1 Course description

Education is often thought of as “the great equalizer,” but in the United States (and around the world), many governments fail to ensure that all citizens have access to high-quality educational opportunities. Why? This course will give students analytical tools from political science and economics to understand (a) how education policy decisions affect the quality and equity of education systems, and (b) how politics shapes the education policy decisions that are made. Emphasis is on the United States but analyzed in comparative perspective. Special attention will be placed on understanding how politics and local, state, and federal K-12 education policy in the United States increases or reduces educational disparities between whites and racial minorities, and between wealthy and low-income individuals.

2 Learning goals

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Describe the main patterns of educational quality and inequality that characterize the U.S.;
- Understand, and be able to write and talk about, how education policy shapes educational quality and inequality in the U.S.;
- Understand, and be able to write and talk about, how politics shapes education policy in the U.S.

In addition, the course seeks to promote the development of two general skills:

- Critical thinking skills (which will be applied to assess the logic of existing theories/explanations of the educational disparities we see, and the quality of the evidence used to support these theories);
- Professional development skills including, for example, the ability to write clearly, meet deadlines, use appropriate language in all communications with the instructor and TA, and participate thoughtfully and respectfully in group discussions.
3  Expectations and Grading

- **Readings and class participation (30% of final grade = 20% for iClicker participation + 10% for thoughtful participation in the discussion of assigned readings).** To learn about politics, policy, and education in the U.S., and to develop your ability to talk about this, you will need to (a) carefully read the required readings **before** each class, (b) attend class, and (c) be engaged in class discussions of the readings. Each lecture typically has two or three required readings, including academic articles, newspaper articles, and/or book chapters. Make sure you have read and digested the readings **before** attending class, so you can participate thoughtfully in the discussion. Your participation in class discussions will be graded. Class attendance will be tracked.

Your combined iClicker participation points are worth 20% of the total grade. All you need to do is to answer all questions asked. Every class, you will get either 1 point for iClicker participation (if you answer all questions) or no points (no partial credit will be assigned). You get one “freebie” during the quarter to give you a buffer if you forget to answer a question or miss a class. To get credit for iClicker participation, your iClicker must be registered in Canvas by **January 13**. It is your responsibility to ensure that your iClicker is working well and is appropriately registered to receive course credit. For registration instructions, go to [https://blink.ucsd.edu/faculty/instruction/tech-guide/clickers/before-class/plan-course.html](https://blink.ucsd.edu/faculty/instruction/tech-guide/clickers/before-class/plan-course.html) and scroll down to “How to register your clicker in Canvas.” Support for iClickers is provided at the Service Desk located on the first floor of the Applied Physics and Mathematics building. You can purchase new or used iClickers at the UCSD Bookstore (which also buys back used iClickers), or on Amazon.

The degree to which you participate thoughtfully in class discussions of the readings will be worth another 10% of your total grade.

- **Midterm Exam (25%).** The midterm will take place on **February 6** during class and will cover everything we have seen before that day. The exam will include multiple choice questions and conceptual questions with short-paragraph responses. The midterm will not be rescheduled except for students who show proof of illness or experience a death or serious illness in the immediate family. Please don’t kill any relatives during midterms week. Lying constitutes a violation of academic honesty (see section 4).

- **In-class exercise (10% = 5% individual component + 5% group component):** The in-class exercise will take place on **March 5**. The exercise will involve writing an Op-Ed based on what you have learnt in the course up to that point. More details will be provided the week before the exercise takes place. Your ability to do well in this exercise will depend on whether you have attended all classes and done all the required readings.

- **Final Exam (35%).** The final exam will take place on **March 17 from 3 to 6pm**. The exam will be cumulative (i.e., you will be tested on material covered throughout the entire quarter, not just after the midterm). It will include multiple choice questions, short answer questions, and two essay questions (a list of possible essay questions will be distributed by the end of week 9 giving you the opportunity to prepare in advance). The final exam will not be rescheduled except for students who show proof of illness or experience a death or serious illness in the immediate family. Please don’t kill any relatives during exams week. Lying constitutes a violation of academic honesty (see section 4).
**Contesting a grade.** I hope there will be no reason to contest a grade. If you strongly feel that your grade on an exam or assignment does not reflect the quality of your work, though, you may appeal through the following procedure: Write a one-page, single-spaced memo that explains, in as much detail as possible, why you think you should have received a different grade. Email me your memo, your graded assignment, and a letter in which you formally request a re-grade. I will reevaluate the work and assign a new grade, which may be higher, lower, or identical to the one you originally received. This new grade will be final. Grade complaints will not be entertained beyond seven calendar days after an assignment or exam has been returned graded to you.

