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SOC380: EDUCATION AND AMERICAN CULTURE

Spring 2014

Monday/Thursday, 12:30 – 1:50 pm: SSB 226

Course Purpose and Description: To perpetuate itself, a culture must thoroughly socialize its young. Complex societies, like the U.S., rely upon families, religion, and schools to provide primary socialization -- but only schools are under the control of elected officials and their representative communities. Hence, schooling is a primary nexus of American cultural contestation -- that is, it is a critical arena in which competing visions of who America is (or should be) clash. Examining education and its related social processes, then, provides much insight into American culture, its cultural processes, and its complex institutional relationships. Knowledge of these issues will be of value to any U.S. resident, but particularly to those who wish to deepen their understanding of the cultural foundations and complexities of U.S. education.

This course “provides an overview of the cultural significance of, and complexities involved in, educational processes and institutions today. Special attention given to opportunity, equality, and mobility issues” (*from the TCNJ catalog*). To achieve these goals, this course will provide students with diverse opportunities to observe and consider education and American culture. Opportunities will include two mandatory field experiences, readings from a variety of challenging texts, guest speakers, documentaries, and course discussions. We will focus on six questions: 1) what does education in the U.S. reveal about American culture (past, present, and future)? 2) who succeeds in the U.S. educational system, who doesn't, and why?, 3) how does U.S. schooling compare? 4) how ought we direct our attention and resources if we are to make U.S. schools the pathways to opportunity we want them to be? 5) how similar is education to other enterprises, like corporations?, and 6) is higher education a game, a credential, a life-transforming experience, a business, or a religion?

Learning Goals:

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

- Use key concepts (e.g., culture, socialization, opportunity structure, credentialism, social capital, mobility, formal organization) to analyze American education.
- Apply key concepts and theories to observation and analysis of schools.
- Critique functionalist (e.g., meritocracy, human capital) models of American education, using empirical evidence and social reproduction theories.
- Articulate the complex web of relationships among American schooling, power/politics, race/ethnicity, religion, social stratification, and economic opportunity.
- Critique social reproduction (or critical) models of American education, using empirical evidence and functionalist theories.
- Compare and contrast aspects of the U.S. education system with other democracies (e.g., Australia, England, Germany), and forms of education in the developing world.

Or, to put it more formally, this course furthers the following college, school, and departmental student learning outcomes: written communication, critical analysis and reasoning, information literacy, intercultural competence, respect for diversity, sociological knowledge, and application of sociological knowledge.

Course Policies:

Academic integrity: Academic dishonesty is any attempt by the student to gain academic advantage through dishonest means, to submit, as his or her own, work which has not been done by him/her or to give improper aid to another student in the completion of an assignment. Such dishonesty would include, but is not limited

to: submitting as his/her own a project, paper, report, test, or speech copied from, partially copied, or paraphrased from the work of another (whether the source is printed, under copyright, or in manuscript form). Credit must be given for words quoted or paraphrased. The rules apply to any academic dishonesty, whether the work is graded or ungraded, group or individual, written or oral. TCNJ's academic integrity policy is available on the web: <http://www.tcnj.edu/~academic/policy/integrity.html>.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Policy: Any student who has a documented disability and is in need of academic accommodations should notify the professor of this course and contact the Office of Differing Abilities Services (609-771-2571). Accommodations are individualized and in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1992. More information on TCNJ's Disability Support Services can be found on the web: <http://differingabilities.pages.tcnj.edu>.

Attendance: This course follows the TCNJ policy on attendance, which indicates that students are expected to be in class except in the case of an emergency. If you need to miss class for a legitimate reason, you are required to notify the instructor in advance (except for extreme extenuating circumstances – e.g., you are unconscious), specify the reason for missing class (“sick” or “medical” is sufficient – you do not need to divulge private medical information), and for any reason other than sick/medical, you must submit necessary documentation (e.g., note from dean, coach, White House, etc.) If you miss class, it is YOUR responsibility to obtain notes & materials from your classmates; do not contact the professor for this information. More information on TCNJ's Attendance policy can be found at: <http://www.tcnj.edu/~academic/policy/attendance.html>. Although this class meets for three hours each week, it is a 4-credit (1 unit) course that offers a depth of learning with additional learning tasks unfolding in the equivalent of a fourth hour. Students will engage in group or individual learning projects outside of class and/or additional learning experiences occurring multiple times during the semester on or off-campus, including community-engaged learning activities and/or campus-wide events.

