



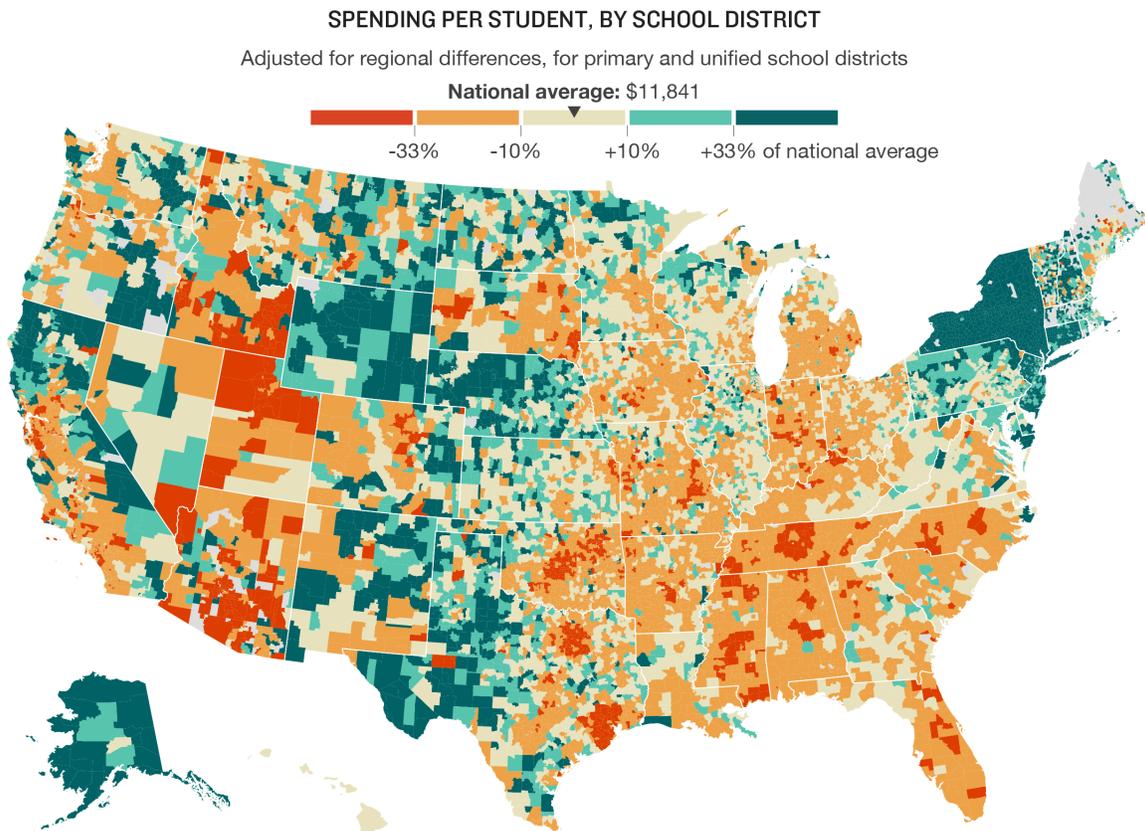
UNC

PHILOSOPHY, POLITICS & ECONOMICS
PROGRAM

Politics, Philosophy, and Economics of Education

POLI 478

Last Updated: March 31st, 2022



*Source: Education Week, U.S. Census Bureau
Credit: Alyson Hurt and Katie Park/NPR*

Professor: Alexandra Oprea, oprea@live.unc.edu
Class Time: Tuesdays and Thursdays 9.30am-10.45am
Class Location: Dey Hall 403
Office: Hamilton Hall 368
Office Hours:
Tuesdays, 11.00am – 12.00pm in person
Thursdays 11.00am – 12.00pm on Zoom

Course Description

Formal education has become nearly universal. In most countries in the world, it is compulsory until at least the age of 14. The average college graduate completes over 16 years of schooling and it has now become increasingly common for individuals to also add pre-school and post-graduate degrees for a total of 20 plus years of full-time schooling. Time spent in school is one of the most important formative experiences for most children and adolescents and we should all do well to carefully scrutinize the goals of education and the best methods to meet those goals.