4 **Academic honesty**

All suspected cases of plagiarism, cheating, lying, or other violations of academic integrity standards will be referred to the Office of Academic Integrity. Any violation of UCSD’s academic honesty policy for which a student is found responsible will be considered grounds for failing the course. You are expected to be the sole author of all your work, and to properly attribute ideas, quotations, and sources. If you are unsure how to do this, please come to office hours or ask in class. If you are unsure what constitutes plagiarism, cheating, or other violations, please see UCSD’s academic honesty policy.

5 **Electronics policy**

Laptops, tablets, phones, digital recorders, and other electronic devices are not allowed in class, except for students who provide an updated AFA letter (see section 6). The research to date is unambiguous: (a) students tend to learn less and do worse in exams when they use laptops during lectures; and, crucially, (b) laptop use by one student harms the learning of students around them. Students who use electronics in class will lose their participation points for that class.

6 **Requesting accommodations**

Students requesting accommodations for this course must provide a current Authorization for Accommodation (AFA) letter issued by the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) which is located in University Center 202 behind Center Hall. Students are required to present their AFA letters to faculty (please make arrangements to contact me privately) and to the OSD Liaison in the Department of Political Science, Joanna Peralta. Please connect with Ms. Peralta via in-person advising (SSB 301) or the Virtual Advising Center as soon as possible so that accommodations may be arranged in advance. Contact the OSD for further information: 858.534.4382 (phone); osd@ucsd.edu (email); http://disabilities.ucsd.edu (website).

7 **Email policy**

We will reply to emails within two business days.

8 **Other**

By Wednesday, January 8 at 11:59pm, send both the instructor and the TA an email where you include the following information: your full name, year (e.g., junior, senior), major (if declared), minor (if you have one), where you attended school (name of the school district and state), and any questions you
have about the syllabus (or simply state “I don’t have any questions about the syllabus”). The subject of your email should be “I read the syllabus carefully.”

9 Schedule and required readings

This section provides an outline of the topic, motivating questions, and list of required readings for each class. (Recommended readings are also listed for those interested in reading more about a particular topic; we will cover some of these during lecture.) We will likely update the schedule throughout the quarter so stay tuned; we will use Canvas announcements to let you know if a revised syllabus has been posted.

All journal articles should be downloadable through the links provided below, which are accessible to UCSD users. If you have trouble with a link, you have the full citation information to find the article via Google Scholar. A few readings (book chapters) will be made available via Canvas.

WEEK 1

Jan-7 Introduction

Course overview, learning goals, expectations, and motivating questions: (1) What are the patterns of educational quality and inequality in the U.S.? (2) How do education policies affect these patterns? (3) How does politics shape education policy?

-- No required reading. --

PART I: Educational Quality and Inequality in the U.S.: The Patterns

Jan-9 What should education systems do, and how can we measure if they are doing this?

Motivating questions: What are the goals of education systems? How do we measure education systems’ quality? What are the advantages and disadvantages of using test scores to measure educational quality?

Required readings (3):

Course Syllabus.


Recommended:

“Has K-12 education fallen for a testing charade?” American Institutes for Research, recorded debate. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VBCR0oWOfjI


WEEK 2

Jan-14 Educational patterns in comparative perspective

Motivating questions: How does educational attainment and the income achievement gap in the U.S. compare to other developed countries? How does educational attainment compare across U.S. states? How does educational attainment compare between white children and children from racial minorities in the U.S.? How does educational attainment compare between high- and low-income children in the U.S.? How have the racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps in the U.S. changed over time?

Required readings (3):


Recommended:


Jan-16 Educational Patterns in Comparative Perspective (cont.)
PART II: How Education Policy Shapes Educational Quality and Inequality in the U.S.

WEEK 3

Jan-21 A Primer on Causal Inference

Motivating questions: What are the difficulties that we face when trying to demonstrate that an education policy, program, or intervention affects student achievement, or when trying to demonstrate that a political actor influences education policy choices? What are some common statistical techniques that researchers use to estimate the counterfactual and, with that, the impact of a variable X on an outcome Y?

-- No required reading. --

Jan-23 Basics of U.S. Schooling: Governance

Motivating questions: How is the authority to make education policy decisions (e.g., the content of the curriculum, how to compensate teachers, how much money to devote to education, etc.) distributed across school districts, state governments, and the federal government? How does this pattern of authority compare to how education policy is made in other countries? What are the consequences of the distribution of education policymaking authority for educational inequality?

