity and quality of prose outlined in points 3 and 11 of the "Guidelines" section at end of syllabus
- Your post is respectful

3. Interpretive essay

Due: Oct. 30 by class time

This essay should analyze several readings from the course (minimum: four), building a central argument that synthesizes the readings to offer a new perspective on a particular topic (the topic is of your choosing, but should be of appropriate grain size—neither too big nor too small for a short essay). In addition to the texts, you will also draw on your field experience to enliven, enrich, and complicate your analysis.

There is no prompt for this essay. In generating a prompt for yourself, consider the following:

- What was interesting to you about the readings, or an issue covered by several readings?
- Where do the readings and your field experience fit or not fit with each other?
- What is infuriating about a particular topic?
- What is inadequately argued in the readings on a particular topic?
- What happens when you synthesize multiple readings on the same topic?
- How do different readings, when paired together, produce a new understanding?
- How do ideas from readings help you understand your field experiences?

If after giving this a go you still believe a prompt would be helpful for you, come to office hours and we will generate one together.

You will be evaluated on the criteria laid out in the “Guidelines” section at the end of the syllabus. Essays should be roughly 1500 words in length.

4. Final project

Projects due during final exam period

Presentations Dec. 10 + 12

In this project, you will be working in groups to assess the urban public school district of your choosing (though I would strongly urge you to consider Worcester, Boston, and Providence, among others). What is the condition of the schools in your city? What are their strengths? What are their challenges? How can they improve?

A. Your first task is to assemble a team. We will do this in class.

B. Your next task is to hit the library and the internet. What is the history of your city and its public schools? What past conditions shape its present? This need not be a part of your final report, but will provide important background knowledge.

C. You will next want to assemble qualitative (narrative) evidence about your city’s schools. Rich materials are available through various sources, and research librarians are more than happy to help you explore the resources available here on campus and elsewhere. Consider materials like non-fiction, first-hand observations, or interviews. We will talk more about this in class.

D. You will also want to piece together a quantitative (numbers-oriented) picture of your city’s schools. Again, research librarians are a great resource. But also consider the U.S. Census, information available through the city, publically available school data, etc.

E. Throughout all of this you’ll want to consider not just the schools, but also any important *out-of-school* issues that affect public education in your city. What is the role of poverty? What do we need to know about crime? What is the importance of issues like housing and healthcare? How are you going to find out about these issues? What data will support your claims? (Consider unemployment figures, health data, crime rates, etc.)

F. Finally, you will want to figure out what story your evidence tells. You'll have a ton of qualitative and quantitative data...but you don't want to just dump that on your audience. Instead, you want to offer a clear framework for understanding your city's schools, their strengths, their weaknesses, and their potential for improvement.

G. Your final product will be a report on your public school system that includes (at the minimum) the following items:

- Strengths of your school system
- Weaknesses of your school system
- Challenges to improving your school system
- Opportunities in improving your school system
- Robust evidence supporting any and all claims
- An appendix in which you describe your research methodology and tools
- Description of work distribution in the group

Your report should be no longer than 10 pages (12-point size type, single-spaced), exclusive of endnotes and appendices.

You will be making final presentations to the class. Plan on 15 minutes. Be efficient and get to the point. Be prepared for questions. Presentations will count for 10% of the total project grade.

5. Personal essay

Due: Dec. 5

For the final assignment of the semester, you will reflect on two things: the introductory essay you wrote at the beginning of the course, and the work you have done over the intervening 14 weeks. What do you know at the end of the course that you did not know before? How have your perceptions changed (if at all)? What problems or possibilities do you see now that you did not see previously? How has evidence shaped your understanding of urban schools? Where has the evidence fallen short in helping you develop your understandings?

As always, your observations should not be disconnected and disjointed. Instead, they should collect around some central theme. Further details about this assignment will be handed out in class toward the end of the semester. 800 words...reflect on first essay...can be a letter to me.

Course Texts

All of your readings for this course are available on Moodle. You should either print them out or use a software program that allows you to annotate your readings. Further, you should bring your annotated readings—hard copy or digital—to the class meeting for which they are due.

Classes and Readings

PART I: Cities

Week 1: (9/3 + 9/5): What Defines Urbanicity?