Our course will explore the politics, philosophy, and economics of education, especially US education. The questions we will explore include:

- What should be the goals of K-12 education? Should it prepare individuals for the workforce, for leading autonomous lives, for being good citizens, or for being life-long learners? Can it simultaneously pursue all of the above?
- How should education resources and opportunities be distributed? Should everyone have access to the same quality of education or is it enough for everyone to get a sufficiently good education? Should we rely on market mechanisms or provision through the state? Should we prioritize those who struggle academically or those who are exceptionally successful?
- Who should make which decisions regarding education policy? What should be the role of local school boards and how should they be organized? What should be the role of teachers and teachers' unions? How much should the state and federal courts intervene in education policy?

Our primary focus will be the education system of the United States. During 2019-2020, 56.6 million students attended public and private primary and secondary schools in the United States. They were taught by 3.7 million teachers. The education budget for the year was \$720.9 billion (approximately 3.3% of GDP), with significant variation in per-pupil expenditure across states, districts, and schools. To properly discuss the best education policies for this complex system, students will have to master material from economics (e.g. human capital theory, signaling theory, social mobility), from political science (e.g. public choice, legislative politics, judicial politics, and public policy), and from political philosophy (e.g. distributive justice, democratic theory, liberal political theory).

Pre-Requisites

This is a 400-level course that is aimed at advanced undergraduates and graduate students. Students are expected to have some prior coursework in political theory, philosophy, political science or its equivalent. It is assumed that you have written at least 3- to 5-page academic essays in your past coursework and are familiar with the basics of academic referencing and essay writing.

If you are concerned about whether taking this course this semester is the right fit for you, please send an email or schedule a meeting during office hours.

Course Materials

All course materials will be provided on the course Sakai page. Students are advised to print the readings and bring them to class for reference and discussion.

Grading

Your overall grade will be determined as follows:

- **Participation: 25%**

- In-class participation: 10%

For in-class participation, note the attendance policy below.

- Weekly forum post: 15%

Students are expected to contribute a weekly 200- to 300-word response to the week's readings. These responses will be posted on the Sakai forum. Half the students will be assigned to the Tuesday readings and be expected submit their responses by 11.59pm on Mondays. The other half will be assigned to the Thursday readings and be expected to submit their responses by 11.59pm on Wednesdays. Students need to complete a total of 10 responses for full credit. (I will designate one Tuesday that will "count as a Thursday" since there are 11 Tuesdays and 9 Thursdays.)

- **Midterm exam: 30%**

The questions will be handed out a week in advance (on March 3rd). The students complete the exams at home by March 10th. You will have a choice of 3 out of 6 questions to answer in the form of short essays of about 750 words. You will have to answer one question each about section 1 (economics), section 2 (philosophy), and section 3 (politics) of education. The midterm will cover all materials up to and including the class on teachers' unions on March 3rd.

- **Final exam: 30%**

The final exam takes place in class and includes material from the special topics section of the course, as well as the final weeks from section 3 (politics) not covered by the midterm exam. It includes a few short answer questions and a choice of 2 out of 3 essay prompts. The exam should take approximately 2 hours to complete, but you will have 3 hours at your disposal.

- **Educational Reform Presentation and Write-Up: 15%**

Students will propose one specific way to improve the current US education system. The final product will be (a) a 5-minute presentation followed by a 5-minute Q&A and (b) a 1,000-word memo outlining the proposal. Further instructions are distributed in class.

Grading Scale

A	94.00–100.00	B	83.00–86.99	C	73.00–76.99	D	60.00–66.99
A–	90.00–93.99	B–	80.00–82.99	C–	70.00–72.99	F	0–59.99
B+	87.00–89.99	C+	77.00–79.99	D+	67.00–69.99		

Note: I will not round up any grades.

Unless I make a note otherwise in my feedback to you, response grades will be less nuanced than midterm and final paper grades. Posts will be graded as follows:

An excellent post will receive an A (95).

A good post will receive a B (85).

A post that is satisfactory, but barely so, will receive a C (75).

Posts that show limited or no familiarity with the reading will receive a D (65).

Lack of a post receives an F (50).

Late posts will not be accepted.

Spring 2022 Course Delivery

As long as it is possible to do so safely, we will be meeting in person this semester. I understand the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic may require changes to this plan and will be monitoring the situation closely. If I need to change the format of the course temporarily due to outbreaks of illness, I will announce this via email and the course Sakai site.

