

# RPAD360/ASOC399: Schools and Social Inequality

Lucy C. Sorensen – Fall 2022 – 3 credits

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Time: Tuesday/Thursday 12:00 - 1:20 PM  
Classroom: Social Science 133

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## Course Description

The neighborhoods where we grow up, and the schools we attend, have lasting impacts on our lives. And yet the opportunities made available through schools are not evenly distributed across children and youth in the US. This course will use concepts from economics and sociology to examine the links between public education systems and social inequality by race, class, geography, disability, and other classifications. It will cover topics such as: residential segregation, school finance, school choice, test-based accountability, teacher quality, and the school-to-prison pipeline. Students will work directly with data to analyze patterns and trends in educational inequality, and to assess potential policy solutions.

*Prerequisites:* RPAD 316 Methodological Tools for Public Policy, or a similar statistics course.

## Course Materials

There are no required textbooks for this class; all readings will be provided on Blackboard. We will also occasionally use Zoom for virtual sessions and will use Microsoft Excel (or alternative statistical software) to conduct data analysis.

## Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Articulate the primary sources of educational inequality in the United States, according to economic, sociological, and historical perspectives.
2. Critically assess new and existing education policies and reforms based on research evidence and incentives present in the policy design.
3. Conduct original analysis of an educational issue by developing a research question and then using secondary data to describe relevant trends and patterns.

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# 1 Course Policies

## Office hours

I welcome visits for any purpose, but want to especially encourage students to meet with me regularly about their data analysis projects. Office hour appointments will be available on Tuesday and Friday afternoons from 3:00 to 6:00 PM. Please use the following link to make appointments: <https://lucysorensen.youcanbook.me/>. This automatically adds an appointment to my calendar. If you cannot find a time on the booking website that works for you, email me to find an alternative time to meet.

**Wellness.** The wellbeing of students, to me, takes higher priority than academic expectations. Please speak to me if you are struggling to meet course deadlines or if something comes up in your personal or professional life that requires you to miss class or assignments. I will work with you to develop accommodations. I also encourage you to use campus resources if needed:

- Mental health: Counseling and Psychological Services.
- Food insecurity: Purple Pantry
- Sexual violence: Advocacy Center
- Financial hardship: Student Emergency Fund
- Accommodations: Disability Resource Center

## Attendance

Students should aim to attend and actively participate in every class. If students need to miss class, they should communicate with the instructor ahead of time, and coordinate with classmates to make up missed material.

## Late work

Please speak to me if circumstances arise such that you need an extension. Most assignments are due at a specific time prior to class. Work turned in after this will receive a grade deduction of 5 percentage points, and then an extra 5 percentage points deducted for each additional day that passes after the original deadline.

## Regrading

If you believe that an error has been made in the grading of your assignment, you may make a written appeal describing why you think the grade should be changed. To be considered, this appeal should be emailed to me *within one week* of receiving your assignment back. On review, your grade may be lowered, increased, or remain the same.

## 2 University Policies

### Accommodations

We are committed to providing an accessible learning environment for all students. This includes students with physical, sensory, medical, cognitive, learning, mental health, and other disabilities. If you have, or think you may have a disability, please contact Disability Access and Inclusion Student Services (DAISS) by emailing [daiss@albany.edu](mailto:daiss@albany.edu) or calling 518 -442-5501. DAISS staff will explain the documentation and registration process, and set you up with an appointment. Once you have completed registration, you will be provided with a letter to inform your instructors that you are a student with a disability registered with DAISS, and which lists the recommended reasonable accommodations for your courses.

### Religious observance

Students are excused, without penalty, to be absent because of religious beliefs, and will be provided equivalent opportunities for make-up examinations, study, or work requirements missed because of such absences. Students should notify the instructor of record in a timely manner, and the instructor will work directly with students to accommodate religious observances. On-line courses will not schedule any assignment deadlines on religious holidays.

### Academic integrity

Statement of conformance to University academic integrity expectations and regulations, along with reference to policy and resources available (below).

