

**Educational Studies 245**  
**The History of American School Reform**  
Fall 2010  
Monday/Wednesday, 1:50-3:00pm; Friday, 2:20-3:20  
Willis 211

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Office hours: M/W 3-4:30pm and by appointment

**Course Description**

In this course, we will explore the history of school reform in the United States. In just ten weeks, we will not be able to pursue a systematic study of this history from beginning to end. Instead, we will explore a few major themes and several key reform movements—progressivism, desegregation, standards and accountability, and school choice, among them—to consider their consequences. Focusing on the twentieth century, and on the high school, we will examine the role of education in American society, the various and often competing goals of school reformers, and the dynamics of educational change. Ultimately, the course asks a simple question: why has so much reform produced so little change?

**Course Themes**

Constancy and Change: Framing our look at the history of reform will be the book, *Tinkering toward Utopia* by David Tyack and Larry Cuban. A key theme of this book and of the course is the paradox of school reform: schools are constantly bombarded by reform efforts, yet never seem to change. Tyack and Cuban unravel this paradox by separating the history of reform into two interacting elements: the noisy and often contradictory volleys of reform rhetoric that are directed at schools, and the slower and steadier process of evolutionary change in the structure of schooling that takes place largely outside of public view. Drawing on this work and others, we will consider why it has been so difficult to change the basic structure of schooling through deliberate reform efforts—because of factors like the peculiar nature of teaching as a practice, the loosely coupled character of schools as organizations, the number of actors who need to be aligned for change to happen, and the complex goals and structures that define the educational enterprise.

The Consequences of School Reform: In the second part of the class, we will examine a series of cases of school reform in detail. The aim here is to consider the extent to which reform efforts have affected the structure and practice of schooling, examining both intended and unintended consequences. To help keep the analysis more focused and coherent, most of these cases will revolve around a single educational institution, the high school, which is a medium through

which we can examine most of the reform efforts and processes that characterize the history of American schools. In light of this approach, we will consider a number of cases, including David Labaree's study of the interaction between politics and markets in Philadelphia's Central High School (*The Making of an American High School*), Diane Ravitch's book (*Left Back*) about the consequences of progressive reform in the early 20th century, and Gerald Grant's study of a New York high school responding to the movements for desegregation and mainstreaming in the 1960s and 70s (*The World We Created at Hamilton High*).

Reform from the Top Down or the Bottom Up: In the last part of the course, we will examine James Scott's framework (*Seeing Like a State*), drawn from anthropology and political science, for understanding why it has been so hard over the years for governments to impose order on complex social institutions such as the schools. Education has certainly changed over the course of American history, yet many of the most enduring changes were not *reforms*, per se, as much as evolutionary changes driven by teachers, administrators, and parents acting in accordance with their own unique needs and concerns. What, then, is the possibility for reform, whether at large scale or small?

What This Class Is and Is Not About: This class is intended to encourage you to think about the things that make educational reform so complex, contradictory, difficult, and often dysfunctional. Its focus is on analyzing what happens to reform efforts between initial proposals and eventual outcomes. This means that its aim is not to provide you with a how-to manual that will enable you to be a successful reformer. Instead, think of this class as an exercise in realism, humility, and cautious optimism.

### **Course Expectations**

1. Readings. Do the assigned readings prior to class discussions and be prepared to ask and answer questions in class. We will be reading five books over the course of the quarter. During weeks in which we will be reading a book, you should roughly divide the book into thirds—completing the first third for Monday's class, the next third for Wednesday's class, and the rest of the book by Friday's meeting. We will also be reading a number of shorter pieces—primary source documents, research briefs assessing particular reform efforts, and journal articles attempting to make sense of American school reform. Expect to read one article for each class meeting. Articles should be read more slowly and more carefully than books, and we will discuss in class how to go about reading across genres.

2. 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. Participation means both listening and talking. Helping others expand, refine, and enhance ideas is both useful to each person and all of us. That said, each person has to judge what constitutes a useful contribution to the overall flow of discussion; remember to make space for others in our discussions. Attendance is a requirement; missing more than two classes will require instructor consent.

3. 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 course of the quarter. For each assignment, you may share ideas with classmates, but your final writing should be entirely your own. You are welcome to do outside research for any assignment, but you are not required or expected to do so. Be sure to cite your sources; any standard format is fine (Chicago, MLA, APA, etc.). And finally, you should take care in crafting not only the ideas in your writing, but also the way you present those ideas (see Guidelines for Analytical Writing for more).

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, your grade.

### Grading and Assignments

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

1. Op-ed writing assignment: 10%
2. Leading class discussion: 15%
3. Two analytical essays: 40%
4. Final exam: 35%

#### 1. Op-ed assignment

**Due: September 15**

For this assignment, write a double-spaced 700-800 word op-ed (check out the op-ed page of the *New York Times* or the “Commentary” section of *Education Week* if you aren’t familiar with the genre) about how to improve American schools.

In this, lay out clearly what kinds of schools you are addressing (urban, rural, elementary, high schools, etc.), where you see those schools falling short, what it would take to turn that school or district into a “successful” one, and, what signs or indicators would convince parents, taxpayers, and policymakers that your school or district is “successful.”