Electronic submissions: Students **must** upload an electronic copy of all written assignments to their SOCS dropbox by each assignment's due date, and it should be given a title that references the specific assignment (e.g., Homework 1, Proposal, Paper A). **DO NOT ATTACH ASSIGNMENTS TO AN EMAIL TO YOUR INSTRUCTOR; USE THE SOCS DROPBOX ONLY.** Electronic submissions must be uploaded in .doc, .docx, .rtf, or .pdf formats. If you are using a Mac, you may need to convert your files (to.doc or .docx) before uploading them to your SOCS, even if you are using MS Word. Electronic submission times are based on the SOCS clock, even if this clock is incorrect. If an electronic submission is unreadable, late penalties will accumulate until a readable file has been uploaded onto SOCS. See late policy below.

E-mail and voice-mail: I check e-mail each morning, and voice mail on Tuesdays and Fridays only. Please don't expect me to check my e-mail over the weekends, at night, or during breaks. I never check voice-mail from home. You may expect at least a 48 hour turn-around on any e-mail message sent to me during the week and longer on the weekend. Sending an e-mail or leaving a voice-mail message is no guarantee that I will respond affirmatively; wait for my reply before you assume anything.

Fourth hour equivalency statement: Although this class meets for three hours each week, it is a 4-credit (1 unit) course that offers a depth of learning with additional learning tasks unfolding in the equivalent of a fourth hour. Students will engage in group or individual learning projects outside of class and/or additional learning experiences occurring multiple times during the semester on or off-campus, including community-engaged learning activities and/or campus-wide events.

Late policies: If you miss an exam or assignment for a legitimate reason, you are required to notify the instructor *in advance* (except for extreme extenuating circumstances – e.g., you are unconscious), specify the reason for missing, and if other than sick/medical, submit the necessary documentation **BEFORE** you try to

turn in late assignments or they will not be accepted. Documentation includes notes from your dean or other official or printed records of critical events (such as funerals). Without documentation, assignments lose 10% of the potential value of the assignment per *calendar* day late, including Saturdays and Sundays to a minimum of 50% of the original value. For example, a 100 point assignment would lose 10 points per day until it was five days late. After five days, the assignment would be worth a maximum 50 points no matter when it was turned in. **Late penalties begin accumulating at the beginning of the course period for which an assignment is due**, unless **prior** exception has been granted by the professor. All of the late and make-up policies apply equally to all students and no exceptions will be made (even for you!).

Office Hours: Every week I have scheduled office hours, but am often available at other times. You do not need to make an appointment to come to scheduled office hours except during pre-registration for next semester (when I have to accommodate my advisees as well). If you would like to meet with me outside of scheduled office hours, you need to make an appointment. Generally, appointment times will be 11:30am on Mon or Thurs, or occasionally on Wed afternoons. You can make an appointment in class or through e-mail or voice-mail.

Punctuality: So that we can start class on time, students who consistently arrive late will have their grade lowered for being disruptive to the class. The same goes for leaving early, leaving class with frequency, or being otherwise disruptive.

Religious holidays and college-related obligations: If you will miss class for religious holidays or obligations related to TCNJ, you must notify me in writing in advance of the missed classes to avoid penalties. Notifying me of religious holidays or TCNJ obligations after the fact will leave you liable for missed work, late penalties, etc. Assignments due on religious holidays will be due on the next day that class meets. Assignments due on dates when students have TCNJ obligations must be submitted before the due date.

SOCS: I use SOCS for this course, since it includes a blogging component that Canvas lacks. All students are expected to access their TCNJ SOCS account for this purpose.

Submission standards: All papers must be submitted as word-processed in MS Word, with reasonable fonts and margins (1 inch margins, 12 point fonts, and double spacing is acceptable). Make certain your full name and the course number (e.g., SOC 380) appear at the top of the page. All submissions should be essentially free of spelling and grammatical errors or will be penalized 10%. All written assignments must be posted to SOCS by the due date in addition to any paper copies requested (which is rare).