Required readings (2):


Recommended:


WEEK 4

Jan-28 Basics of U.S. Schooling: Funding

Motivating questions: How much money is spent on public schools in the U.S.? Where does this money come from? Does the amount of money that governments spend on education affect the quality and equity of education? Does the composition of education funding (from federal, state and local sources) affect educational inequality between racial and/or socioeconomic groups? What specific policies have been put in place to reduce inequality in education spending levels between high- and low-income school districts, and
between wealthier and poorer states? Have these policies helped improve the quality and equity of public schools?

Required readings (2):


Recommended:


Jan-30 Basics of U.S. Schooling: Teachers

Motivating questions: How are teachers recruited, trained, and compensated in the U.S. compared to other countries? How do teacher policies vary across states? What policies enhance, and which ones hinder, school districts’ ability to attract and retain talented teachers?

Required reading (2):


OECD. 2011. “Ontario, Canada: Reform to Support High Achievement in a Diverse Context.” Chapter 3 in *Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education Lessons from PISA for the United States*. [link]

Recommended:


WEEK 5

Feb-4 The role of desegregation policies

Motivating questions: What states and districts were most likely to implement school desegregation plans during the 1960s and 70s? How did court-ordered desegregation affect the level of school funding and the educational attainment of African-Americans? Is a court order alone sufficient to induce districts to desegregate?

Required readings (3):


Recommended:


Feb-6 In-class midterm exam

PART III: How Politics Shapes Education Policies in the U.S.

Motivating questions: Why do some states and school districts spend more money on education than others? Who determines what education policies are adopted? To what extent do politicians’ education policy choices respond to the general interests of the electorate, pressure from teacher unions, pressure from business groups, or specific partisan interests? How does racial diversity at the neighborhood level affect education spending? How does the election of a politician who belongs to a racial minority group affect education spending? Does the political participation of women, black citizens, or other historically excluded groups lead to the adoption of education policies that reduce educational inequality?

WEEK 6

Feb-11 The role of teacher unions

Motivating questions: When did teachers organize collectively? Why do teachers join unions? What aspects of education do unions seek to influence? How (through what channels) do unions attempt to influence education policy? How effective are teacher unions in obtaining higher teacher salaries, better benefits, lower classroom sizes, and more spending on education?

Required readings (2):


Recommended:


**Feb-13 The role of teacher unions (cont.)**

*Motivating questions: When did teachers organize collectively? Why do teachers join unions? What aspects of education do unions seek to influence? How (through what channels) do unions attempt to influence education policy? How effective are teacher unions in obtaining higher teacher salaries, better benefits, lower classroom sizes, and more spending on education?*

**Required readings (2):**


**Recommended:**


**WEEK 7**

**Feb-18 The political history of U.S. public schooling**

*Motivating questions: What explains why elementary education during the 19th century expanded more in the North than in the South? What were the goals of mass schooling? What explains the expansion of high schools in the early-20th century? How did (a) European immigration, (b) ethnic, racial, and religious diversity, (c) aggregate income, and (d) economic inequality affect governments’ incentives and ability to provide education? When and why did educational governance in the U.S. take the form of a decentralized system with power concentrated at the school district and state levels?*
Required readings (4):


Feb-20 The role of elections and public opinion

Motivating questions: Are education policies representative of the preferences of voters? Is the level of education spending at the school district level consistent with what voters in that district would want?

Required readings (3):


Recommended:


WEEK 8

Feb-25 No class

Feb-27 The role of women’s political participation

Motivating questions: Are education policies representative of the preferences of voters? How does recognizing women’s right to vote affect the level of education spending? What might explain this effect? How does the enfranchisement of women affect the educational disparities between whites and blacks?
Required reading (1):

WEEK 9

Mar-3 The role of African Americans’ and Latinos’ political rights & the role of racial diversity

Motivating questions: Are education policies representative of the preferences of voters? Do voting restrictions designed to disenfranchise racial minorities affect the level of education resources in communities with a high proportion of racial minorities? Does recognizing racial minorities’ legal right to vote affect the level of education resources that governments allocate to communities with a high proportion of racial minorities? What might explain this effect? Does racial heterogeneity among the electorate and in local government councils promote or hinder the provision of education?

Required readings (2):

Recommended:

Mar-5 In-class exercise

WEEK 10

Mar-10 The role of political parties, business groups, and philanthropies

Motivating questions: (1) on political parties: Does the partisan composition of local school boards (i.e., whether board members are Republican, Democrat, etc.) affect the level of racial segregation in a school district? Does it affect the level of economic segregation in the district? (1) on business groups and philanthropies: How have conservative groups tried to limit teacher unions’ power? Have they been successful? How have philanthropies sought to influence education policy? Have they been successful?

Required readings (3):