Wed: - Introduction to course

Fri: - Stanley Milgram, "The Experience of Living in Cities," *Science* (1970)
- Edward Glaeser, "Are Cities Dying?" *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* (1998)

Week 2: (9/10 + 9/12): Wealth and Poverty in the City

Wed: - Alexandra Curley, "Theories of Urban Poverty..." (2005)
- Richard Rothstein, "The Urban Poor Shall Inherit Poverty," *The American Prospect* (2014)
- Introductory essays due

Fri: - Dan Willingham, "Why Does Family Wealth Affect Learning?" *American Educator* (2012)
- Margaret Talbot, "The Talking Cure," *The New Yorker* (2015)

Week 3: (9/17 + 9/19): Race and Segregation in the City

Wed: - Leah Platt Boustan, "Racial Residential Segregation in American Cities," *Oxford Handbook of Urban Economics and Planning* (2011)

Fri: - Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, et al., "Family Background, Parenting Practices, and the Black-White Test Score Gap," chapter 4 in *The Black-White Test Score Gap*
- First blog entry due

Week 4: (10/1 + 10/3): Urban Culture Outside and Inside of Schools

Wed: - Report of the Task Force on Urban Psychology (2004), "Urban Social Issues" section (pages 11-24); "Psychology and Urban Institutions" section (pages 30-44).
- National Center for Education Statistics, "Student Background Characteristics and Afterschool Activities," from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs/96184all.pdf> (chapter 3)

Fri: - Sarah Deschenes, Larry Cuban and David Tyack, "Mismatch: Historical Perspectives on Schools and Students Who Don't Fit Them," *Teachers College Record* (2001)

PART II: City Schools

Week 5: (10/8 + 10/10): How Are Urban Schools Doing?

- Wed: - The Council of the Great City Schools, "Pieces of the Puzzle," chapters 3 + 4 (2011)
- National Center for Education Statistics, Results from the 2013 TUDA
- Fri: - Martin Haberman, "Urban Schools: Day Camps or Custodial Centers?" (2001)
- David Kirp, "The Dream Team" (excerpt from *Improbably Scholars*)

Week 6: (10/22 + 10/24): Urban School Finance

- Wed: - Linda Darling-Hammond, *What Happens to a Dream Deferred? The Continuing Quest for Equal Educational Opportunity* (section on school funding: pages 11-20)
- Bruce J. Biddle and David C. Berliner "What Research Says about Unequal Funding for Schools in America" (2002)
- Fri: - James Guthrie and Arthur Peng, "The Phony Funding Crisis," *Education Next* (2010)
- Richard J. Murnane and Frank Levy, "Evidence from Fifteen Schools in Austin, Texas," in *Does Money Matter?* (1996)

Week 7: Fall Break

Week 8: (10/29 + 10/31): Urban School Policies

- Wed: - Jonathan Kozol, *Shame of the Nation* (2005), chapters 3 and 5
- Fri: - Pedro Noguera, "Schools, Prisons, and Social Implications of Punishment," *Theory into Practice* (2003)

Week 9: (11/5 + 11/7): Urban School Governance

- Wed: - Elizabeth Useem, "Big City Superintendent as Powerful CEO," *Peabody Journal of Ed.* (2009)
- Pedro Noguera, "Racial Isolation, Poverty, and the Limits of Local Control in Oakland," *Teachers College Record* (2004)
- Fri: - Thomas Payzant and Christopher Horan, "The Boston Story," in *A Decade of Urban School Reform* (2007)
- Last blog entry

Week 10: (11/12 + 11/14): Curriculum in Urban Schools

- Wed: - Jeannie Oakes, *Keeping Track*, chapter 1 (2005)
- Linda Darling-Hammond, *What Happens to a Dream Deferred?* "Access to Courses, Curriculum Materials, and Equipment" (pages 30-48)
- Fri: - Melissa Roderick and Mimi Engel, "The Grasshopper and the Ant: Responses of Low-Achieving Students to High-Stakes Testing," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* (2001)

Week 11: (11/19 + 11/21): Teachers in Urban Schools

- Wed: - Brian Jacob, "The Challenge of Staffing Urban Schools with Effective Teachers," *The Future of Children* (2007)
- Fri: - Elaine M. Stotko, Rochelle Ingram, and Mary Ellen Beaty-O'Ferrall, "Promising Strategies for Attracting and Retaining Successful Urban Teachers," *Urban Education* (2007)
- Brad Olsen and Lauren Anderson, "Courses of Action," *Urban Education* (2007)
- Interpretive essays due

PART III: Great City Schools

Week 12: (12/3 + 12/5): Traditional Models

- Wed: - Tyrone C. Howard, "Telling Their Side of the Story," *The Urban Review* 33, no. 2 (2001)
- James Joseph Scheurich, "Highly Successful and Loving Public Elementary Schools Populated Mainly by Low-SES Children of Color," *Urban Education* (1998)
- Fri: - Jeff Duncan-Andrade, "Gangstas, Wankstas, and Ridas: Defining, Developing, and Supporting Effective Teachers in Urban Schools," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* (2007)
- This American Life, "Harper High School" part I (optional: part II)

Week 13: Thanksgiving Break

Week 14: Models from Outside the Box

- Wed: - James P. Comer, Norris M. Haynes, and Edward T. Joyner, "The School Development Program," from *Rallying the Whole Village* (1996)
- Fri: - *Good Morning Mission Hill* (video, 50 minutes)

Week 15: (12/10 + 12/12): Visions of Improvement

Wed: - Project presentations

Fri: - Project presentations

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.