Education Policy and Politics
EDUC 251
Spring 2019: Tuesdays 1:00-3:50

Course Instructor
Greg Duncan  email:  gduncan@uci.edu
office hours:  By appointment

Note: The current version of course materials will be on Canvas.

Origins of my teaching the course

Professor Emily Penner is the usual instructor for this course and I am filling in for her to ensure that the course is offered at least once every two years. I have borrowed shamelessly from her syllabus and appreciate her willingness to share it with me. I have also borrowed material from the reading list of Professor Gary Henry. That said, I have introduced enough changes to be culpable for any shortcomings that you might experience in the course.

Course objectives

This course is designed to review the academic literature on key policy issues surrounding the pre-K through grade 12 educational system in the United States. There is much more of an emphasis on policy than politics.

By structuring the class with student presentations of most of the material (see below), I also aspire to promote student skills in synthesizing and presenting key articles in the research literature. In addition to discussing the articles in the syllabus, we will spend time each week discussing the effectiveness of the presentations themselves. Moreover, all students are required to submit discussion questions/issues before each class (see below), which is intended to develop critical thinking.

Finally, by requiring a paper that is written in the style of a registered report, I hope to promote that skill as well.

Course structure

First of all, the class will not meet in Week 1, so the first class will be on Tuesday April 9th. My decision to teach the course came after I had committed to chair a meeting in Washington DC on Monday and Tuesday of the first week in April. We will cover the readings in Weeks 1 and 2 in our Week 2 class. I will lead the discussion during our Weeks 2 and 3 classes.

Beginning with Week 4, each class will be divided into two roughly equal parts with separate sets of readings for each part. In most cases, the material in the two parts will address the same
general theme. The two-part division is intended to limit the length of any given student’s presentation and its discussion to just half the class period.

A persistent requirement for all students is to submit discussion questions or issues by Monday noon – 24 hours before each class. On some occasions I will add a question and expect students to submit answers by Monday noon as well. These discussion issues/questions will be viewable by all students in the class and should help the students preparing for their presentations. Questions are presented in the “Assignments” section of Canvas.

Student presentations: I will randomly assign students into five groups. Group size obviously depends on total enrollment but I anticipate 2-3 students in most groups. With roughly 7 weeks of student presentations and two presentations per week, there will be about 14 opportunities for student group presentations. So each group will be responsible for 3 presentations over the course of the quarter.

One student from each group will provide a given week’s presentation during the first or second half of the class period. All students are expected to present at least once during the quarter. Presentations should take about 25 minutes and cover the highlights of the assigned readings. Each presentation should include: i) a general motivation for why the subject is important; ii) a brief background for the issues covered in the readings; and iii) a presentation of the methods and results in the empirical paper(s). Item iii) will take the most time by far. By and large, these presentations should be structured like most outside speaker and job talk seminars. Please prepare powerpoint or equivalent presentations and strive for minimum word counts with maximal clarity, and for clear, easy to understand graphs rather than dense and often indecipherable tables. Because students will be required to submit questions or issues about the readings 24 hours before the class, the presenting group will have a chance to reflect on those and perhaps incorporate them into their presentations.

Course Materials

Nearly all course materials can be found on Canvas.

There two books for the course:

Duncan, G. J., & Murnane, R. J. (2014). *Restoring opportunity: The crisis of inequality and the challenge for American education*. Harvard Education Press. I have included a pdf of it in Canvas but you may wish to buy a used copy. If you buy a new one let me know and I will donate my meager royalty from it to the School of Education.


Course requirements and grading
A. Weekly discussion questions, usually submitted on the Monday before class (40 percent).

B. In-class participation (15 percent) and individual presentation (20 percent). Please come to class prepared to engage in lively discussion. In order to do so, you will need to complete the assigned readings and complete the weekly assignments.

C. Final Paper – due the Monday of finals week (25 percent). For the final paper requirement, students are expected to write a registered report. Registered reports are complete papers except that they are written before any actual analysis takes place. The idea is to eliminate any possibility that results influence how you frame the paper and went about getting the results. Almost all of the elements of a conventional paper are there – an abstract (without sentences describing the results); a motivational introduction; a (for us, shorter-than-usual) literature review; a data section; an “analytic approach” section; tables of results without the results. The tables should show exactly what kind of (usually) regression analyses you intend to run. And no summary/conclusion. I strongly encourage students to submit drafts of their papers by May 24th. I will provide feedback on these drafts, which may help with the final version of the paper.

Academic Honesty:
I will strictly enforce the academic honesty principles laid out in the UCI Principles of Community (http://www.editor.uci.edu/catalogue/appx/appx.2.htm):

Students have responsibility for:
1. Refraining from cheating and plagiarism.
2. Refusing to aid or abet any form of academic dishonesty.
3. Notifying professors and/or appropriate administrative officials about observed incidents of academic misconduct. The anonymity of a student reporting an incident of academic dishonesty will be protected.