Attendance

The success of our class depends on everyone's consistent and informed participation in discussion and on building trust and a sense of community. This requires regular attendance. However, the pandemic and the stresses of daily life can sometimes be overwhelming. I therefore allow you two absences this semester – no questions asked. I also encourage you to stay home and get tested if you show any of the symptoms listed at <https://carolinatogether.unc.edu/symptom-monitoring/>

I offer the option of making up classes missed due to COVID concerns or due to approved university absences through written responses to the class' discussion question or questions. Please email me to discuss the specific questions you should address on any particular day.

Mask Use Policy

This semester, while we are in the midst of a global pandemic, all enrolled students are required to wear a mask covering your mouth and nose at all times in our classroom. This requirement is to protect our educational community—your classmates and me—as we learn together. If you choose not to wear a mask, or wear it improperly, I will ask you to leave immediately, and I will submit a report to the [Office of Student Conduct](#). At that point you will be disenrolled from this course for the protection of our educational community. Students who have an authorized accommodation from Accessibility Resources and Service have an exception. For additional information, see [Carolina Together](#).

Honor Code

The Honor Code is in effect in this class. I am committed to treating Honor Code violations seriously and urge you to become familiar with its terms set out at <http://instrument.unc.edu>. If you have questions, it is your responsibility to ask about the Code's application

Plagiarism

Plagiarism of any kind will not be tolerated. It is in your interest to keep a careful record of any resources you use in research and writing. Always cite any resource that you use. Do not re-use papers you have written for past classes.

Electronics Policy

You can use your laptop for the purposes of note taking or other specified class-related activities. To prevent distractions to you and other students, the use of other mobile devices (e.g., cell phones) is prohibited. If you are using a mobile device for non-class-related activities, I will ask you to put it away. In the case of repeated violations of this policy, I reserve the right to confiscate your mobile device and return it to you at the end of class.

PPE Events

During the year, there will also be a variety of PPE talks that complement our course. I encourage you to attend any talks or seminars that you can include in your schedule. Attending an event this semester and posting a short (200-300 word) response can improve your participation grade by up to 1/3 of a letter grade (This does not apply if you already have an A in participation). Details are available on [our PPE website](#).

Accessibility Resources and Services

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in barriers to fully accessing University courses, programs and activities. Accommodations are determined through the Office of Accessibility Resources and Service (ARS) for individuals with documented qualifying disabilities in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. See the ARS Website for contact information: <https://ars.unc.edu> or email ars@unc.edu.

Further Resources and Policies

See the final page of the syllabus for more information.

Proposed Topics and Texts
(subject to change at any time)

Topics	Dates	Readings and Topics
Introduction	Tu (01/11)	No required readings

Section 1. The Economics of Education

Human Capital	Th (01/13)	Gary Becker, “The Age of Human Capital” Gary Becker, “Human Capital and the Economy” <i>Optional:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gary Becker, “The Economic Way of Looking at Life”• Lang and Kropp "Human Capital versus Sorting: The Effects of Compulsory Attendance Laws"
Signaling	Tu (01/18)	Bryan Caplan, <i>The Case Against Education</i> , chapter 1 <i>Optional:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bryan Caplan, <i>The Case Against Education</i>, chapters 3 & 4• Econtalk: Bryan Caplan on College Signaling and Human Capital• Andrew Weiss, “Human Capital vs. Signaling Explanations of Wages”• Arcidiacono, Bayer and Hizmo, "Beyond Signaling and Human Capital: Education and the Revelation of Ability"
Economics of Identity	Th (01/20)	Akerlof and Kranton, <i>Identity Economics</i> (chapter 6) <i>Optional:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Akerlof and Kranton, “Identity and Schooling”
Social Mobility	Tu (01/25)	Raj Chetty et al, “Mobility Report Cards” (Non-Technical Summary) Raj Chetty et al, “Income Segregation and Intergenerational Mobility Across Colleges” (Non-Technical Summary) Freakonomics: “ Is the American Dream Really Dead? ” (40 minutes) <i>Optional:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Raj Chetty et al, “Income Segregation and Intergenerational Mobility Across Colleges in the United States” (full paper)• Raj Chetty et al, “• Jessica McCrory Calarco, “Coached for the Classroom: Parents’ Cultural Transmission and Children’s Reproduction of Educational Inequalities”

Teacher Effectiveness Th (01/27) Education Next Symposium:

- Chetty, Friedman, and Rokoff, “Great Teachers”
- Four responses

Freakonomics: “[Is America’s Education Problem Really Just a Teacher Problem?](#)” (38 minutes)

Optional:

- Raj Chetty et al, “Measuring Teacher Effectiveness II”
- Raj Chetty et al, “Measuring Teacher Effectiveness I”

Political Economy Tu (02/01) Paglayan, “The Non-Democratic Roots of Mass Education”

Optional

- Ben Ansell, *From the Ballot to the Blackboard* (chapter 4)

NOTE: We will be considering Tuesday, February 1st as a Thursday for the purpose of forum posting. Only those in the Thursday group should post on the forum that day.