Graduate Bulletin: [https://www.albany.edu/graduatebulletin/requirements\\_degree.htm#standards\\_integrity](https://www.albany.edu/graduatebulletin/requirements_degree.htm#standards_integrity)

Undergraduate Bulletin: [https://www.albany.edu/undergraduate\\_bulletin/regulations.html](https://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html)

Information provided by the university libraries: <http://library.albany.edu/infolit/integrity>

### Incomplete grades

This is a temporary grade requested by the student and assigned by the instructor ONLY when the student has nearly completed the course requirements but because of circumstances beyond the student's control the work is not completed. Please see the [graduate bulletin](#) for university policies regarding incomplete grades.

## 3 Course Assignments

### Grading

Below is the breakdown of graded items for the course. Rubrics will be provided to students to clarify the expectations for each graded component.

Component	Description	Points
Quizzes	10 assessments at 2 pts. each	20
Policy Memos	2 memos at 15 pts. each	30
Research Project	Topic proposal - 5 pts. Analysis plan - 5 pts. Final presentation - 5 pts. Final report - 25 pts.	40
Participation	Attendance and engagement	10
Total		100

A student's final grade will be calculated as the sum of the elements above. These numerical final grades will then be converted (*without rounding*) to a final letter grade as follows:

Percent Grade	Letter Grade
93-100	A
90-93	A-
87-90	B+
83-87	B
80-83	B-
77-80	C+
70-77	C
60-70	D
Below 60	E

### Quizzes

Each week, students will complete short quizzes to assess how well you read, understood, and synthesized the main concepts from each week's readings. These quizzes will usually include some combination of multiple choice questions and essay questions. I will only take your top 10 grades from all weekly quizzes, which means that your bottom two scores will be dropped.

### Policy Memos

At two points during the semester, you will write an individual memo on a specific education policy issue with detailed policy analysis and recommendations based on evidence from the readings. A grading rubric will be provided to students.

### Research Project

With your team, you will work throughout the semester on an original quantitative research project. Through this project you will identify a research question, a publicly-available data source, a plan of analysis, and write up a final report based on your findings. There are multiple intermediate deadlines for this project in addition to the final report and presentation. Further, students will complete peer assessments, which will inform each individual student's grade.

## Participation

Students will receive a participation grade based on their attendance, preparation, engagement, and contribution to group learning, during and outside of class time.

## 4 Course Schedule

Check Blackboard regularly for changes to the schedule and readings. Please check the [UAlbany academic calendar](#) for dates regarding adding, dropping, and withdrawing from the course.

### Week of 8/23: K-12 Education in the U.S.

Course syllabus

- 8/23: Introduction
- 8/24: Role of government in education I

### Week of 8/30: The Role of Government in Education

Due: Quiz 1

Friedman, M. (1955). The Role of Government in Education.

Labaree, D. F. (1997). Public Goods, Private Goods: The American Struggle Over Educational Goals. *American Educational Research Journal*.

- 8/30: Role of government in education II
- 9/1: Virtual - Research presentation on police in schools

### Week of 9/6: Sources of Educational Inequality

Due: Quiz 2

Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From Achievement Gap to the Education Debt: Understanding Achievement in U.S. Schools. *Educational Researcher*

Downey, D. B., & Condron, D. J. (2016). Fifty Years since the Coleman Report: Rethinking the Relationship between Schools and Inequality. *Sociology of Education*.

- 9/6: Sources of educational inequality I
- 9/8: Sources of educational inequality II

## **Week of 9/13 School Segregation**

Due: Quiz 3

Reardon, S. F., Grewal, E., Kalogrides, D., & Greenberg, E. (2012). The End of Court-Ordered School Desegregation and the Resegregation of American Public Schools. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*.

Hannah-Jones, N. (2015). The Problem We All Live With - Part One. *This American Life*.

Chang, A. (2018). We Can Draw School Zones to Make Classrooms Less Segregated. This is How Well Your District Does. *Vox*.