Required Readings:

Peter W. Cookson, Jr & Caroline Hodges Persell. (aka C&P) *Preparing for Power*.

Jay MacLeod. *Ain't No Makin' It*.

Denise Clark Pope. *Doing School*.

Diane Ravitch. *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*.

Students must also read articles posted on SOCS as noted on the syllabus and/or during class. Your professor also reserves the right to add articles throughout the course (and you have the right to suggest the same), based on the course of our class discussions, student interest, and current events.

Assessment:

Exams: There will be two essay examinations. Both exams will include take-home and in-class components. All take-home examination questions will have a strict word limit (e.g., 300 words per question). You will receive the questions in class the week preceding the exam, and must submit your answers using the virtual dropbox on SOCS, by the date and time indicated. The in-class exams will be closed-book, except for the reading notes described below.

Field Experiences & Reflection Blogs: It would be a crime to teach this class and never take advantage firsthand of the vivid examples of American religious that surround us. **Hence, we will do two mandatory field trips.** *You must attend these field trips.* One trip will be to a local boarding school – it will last approximately 5 hours. A second trip will be to 1 or 2 urban schools – this trip will last approximately 10 hours. Both trips will be scheduled for Wednesdays. Specific information will be distributed in class as the details are determined for these trips.

You will also write a 700 word blog post of “*reflections and connections*” for each field trip. That is, a post in which you *reflect* upon what you observed/experienced – how the field experience helped you understand or see things in a new or more vivid way (if true) – and in which you *connect* your observations/experience with specific concepts discussed in course readings. Again, no more than 700 words, and it must be posted by the date indicated. The best papers identify one to three key observations and then make thoughtful connections to the texts, course concepts, and possibly other course materials (a guest speaker, documentary). The worst papers present one’s emotional reactions only, write long lists of things that were observed, and lack insightful and specific connections to the course texts.

Should you miss the trip for a legitimate reason (illness, refusal of another instructor to excuse you from class), make-up assignment will likely be the assignment of an additional book and a 6-8 page analysis paper.

Grades will be calculated using the following percentages:

Class Readiness & Participation	10%
Reading Notes	5%
Weekly Blog Posts & Comments	20%
Field Experience Blogs	15%
Midterm Exam	25%
Final Exam	<u>25%</u>
TOTAL	100%

Grade distribution is the traditional 0 to 100 point scale: 93-100=A, 90-92=A-, 87-89=B+, 83-86=B, 80-82=B-, 77-79=C+, 73-76=C, 70-72=C-, 67-69=D+, 60-66=D, less than 60=F.

Reading Notes: We will be reading a number of different texts/articles this semester, and it is imperative that you come prepared to discuss these in class. To facilitate this, you will submit to me at the start of each class (*and post to SOCS*) a *one-page, single-sided sheet of reading notes*. Let me explain how each of these sheets will be processed:

The *reading notes* will not be graded, I will simply record their presence/absence each week, and save them until the exam. During in-class examinations, *which are otherwise closed-book*, you will receive these reading notes back to assist you. So it is clearly in your interest to do the best job you can each week with your one-page, single-sided sheet of reading notes. How you format/design these is entirely up to you – just make sure your name and the date of the class is written clearly on them, and that you stick to one-side of one regular-size (8.5 x 11) sheet of paper. IMPORTANT NOTE: I shall do everything I can to ensure the safekeeping of these notes; however, a page of notes may get separated from the rest and lost -- while this is unfortunate, I will not allow you to reschedule the exam if this occurs. What I will do is give everyone an opportunity, before the exam begins, to check that they have all their notes, and if any are missing, and let me know if any are missing so that I can print a replacement page from SOCS at that moment (*hence the importance of posting your reading notes to SOCS each week; Note, too, that late SOCS posts are ineligible for reprinting*).

Weekly Blog Posts & Comments [BP/C]: You will each need to participate in a weekly blog post on the SOCS website for this course. Specifically, you will *post once each week* to your blog, and you will also *comment once each week* on a classmate’s blog. A blog is, of course, a website on which individuals can post thoughts, musings, reflection, opinion, and arguments – and invite others to comment on their posts. Your course blogs will be visible to everyone else in the course, including your professor, but they are not accessible to those outside the class. Your posts should average 150-250 words, and your comments about others’ posts should be

at least 75 words. Of course, you need not agree with each other nor with me, but you will be expected to be civil and respectful. By the end of the semester, you should have at least 11 posts to your blog (*not counting your field experience blogs – see item #3 below*) and at least 11 comments on others’ blogs.