No Class on February 3rd – PPE Society Meeting.

Section 2: The Philosophy of Education

Equality Tu (02/08) Brighthouse and Swift, “Equality, priority, and positional goods”

Optional

- Brighthouse and Swift, "Putting educational equality in its place,"
- Koski and Reich, "When 'adequate' isn't: the retreat from equity in education law and policy and why it matters”

Sufficiency Th (02/10) Debra Satz, "Equality, adequacy, and education for citizenship"

Optional:

- Elizabeth Anderson, "Fair opportunity in education: a democratic equality perspective”
- Alexandra Oprea, “Inadequate for Democracy”

Social Mobility Tu (02/15) Jennifer Morton, *Moving Up without Losing Your Way* (Introduction and chapter 1)

Optional:

- Gina Shouten and Harry Brighthouse, “Redistributing Education among the Less Advantaged: A Problem for Principles of Justice?”
- James Tooley, “Why Harry Brighthouse is nearly right about the privatisation of education”

Meritocracy Th (02/17) Michael Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit* (Introduction and chapter 4)

Optional:

- Frederick de Boer, *The Cult of Smart* (chapter 3)

Democracy Tu (02/22) Danielle Allen, *Education and Equality* (chapter 2)

Optional:

- Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education* (chapter 2)

Section 3. The Politics of Education

Local School Boards Th (02/24) Education Next Forum: “The Future of School Boards”

Optional:

- Deborah Land, “Local School Boards Under Review: Their Role and Effectiveness in Relation to Students’ Academic Achievement”
- Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education* (chapter 5)
- Macartneya and Singleton, “School boards and student segregation”
- Berkman and Plutzer, *Ten Thousand Democracies: Politics and Public Opinion in America’s School Districts* (selections)

State and Federal Courts Tu (03/01) Michael Rebell, *Courts and Kids* (chapters 1, 2)

Optional:

- Douglas Reed, *On Equal Terms* (chapters 1, 2)
- Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education* (chapter 4)

Teachers’ Unions Th (03/03) Terry Moe, *Special Interest* (chapter 1)

Optional:

- Finger and Hartney, “Financial Solidarity: the Future of Unions in the post-*Janus* Era”
- Terry Moe, *Special Interest* (chapters 2, 3)
- Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education* (chapter 3)

Take-home midterm handed out on Thursday, March 3rd.
Due on Thursday, March 10th at 11.59pm.

Vouchers Tu (03/08) Helen Ladd, "School Vouchers: A Critical View"

Optional:

- Epple, Romano and Uruquiola "School Vouchers: A Survey of Literature"

Charter Schools Th (03/10) Econtalk: [Diane Ravitch on Slaying Goliath](#) (62 minutes)

Optional:

- Econtalk: [Sarah Carr on Charter Schools, Educational Reform, and Hope Against Hope](#) (60 minutes)
- Angrist et al "Explaining Charter School Effectiveness"
- Thomas et al "Inputs and impacts in charter schools: KIPP Lynn"
- Eric Bettinger, "The Effect of Charter Schools on Charter Students and Public Schools"

Spring Break from March 11th to March 20th

Private Schools Tu (03/22) Adam Swift, *How Not to be a Hypocrite* (introduction, chapter 3)

Optional:

- Adam Swift, "How not to defend private schools"
- John White, "Justifying Private Schools"

Section 4: Special Topics Education Debates

Debate:
Markets in
Education Th (03/24) Herbert Gintis, "The Political Economy of School Choice"
Education Next: "Choice, Flexibility, Accountability Drive School Improvement"

Optional:

- Harry Brighouse, "The Case Against Markets in Education"
- David Schmitz, "Human Capital in the 21st Century (Intro)"
- David Schmitz, "Charter Schools"
- Abdulkadiroglu et al. "Free to Choose: Can School Choice Reduce Student Achievement?"

