**EFOP 3315- Education Politics: Power and Inequality in K12 Education Systems**

Instructor: Professor Joshua Bleiberg ([jbleiber@pitt.edu](mailto:jbleiber@pitt.edu))

Office Hours: By appointment and via [Calendly](https://calendly.com/jbleiber/30min)

Tuesday 5:30PM - 8:10PM

5315 Wesley W Posvar Hall

**Overview**

This course examines the political systems that maintain inequality in U.S. primary and secondary schools including the creation of rights, agenda setting, and policy solutions. The course also examines the ways in way various policy solutions that are intended to mitigate inequality have succeed and failed (e.g., school finance reform, standards-based reform, “desegregation”). Finally, we will study the politics of inequality in the context of primary and secondary schools.

**Essential Course Questions**

1. What are the political origins of U.S. systems that promote educational inequality?
2. What US systems contribute to educational inequality in K12 schools?
3. What changes can be made to systems to either mitigate inequality or promote inequality?

I have adapted my definition of inequality from Robin DiAngelo and Charles W. Mills. A government system (e.g., rule, policy, organization) that uniformly benefits one group of students over another group of students. Inequality is perpetuated by systems and occurs when prejudice is combined with power. The course questions serve both as a general motivation for the course (e.g., readings, course content). I will also explicitly raise them in class discussions and with guest speakers.

**Course Texts and Materials**

Course readings will include journal articles, government documents, reports, documentaries, and podcasts that are freely available to students (e.g., Pitt Library, online). Several chapters will be assigned from the Cooper et al. text. An E-Book version of the text will be available through PittCatt with no limits on the simultaneous number of users.

Cooper, B. S., Cibulka, J. G., & Fusarelli, L. D. (Eds.). (2014). *Handbook of Education Politics and Policy*. Routledge.

[See linked doc for summary of readings.](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1jARCMvoGcIlBqNYBJTZfbaeWfWgWKmJQp4d44z3TPzc/edit?usp=sharing)

**Grading and Student Responsibilities**

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| --- | --- |
| Assignment | Weight |
| Class Participation | 20% |
| Multiple Streams Exercise | 5% |
| Ethnographic Memo | 20% |
| Inequality Problem Memo | 15% |
| Final Presentation | 15% |
| Final Memo | 25% |

As a member of the course, you will be expected to: (a) attend all classes, (b) complete all assigned reading, (c) be well prepared for each class, (d) participate fully in class discussion, (e) and complete all course assignments.

**Weekly Readings and Class Participation**

Each week, you will be responsible for three "readings" (e.g., book chapters, articles, documentaries). We will use Perusall to collaboratively engage with and discuss the weekly readings. Students are expected to engage with the readings by hilighting the text, commenting, and responding to other student questions. Perusall then grades participation for each assignment. This is the first semester I am using Perusall. I will be actively soliciting feedback about the experience of using the Perusall and will make changes if necessary to the grading procedure for the weekly readings and class participation. I will facilitate the use of Perusall by hilighting text and annotations to spark a broader conversation. I encourage you to think about your interaction with Perusall as closer to a conversation than a discussion board. If you encounter an idea that is confusing then please note that! If you disagree with an author's stance then say that as well! Please complete the Perusall tutorial prior to the first meeting of the class.

My goal is that our class discussions are a time of deep, collaborative learning. I expect you to be well prepared for each class. Class discussions will be a combination of free-flowing conversation and working through your answers to the prepared questions. To ensure that students are prepared for discussions and to ensure that we hear from everyone in the class, I will occasionally call on students *at random* to share their answers to the prepared questions. I recognize that this random calling may induce some degree of stress. Please know that my philosophy regarding these questions is that it is okay to be unsure of the answer, but only after you have engaged with the course material and attempted to answer the questions. **In short, it’s okay not to know; it’s not okay not to have tried**. My overarching goal is to facilitate a classroom environment that is **psychologically safe**. As my colleague Shannon Wanless (2016) describes, this means that you will feel enabled take interpersonal risks that will not “result in embarrassment, ridicule or shame” but that will, instead, enable you to “engage, connect, change and learn” together.

**Multiple Streams Case Analysis**

The case analysis will provide a structure introduction to using the Multiple Streams framework. The assignment includes several prompts related to difference elements of the Multiple Streams framework. I have created an answer key but there are likely many more correct responses. The goal of the assignment is to build the skill of examining the policy adoption process rather than assessing whether a policy is normatively good.

**Inequality Problem Memo**

In the inequality problem memo you will identify an issue or a specific area of inequality that you believe merits a response. Once you choose a problem in the initial assignment you are committed to work in that area for the subsequent two assignments. Flexibility to change the problem will only be provided if the project becomes inviable due to an unforeseen challenge. Before you submit your policy outline, we will discuss the problem you have identified. The primary goal here is to find a problem that is the correct scope. For example solving inequality through reparations would involve many institutions/complex policy proposals and the constraints of the assignment do not provide enough space for a thorough explanation.

**Ethnographic Memo**

This memo will be based on the notes you take while observing an organization that makes education policy (e.g., school board, state legislature). You are not required to attend the meeting in person. You can complete the assignment by streaming a meeting (either live or archived video). The policy making organization may be anywhere in the United States and the meeting must be recent (no more than 6 months in the past). The focus of your memo must be on either how the policy making body addresses issues of inequality or how issues of inequality are neglected.