Please DO NOT read any assigned texts for this first assignment. Just sit down and think through what you believe and 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.

This op-ed will receive a letter grade for the quality of writing and the degree to which you met the requirements of the assignment. The grade does not evaluate your interpretation of how to improve schools. All papers must be submitted by email as an MS Word attachment.

You may rewrite this paper at any time for a revised grade, or simply because you want to.

## 2. Leading class discussion

**Due: TBD**

Each student is responsible for guiding a portion of class discussion during one of our meetings. You may work alone for this or with a partner, and you may choose which of the meetings you wish to lead. This will be decided on a first-come, first-serve basis. Students who elect to lead discussion of a book are responsible for only a portion of the book, which we can negotiate on a one-on-one basis. You will be evaluated on your ability to identify major issues and themes in the readings, the depth of your questions, your ability to effectively draw-out student response, and the way in which you connect student comments together to produce a coherent string of dialogue. Questions about your particular work on this assignment can be discussed during office hours.

## 3. Analytical essays

**Due: No later than October 8 (#1) and November 1 (#2)**

Each essay should be roughly five pages in length (typed and double-spaced—roughly 2000 words) and analyze a particular book or group of articles from the course. Your analysis should have a central argument that focuses on what is new, interesting, provocative, troubling, or problematic about the reading(s). Avoid summary, and instead, concentrate on making a point about the text(s) that enhance or complicate our understanding of it/them. You should have a central argument/key observation that you then substantiate with evidence from course readings.

These assignments will receive letter grades. You will be evaluated on the basis of the thoughtfulness, depth of understanding, and analytical insight that is reflected in your paper. But if you are dissatisfied with your performance, you may always rewrite for a new grade.

These papers are due no later than October 8 and November 1, but you need not delay in writing them. If you are inspired by our first book, write about it. You can always use additional time to rewrite, focus on other assignments, etc. Email as MS Word attachments.

## 4. Final exam

**Due: November 20 by 3pm**

The final for this course will be a take-home exam. In class on November 15, I will hand out a list of final exam questions. These questions will ask you to analyze broad issues in the history of school reform by drawing on required readings in this course. You will have one week to write an answer. These essays should be a minimum of 8-10 pages double-spaced (roughly 3500 words). More detailed instructions will accompany the final.

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

## Course Texts

Books: The following books are required reading for the course; all are available through the Carleton bookstore. All are in paper editions.

Tyack, David & Cuban, Larry. (1995). *Tinkering toward utopia: Reflections on a century of public school reform*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Labaree, David F. (1988). *The making of an American high school: The credentials market and the Central High School of Philadelphia, 1838-1920*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Ravitch, Diane. (2000). *Left back: A century of failed school reforms*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Grant, Gerald. (1988). *The world we created at Hamilton High*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Scott, James. (1999). *Seeing like a state*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Assigned articles and other readings: a collection of additional readings for the class will be posted online.

## Course Outline

Below are the readings for each class meeting. Readings and assignments under each day are to be **completed for class that day**.

\* = Readings available online

\*\* = Books available for purchase at the Carleton bookstore

### Week 1

M 9/13

Introduction to course

W 9/15

Op-ed assignments due

F 9/17

\* Mary H. Metz, "Real School: A Universal Drama amid Disparate Experience," in Douglas E. Mitchell & Margaret E. Goertz (eds.), *Education Politics for the New Century* (New York: Falmer, 1990), 75-91.

## **Week 2**

M 9/20

Overview of themes in the history of educational reform

\*\* David Tyack and Larry Cuban, *Tinkering toward Utopia: Reflections on a Century of Public School Reform* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

W 9/22

\*\* Tinkering toward Utopia

F 9/24

\*\* Tinkering toward Utopia

## **Week 3**

M 9/27

\*David K. Cohen, "Teaching Practice: Plus que ça Change," in Phillip W. Jackson (ed.), *Contributing to Educational Change* (Berkeley: McCutchan, 1988), 27-84.

W 9/29

\* Richard F. Elmore and Milbrey W. McLaughlin, *Steady Work* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 1988). Read parts I, II, III, and V (part IV is optional).

F 10/1 (class will meet earlier than our regularly scheduled time; TBD)

\* Michael B. Katz, "Alternative Models for American Education," in *Reconstructing American Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 24-57.

## **Week 4**

M 10/4

From common schools to universal enrollment: an overview

\*\* David F. Labaree, *The Making of an American High School: The Credentials Market and the Central High School of Philadelphia, 1838-1939* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988).

W 10/6

\*\* The Making of an American High School

F 10/8

\*\* The Making of an American High School

First essay due no later than 10/8

**Week 5**

M 10/11

\* John Dewey, "The Child and the Curriculum," in Philip W. Jackson (ed.), *The School and Society and the Child and the Curriculum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1902/1990), 181-209.

W 10/13

\*Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education. *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education* (Washington, DC: National Education Association, 1918).

F 10/15

\* *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U.S. 483, 1954.