Students who witness plagiarism, cheating, or other forms of academic dishonesty should contact me. I will report all instances of academic dishonesty to the appropriate Associate Dean or the Office of Academic Integrity & Student Conduct, and will not give credit for plagiarized work.

SCHEDULE

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Week 1, April 2  

**Purposes of Schools**

NO CLASS THIS WEEK. THESE READINGS WILL BE DISCUSSED IN THE FIRST HALF OF WEEK 2.

**Guiding Questions:**
1. What are the purposes and goals of school in America?
2. What led us to our current educational system?
3. What is the rationale for public schools?

**Readings:**


Week 2, April 9:  

**Income Inequality and Schools**

**Assignments:** Please submit three discussion questions about the Week 1 readings and three discussion questions on the Duncan & Murnane book by noon on Monday, April 8th.

**Readings:**

Watch the three videos on restoringopportunity.com

Week 3, April 16th:  

**Early Childhood Education**

**Guiding Questions:**
1. What are the most important policy questions facing the preschool system in the United States?
2. What are the characteristics of model programs from the 1960s and 1970s that had longer-run follow-ups?
3. How should we characterize the impacts of more recent early childhood programs?
4. What is the best path forward?

1st half


2nd half
Reread chapter 5 from *Restoring Opportunity*, rewatch the Boston pre-K video and read the associated interview transcripts.


**Week 4 April 23: Teacher Preparation, Recruitment and Retention**

**Guiding Questions:**
1. To what extent does teacher preparation affect student learning?
2. How does teacher pay affect recruitment and retention?

**Readings:**

First half


Second half
Week 5, April 30 Teacher evaluation, coaching and performance and student achievement

Guiding Questions:

1. What constitutes great teaching and how does it relate to student outcomes?
2. How does teacher coaching and pay affect teacher performance?

First half


Second half


Week 6 May 7th: School Organization

Guiding Questions:

1. How do school structure and dynamics affect school reforms?
2. How can high school structures influence high school performance?

First half – School Structure and School Reform

Professor George Farkas will help to lead this discussion


Second half – High School


Reread chapter 7 from *Restoring Opportunity*, rewatch the Urban Assembly video and read the associated interview transcripts.


**Week 7, May 14: School Desegregation**

**Guiding Questions:**

1. How has school desegregation evolved over the past 60 years?
2. What are the ways that white communities react(ed) to desegregation?
3. What are some of the shorter and longer-run consequences of desegregation for students?

**Background Readings & Audio Recordings:**

School desegregation milestones: [Wikipedia article](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/School_desegregation)


Additional materials in this Dropbox folder

**First half**


**Second half**


**Week 8, May 21 School Finance**
Guiding Questions:
1. One option for school finance is that schools are financed entirely by state funds, with no additional contributions from the local level. What are some of the benefits of this approach as opposed to a system that allows some local revenue raising for schools?
2. One option for school finance is that all schools receive the same per pupil funding. What are some of the disadvantages of this approach? If some districts should receive more than other districts, what characteristics of districts should be considered? How might we tell how much more one district should get than another district?
3. In almost all states funding goes to districts and then districts decide what to do with the funds. Another option is to fund individual schools or individual students. What are the advantages and disadvantages of these alternatives?

Readings:

First half
Heather Rose and Margaret Weston (2013). California School District Revenue and Student Poverty Moving Toward a Weighted Pupil Funding Formula. Public Policy Institute of California.

Second half

Week 9, May 28 School-Level Accountability

Guiding Questions:
1. Much of governance is a question of who makes what decision pertaining to education policy and practice. What are five decisions that you think are particularly important for education quality? Why are they important and who should make them?
2. What are the aims of test-based accountability? What are some of the possible worries? What changes would you make in the current system to help support the aims and mitigate the worries?
3. Currently math and reading tests in grades 4 through 8 have the most weight in accountability systems. How would you change that, if at all, and what are the potential drawbacks of these changes?
4. Consequences are a necessary feature of accountability systems. What are the consequences for schools built into the current systems? How would you alter these consequences and why?
Readings:

First half

Second half

Week 10, June 4: School Choice

Guiding Questions:
1. School choice may improve the matching of students to schools, the diversity of schools, and the overall quality of schools? How might charter schools, in particular, affect these three potential outcomes? What are some potential barriers to these changes?

2. School competition may increase as the result of increased school choice by parents. What types of school choice are likely to elicit greater competition? What outcomes for students are likely to incentivize by school choice? How might schools respond to this increased competition?

3. How should we approach accountability and governance with public charter schools? Is it appropriate to let markets exclusively determine whether schools are adequately performing? If not, how could we appropriately balance accountability and regulations with autonomy for school operators?

4. The most attention-grabbing schools of choice have been KIPP-style, urban, “No Excuses” charter schools that have produced exceptionally high test scores. Is it realistic that traditional public schools could get some of the same positive effects by adopting similar practices? Would it be desirable for them to try?

Readings:

First half – Charter Schools


Second half – vouchers