- 9/13: School segregation I
- 9/15: School segregation II

## **Week of 9/20: School Finance**

Due: Quiz 4

Baker, B. D., & Green, P. C. (2015). Chapter 14: Conceptions of Equity and Adequacy in School Finance. In Ladd & Goertz's *Handbook of Research in Education Finance and Policy*, Second Edition.

Jackson, C. K., Johnson, R. C., & Persico, C. (2015). Boosting Educational Attainment and Adult Earnings: Does School Spending Matter After All? *Education Next*.

- 9/20: School finance I
- 9/22: School finance II

## **Week of 9/27: Education Data Analysis**

Due: Quiz 5

Felvegi, E., et al. *Excel for Decision Making*. Chapter 1 - Fundamental Skills.

Felvegi, E., et al. *Excel for Decision Making*. Chapter 2 - Formulas, Functions, Cell References.

Optional: Felvegi, E., et al. *Excel for Decision Making*. Chapter 3 - More on Formulas, Logical and Lookup Functions.

- 9/27: Virtual - Education data analysis I
- 9/29: Research project workshop

## **Week of 10/4: Schooling Inputs**

Due: Quiz 6, **Memo 1**

Monk, D. H. (1989). The Education Production Function: Its Evolving Role in Policy Analysis. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*.

Golhaber, D. (2016). In Schools, Teacher Quality Matters Most. *Education Next*.

EdNext Podcast: The Unintended Consequences of Lowering Class Size.

- 10/4: Schooling inputs I
- 10/6: Schooling inputs II

## **Week of 10/11: Fall Break**

Due: **Topic Proposal**

- 10/11: No class (Fall break)
- 10/13: Virtual - Research presentation on state takeovers

## **Week of 10/18: Performance Accountability**

Due: Quiz 7

Dee, T. S., & Jacob, B. A. (2010). Evaluating NCLB. *Education Next*.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2007). Evaluating 'No Child Left Behind'. *The Nation*.

Podgursky, M. J., & Springer, M. G. (2007). Teacher Performance Pay: A Review. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*.

- 10/18: Performance accountability I
- 10/20: Performance accountability II

## **Week of 10/25: Education Data Analysis**

Due: Quiz 8, **Analysis Plan**

Felvegi, E., et al. *Excel for Decision Making*. Chapter 4 - Presenting Data with Charts.

Felvegi, E., et al. *Excel for Decision Making*. Chapter 5 - Excel Tables.

Optional: Felvegi, E., et al. *Excel for Decision Making*. Chapter 6 - PivotTables & PivotCharts.



- 10/25: Education data analysis II
- 10/27: Students with disabilities (Guest lecture Arzana Myderrizi)

### **Week of 11/1: School Choice**

Due: Quiz 9

Friedman, M. (1973). Selling Schooling like Groceries." *New York Times Magazine*.

Cohodes, S. (2018). Charter Schools and the Achievement Gap. *The Future of Children*.

Nice White Parents: Episode One. *The New York Times*.

- 11/1: School choice I
- 11/3: School choice II

### **Week of 11/1: Higher education**

Due: Quiz 10, **Memo 2**

Podcast: Dynarski, S. (2020). The Student Loan System has "Layers and Layers of Dysfunction." Make Me Smart, Episode 341.

Baker, D., & Rosinger, K. (2021). Test Optional Offers Benefits but It's Not Enough. *Education Week*.

Buckley, J. (2021). Standardized Tests Can Serve as a Neutral Yardstick. *Education Week*.

- 11/8: Higher education I
- 11/10: Higher education II

### **Week of 11/15: Early Childhood Education**

Due: Quiz 11

Mongeau, L. (2016). The Never-Ending Struggle to Improve Head Start. *The Atlantic*.

Video: Brookings Institute. (2021). The Future of Early Childhood Education After COVID-19.

- 11/15: Early childhood education I
- 11/17: Virtual - Early childhood education II

### **Week of 11/24: Thanksgiving**

- 11/22: Research project workshop

## **Week of 11/29: Student final projects**

Due: **Final Project**

- 11/29: Final project presentations
- 12/1: Final class