\* Adam Cohen, "The Supreme Struggle," *The New York Times*, January 18, 2004.

**Week 6**

M 10/18

No Class

W 10/20

\*\* Diane Ravitch, *Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reforms* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000). Focus on Introduction, chapters 1-3, 5, 11, and Conclusion.

F 10/22

\*\* Left Back

**Week 7**

M 10/25

Reform in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: an overview

\*\* Gerald Grant, *The World We Created at Hamilton High* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

W 10/27

\*\* *The World We Created at Hamilton High*

F 10/29

\*\* *The World We Created at Hamilton High*

Second essay due no later than 11/1

## **Week 8**

M 11/1

\* National Commission on Excellence in Education. *A Nation at Risk: the Imperative for Educational Reform* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 1983).

\*\*\* No Child Left Behind Act. Public Law 107-110, 2002. Focus on Title I.

<http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/index.html>

W 11/3

\* Herbert J. Walberg and Joseph L. Best, "Failure of the Public School Monopoly," in *Education and Capitalism: How Overcoming Our Fear of Markets and Economics Can Improve America's Schools* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2003), 3-32.

\* Howard Fuller, "Education Matters to Me: Full Court Press," *Education Next* 2:3 (2002), 88. See website of Black Alliance for Educational Options at <http://www.baeo.org/>.

F 11/5

\* Arthur Powell, Eleanor Farrar, and David Cohen. "Origins," in *The Shopping Mall High School: Winners and Losers in the Educational Marketplace* (Boston: Little Brown, 1985).

## **Week 9**

M 11/8

Problems in making systematic reform of education

\*\* James Scott, *Seeing like a State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

W 11/10

\*\* *Seeing like a State*

F 11/12

\*\* *Seeing like a State*

## **Week 10**

M 11/15

\* David K. Cohen, "A Revolution in One Classroom: The Case of Mrs. Oublier," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 12:3 (1990), 311-329.

Take-home final exam questions handed out in class

W 11/17

\* David F. Labaree, "Public Good, Private Goods: the American Struggle over Educational Goals," *American Educational Research Journal*, 34:1 (1997), 39-81.

F 11/9

\* Rory Stewart, "Afghanistan: What Could Work," *New York Review of Books*, 2010.

Saturday November 20: Take-home final exams due at 3:00 p.m.

## **Guidelines for Critical Reading**

As a critical reader of a particular text (a book, article, speech, proposal), you should 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? 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, the one that subsumes all the others: 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 points.

1. Pick an important issue: make sure that your analysis meets the "so what" test. Why should anyone care about this topic, anyway? Pick an issue or issues that matters and that you really care about.
2. Keep focused: don't lose track of the point you are trying to make and make sure the reader knows where you are heading and why.
3. Aim for clarity: don't assume that the reader knows what you're talking about; it's your job to make your points clearly. In part this means keeping focused and avoiding distracting clutter. But in part it means that you need to make more than elliptical references to concepts and sources or to professional experience. When referring to readings, explain who said what and why this point is pertinent to the issue at hand. Proceed as though you were writing for an educated person who is neither a member of this class nor a professional colleague, someone who has not read the material you are referring to.
4. 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; it is more than an expression of your educational values or an announcement of your prescription for what ails education. A good paper is a logical and coherent analysis of the issues raised within your chosen area of focus. This means that your paper should aim to explain rather than describe. If you give examples, be sure to tell the reader what they mean in the context of your analysis. Make sure the reader understands the connection between the various points in your paper.
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, thus providing a foundation for your argument. Remember that you are trying to accomplish two things with the use of evidence. First, you are saying that it is not just you making this assertion but that authoritative sources and solid evidence back you up. Second, you are supplying a degree of specificity and detail, which helps to flesh out an otherwise skeletal argument.

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. The issues in the history of American education are not simple, and your paper should not propose simple solutions to complex problems. 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. This does not mean you should be wishy-washy. Instead, you should aim to make a clear point by showing that you have considered alternate views.

9. Challenge assumptions. Papers should show that you have learned something. There should be evidence that you have been open to changing your mind.

10. 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 unless they constitute a primary form of data for your analysis. 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 in order to serve your own analytical purposes. However, selective use of quotations can be very useful as a way of capturing the author's tone or conveying a particularly aptly phrased point.

11. 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., (Ravitch, 2000, 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. (For critical reaction papers, you only need to give the short cite for items from the course reading; other sources require full citations.) Note that citing a source is not sufficient to fulfill the requirement to provide evidence for your argument. As spelled out in #6 above, you need to transmit to the reader some of the substance of what appears in the source cited, so the reader can understand the connection with the point you are making and can have some meat to chew on. The best analytical writing provides a real feel for the material and not just a list of assertions and citations. Depth, insight, and connections count for more than a superficial collection of glancing references.

12. 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. So you should take the time to reflect on your own ideas on paper and revise them as needed. You may want to take advantage of the opportunity in this course to submit a draft of the final paper, revise it in light of comments, and then resubmit the revised version. Remember, outside of the artificial world of the classroom, writers never turn in their first draft as their final statement on a subject.