Draft Syllabus Subject to Change

Education and the Inheritance of Social Inequality

Northwestern University
Fall 2018

Instructor: Marshall Jean (marshall.jean@northwestern.edu)
Office: 2046 Sheridan Road – Room 203

Location and Time: Monday/Wednesday 12:30 – 1:50 p.m.
Annenburg Hall – Room G08

Course Description: This course will provide students with an empirically-grounded understanding of the role formal education plays in mediating intergenerational social mobility in the US. It combines classic theory and research with some of the most current empirical work available. It is divided into three sections. The first section introduces research on intergenerational social mobility – describing just how much mobility exists in the United States, how it has changed over time, and how much education might mediate social mobility. The second section considers four competing theories that describe how and why education mediates the intergenerational inheritance of social status. The final section examines policies designed to promote social mobility, reduce racial and SES-based achievement gaps, and "break the cycle of poverty" through education.

Course Requirements: Attendance and Participation – The class is seminar style, and all students are expected to regularly contribute to discussions in class.

Message Board Participation – You are expected to post questions or responses to readings on an online discussion board to ensure reading participation and facilitate class discussions. The instructor will create a new thread for each day of class, and students should post a question or response regarding the readings assigned for that day before 10 a.m. You should post a discussion question even if you are unable to attend class that day. Please respond to the threads created by the instructor, not to the responses of other students.

Seminar Paper – At the end of the course, students will compose a 13-15 page seminar paper discussing the merits and drawbacks of a particular comprehensive education intervention. You may choose a program or intervention, or may write about the program proposed by the instructor. You will be required to describe how advocates of each of the four theoretical perspectives discussed in class would evaluate the intervention and its likelihood of success. You will also need to provide your own perspective on the matter, drawing from your knowledge of empirical research gained in the class and reasoned speculation based on theory. After week 6, you will submit a
3-5 page outline for their proposed seminar paper and will have the opportunity to receive feedback.

Grading:

- Class and Message Board Participation – 25 percent
- Seminar Paper Proposal – 25 percent
- Seminar Paper – 50 percent


The text has been ordered at the university bookstores, and is also available on Amazon.com. Other required readings will be available online.

Course policies

Accommodations: Any student requesting accommodations related to a disability or other condition is required to register with AccessibleNU (accessiblenu@northwestern.edu; 847-467-5530) and provide professors with an accommodation notification from AccessibleNU, preferably within the first two weeks of class. All information will remain confidential.

Academic Integrity: Students are required to abide by Northwestern University's academic integrity policy, which can be found at http://www.northwestern.edu/provost/students/integrity/. Suspected violations of academic integrity will be reported to the Dean's Office. For more information on Northwestern’s academic integrity policies, see http://www.weinberg.northwestern.edu/handbook/integrity/index.html.

Sexual Harassment Prevention: It is the policy of Northwestern University that no member of the Northwestern community – students, faculty, administrators, or staff – may sexually harass any other member of the community. Sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute harassment when:

- submission to such conduct is made or threatened to be made, either explicitly or implicitly, a term or condition of an individual's employment or education; or
- submission to or rejection of such conduct is used or threatened to be used as the basis for academic or employment decisions affecting that individual; or
- such conduct has the purpose or effect of substantially interfering with an individual's academic or professional performance or creating what a reasonable person would sense as an intimidating, hostile or offensive employment, educational, or living environment.
For more information, see http://www.northwestern.edu/sexual-harassment/.

**Electronics Use:** Students are permitted to use electronic devices in class. You are responsible for regulating your own use of these devices. If you use a laptop to take notes, do not attempt to capture everything said in class. There is evidence that this strategy is less effective for short- and intermediate-term recall of material than taking notes by hand (Mueller and Oppenheimer, 2014). However, electronic notes are easier to search, save, and share with others. You can decide what works best for your learning needs. All electronic devices should be used muted during class.

**Topics and Readings:**

**Week 1 – The State of the Problem**


Optional:

https://voxeu.org/article/where-land-opportunity-intergenerational-mobility-us

https://voxeu.org/article/us-intergenerational-mobility-wwii

**Weeks 2 and 3 – Describing the Role of Education**


Week 4 – Functionalist theories


Week 5 – Organizational theories


Week 6 – Culture and cultural capital theories


Optional: Bordieu, Pierre and Jean-Claude Passeron. Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture. Book 1, p. 1-68. [Skim this if you are unfamiliar with the theory]


Week 7 – Economic and human capital theories


Week 8 – School Funding Policies


Week 9 – Accountability and School Choice


**Week 10 – Structural Changes to Schools**


Brian Rowan. "Intervening to Improve the Educational Outcomes of Students in Poverty: Lessons from Recent Work in High-Poverty Schools." in *Whither Opportunity*.