**Final Presentation and Memo**

The final assignment includes a presentation and memo. The presentations will be approximately 10-12 minutes long. I will use them to provide you feedback in advance of the final memo. The final memo will incorporate the inequality problem memo. More specifically it may include your inequality problem memo in its entirety. However, I expect that you respond to the feedback I provided you on the inequality problem memo.

**Attendance Policy**

If you are not able to attend class, please give me advance notice. I will do my best to find a way for you to participate.

**Grading Scale**

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| --- | --- |
| Grade | Points |
| A | 93-100 |
| A- | 90-92 |
| B+ | 86-89 |
| B | 83-85 |
| B- | 80-82 |
| C+ | 76-79 |
| C | 73-75 |
| C- | 70-72 |
| D+ | 67-69 |
| D | 64-66 |
| D- | 60-63 |
| F | Less than 60 |

A grade of A+ will only be granted in cases of truly exceptional work that considerably exceeds the expectations for each assignment.

**University Policies**

Several university policies are pertinent to this course.  As an instructor I am committed to pedagogy that is anti-racist, non-sexist, non-classist, non-heterosexist, non-ableist, and non-gender normative.  This includes fostering an environment that is as safe and inclusive as possible.  It is my intention to name and correct as best as possible any actions on my part that fall short of these commitments.  If everyone in the class is likewise committed, the work should be more easily facilitated.  I am also committed to making the class accessible to anyone wishing to participate.

University COVID Precautions.

The University of Pittsburgh updates its COVID protocols in response to changing conditions.  See the latest information at coronavirus.pitt.edu. In this course we will adapt as needed.  Please reach out and we’ll make it work.

**Availability of Instructor**

The instructor will respond promptly to all e-mails and you may also request a face-to-face meeting with the instructor. It's my hope to be able to meet with everyone in person at least once this semester. Email for appointment or via [Calendly](https://calendly.com/jbleiber/30min).

**Departmental Grievance Procedures**

The purpose of grievance procedures is to ensure the rights and responsibilities of faculty and students in their relationships with each other. When a student in the EFOP Department or an EFOP course believes that a faculty member has not met his or her obligations (as an instructor or in another capacity) as described in the [*School of Education Academic Integrity Guidelines*](https://www.education.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/SOE-Academic-Integrity-Guidelines.pdf), the student should follow the procedure described in the Guidelines by (1) first trying to resolve the matter with the faculty member directly; (2) then, if needed, attempting to resolve the matter through conversations with Dr. Max Schuster, the associate chair of the Department of Educational Foundations, Organizations, and Policy; (3) if needed, next talking to the academic integrity officer of the school, Assistant Dean Dr. Andrea Zito; and (4) if needed, filing a written statement of charges with the academic integrity officer.

**Academic Integrity**

Students in this course will be expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity. Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. This may include, but is not limited to, the confiscation of the examination of any individual suspected of violating University Policy. Furthermore, no student may bring any unauthorized materials to an exam, including dictionaries and programmable calculators.

**Disability Services**

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both the instructor and Disability Resources and Services (DRS) as early as possible in the term: 140 William Pitt Union, (412) 648-7890, drsrecep@pitt.edu, (412) 228-5347 for P3 ASL users. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for these courses.

**Statement on Classroom Recording**

To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student’s own private use.

**Accessibility**

Ensuring an accessible and pleasant experience to all users, regardless of disability, is a key focus of Canvas. The Canvas platform was built using the most modern HTML and CSS technologies, and is committed to W3C's Web Accessibility Initiative and Section 508 [guidelines](https://www.access-board.gov/ict/). Read more about [Accessibility](https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-2061-accessibility-within-canvas).

**Copyright Notice**

These materials may be protected by copyright. United States copyright law, 17 USC section 101, et seq., in addition to University policy and procedures, prohibit unauthorized duplication or retransmission of course materials. See [Library of Congress Copyright Office](https://www.copyright.gov/) and the [University Copyright Policy](https://www.library.pitt.edu/copyright)

**Religious Observances**

The observance of religious holidays (activities observed by a religious group of which a student is a member) and cultural practices are an important reflection of diversity. As your instructor, I am committed to providing equivalent educational opportunities to students of all belief systems. At the beginning of the semester, you should review the course requirements to identify foreseeable conflicts with assignments, exams, or other required attendance. If at all possible, please contact me (your course coordinator/s) within the first two weeks of the first class meeting to allow time for us to discuss and make fair and reasonable adjustments to the schedule and/or tasks.

**Your Well Being Matters**

College/Graduate school can be an exciting and challenging time for students. Taking time to care for yourself and seeking appropriate support can help you achieve your academic and professional goals. You are encouraged to maintain a healthy lifestyle by eating a balanced diet, exercising regularly, avoiding drugs and alcohol, getting enough sleep, and taking time to relax.

It can be helpful to remember that we all benefit from assistance and guidance at times, and there are many resources available to support your well-being while you are at Pitt. If you or anyone you know experiences overwhelming academic stress, persistent difficult feelings and/or challenging life events, you are strongly encouraged to seek support. In addition to reaching out to friends and loved ones, consider connecting with a faculty member you trust for assistance connecting to helpful resources. The [University Counseling Center](http://www.counseling.pitt.edu/) is also here for you. You can call 412-648-7930 at any time to connect with a clinician.

If you or someone you know is feeling suicidal, please call the University Counseling Center at any time at 412-648-7930. You can also contact Resolve Crisis Network at 888-796-8226. If the situation is life threatening, call Pitt Police at 412-624-2121 or dial 911.