OK, so what should you post to your blog about? On the first page of the syllabus, you’ll find a description of the course. You can blog about that. You can blog about the learning goals. You can blog about texts/readings, discussions in class, or my comments in class. You can even be daring (occasionally) and blog about stuff outside of class – e.g., a news article or op-ed; a movie; or an observation. *What I’m looking for with this assignment is:* evidence of your ability to engage thoughtfully with the class materials/issues, to think analytically and critically, to make integrative/synthesizing connections, to demonstrate that you’ve read the assignments, and to consider the implications of what you are learning. As a general rule, *you shouldn’t post about the same source/issue/topic more than twice* – be sure to vary your “stimuli,” and *at least 6 of these posts should connect specifically to the course readings*. As for comments on others’ posts, I will ask you to spread around your attention here as well. No given student should receive more than 2 comments from you.

Twice during the semester I will review your posts and comments and record a grade: the first grading period will cover the initial five weeks of the semester, and the second grading period will cover the latter seven weeks of the semester. Keep up with the 1 post, 1 comment per week rate – *there will be no make-up posts/comments accepted*. When I grade, I’ll be checking that you posted and commented each week as well as evaluating the substance/quality of your work.

Course Schedule: (tentative; the professor reserves the right to adjust; field trip dates & reflection assignments to be determined)

Mondays	Thursdays
	January 23: Course Overview; “Pressure Cooker, part 1”
January 27: “Pressure Cooker, part 2”; Opportunity vs Reproduction READ: MacLeod (M) preface, Ch 1-2 Due: Blog Post/Comment 1	January 30: Total, Elite Institutions READ: Cookson & Persell (CP) prologue, Ch 1-2
February 3: Aspirations & Families READ: M Ch 3-5 Due: Blog Post/Comment 2	February 6: Selection & Cultural Capital READ: CP Ch 3-4
February 10: Competition & Leveled Aspirations READ: M Ch 6-8 Due: Blog Post/Comment 3	February 13: Stress & Authority READ: CP Ch 5-6
February 17: 8 years later ... READ: M Ch 9-11 Due: Blog Post/Comment 4	February 20: Crucibles & Coming of Age READ: CP Ch 7-8
February 24: Transcript Analysis READ: M Ch 12-13 Due: Blog Post/Comment 5	February 27: Preps & Power READ: CP Ch 9-10
March 3: On Agency, Structure, & Achievement READ: M Ch 14	March 6: EXAM 1
SPRING BREAK March 10-14	
March 17: On School Reform READ: Ravitch (R) Ch 1-3	March 20: “Doing School” READ: Pope (P) preface, Ch 1-2
March 24: San Diego, NYC, & NCLB READ: R Ch 4-6 Due: Blog Post/Comment 6	March 27: Competition vs Engagement READ: P Ch 3-4

Mondays	Thursdays
March 31: Choice & Accountability READ: R Ch 7-8 Due: Blog Post/Comment 7	April 3: Intellectual Curiosity & Values READ: P Ch 5-6
April 7: **NO CLASS MEETING** READ: R Ch 9 Due: Blog Post/Comment 8	April 10: The system critiqued READ: P Ch 7, epilogue
April 14: Mrs. Ratcliff, Billionaires, & Lessons Learned READ: R Ch 10-11 Due: Blog Post/Comment 9	April 17: Higher Education Adrift? READ: Arum & Roksa, Ch 1&3 (on SOCS)
April 21: Declining By Degrees READ: Hersh & Morrow excerpt 1 (on SOCS) Due: Blog Post/Comment 10	April 24: Declining By Degrees, part 2 READ: Hersh & Morrow excerpt 2 (on SOCS)
April 28: The Purpose of College READ: Delbanco excerpt (on SOCS) Due: Blog Post/Comment 11	May 1: College & Student Purpose READ: Clydesdale excerpt (on SOCS)
FINAL EXAM (at the time set by college officials and posted on PAWS)	