<i>Debate:</i> School Accountability	Tu (03/29)	Nicholas Tampio, “Democracy and National Education Standards” <i>Optional:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nicholas Tampio, <i>Common Core</i> (chapters 1 and 2) • Brian Jacob, "Accountability, Incentives and Behavior: The Impact of High-stakes Testing in the Chicago Public Schools" • Sarah Anzia, “The Backlash Against School Choice and Accountability Policies: The Organizations and Their Politics” • Brighthouse, Ladd, Loeb, Swift, <i>Educational Goods</i> (chapter 6)
<i>Debate:</i> Student Debt	Th (03/31)	Brennan and Magness, <i>Cracks in the Ivory Tower</i> (chapter 11) The Conversation: “The morality of canceling student debt” Planet Money: The Market for Student Loans (10 minutes) <i>Optional:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barrow and Malamud, “Is College a Worthwhile Investment?” • Bryan Caplan, <i>The Case Against Education</i> (chapter 7) • Oreopoulos and Salvanes, “Priceless: The Nonpecuniary Benefits of Schooling”
<i>Debate:</i> Mental Health	Tu (04/05)	Jean Twenge, <i>iGen</i> (chapter 4) Lukianoff and Haidt, “The Coddling of the American Mind” NPR: The Silent Epidemic
<i>Debate:</i> School Safety	Th (04/07)	EdNext: “Proving the School-to-Prison Pipeline” NCSL: “How States are Addressing School Safety”

No Class on Thursday, April 14th (Wellness Day)

Section 5: Presentations of Education Reform Proposals

Groups 1	Tu (04/12)
Groups 2	Th (04/19)
Groups 3	Tu (04/21)
Groups 4	Th (04/26)

Final Exam: Tuesday, May 3rd, 8am to 11am (in class)

Final Exam Week Review Session: Thursday, April 28th, 9.30am to 10.45am

Final Exam Office Hours: Monday, May 2nd, 12pm to 2pm

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Information for Undergraduate Classes
Spring 2022

Attendance Policy

University Policy: As stated in the University's Class Attendance Policy, no right or privilege exists that permits a student to be absent from any class meetings, except for these University Approved Absences:

1. Authorized University activities
2. Disability/religious observance/pregnancy, as required by law and approved by Accessibility Resources and Service and/or the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (EOC)
3. Significant health condition and/or personal/family emergency as approved by the Office of the Dean of Students, Gender Violence Service Coordinators, and/or the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (EOC).

Class Policy: Instructors may work with students to meet attendance needs that do not fall within University-approved absences. For situations when an absence is not University approved (e.g., a job interview or club activity), instructors determine their own approach to missed classes and make-up assessment and assignments.

University Approved Absence Office (UAAO): The UAAO website provides information and FAQs for students and faculty related to University Approved Absences.

Note: Instructors have the authority to make academic adjustments without official notice from the UAAO. In other words, it is not required for instructors to receive a University Approved Absence notification in order to work with a student. In fact, instructors are encouraged to work directly with students when possible.

Acceptable Use Policy

By enrolling as a student in this course, you agree to abide by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill policies related to the acceptable use of IT systems and services. You may be asked to participate in online discussions or other online activities that may include personal information about you or other students in the course. The rights and protection of other participants are protected under the UNC-Chapel Hill [Information Technology Acceptable Use Policy](#), which covers topics related to using digital resources, such as privacy, confidentiality, and intellectual property.

Consult the University website “[Safe Computing at UNC](#)” for information about the data security policies, updates, and tips on keeping your identity, information, and devices safe.

Counseling and Psychological Services

CAPS is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body through timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services, whether for short or long-term needs. Go to their website: <https://caps.unc.edu/> or visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health Services building for a walk-in evaluation to learn more.

Title IX Resources

Any student who is impacted by discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, or stalking is encouraged to seek resources on campus or in the community. Reports can be made online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>. Please contact the University’s Title IX Coordinator (Elizabeth Hall, interim–titleixcoordinator@unc.edu), Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (reportandresponse@unc.edu), Counseling and Psychological Services (confidential), or the Gender Violence Services Coordinators (gvsc@unc.edu; confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at safe.unc.edu.

Policy on Non-Discrimination

The University is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and to ensuring that educational and employment decisions are based on individuals’ abilities and qualifications. Consistent with this principle and applicable laws, the University’s [Policy Statement on Non-Discrimination](#) offers access to its educational programs and activities as well as employment terms and conditions without respect to race, color, gender, national origin, age, religion, creed, genetic information, disability, veteran’s status, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Such a policy ensures that only relevant factors are considered and that equitable and consistent standards of conduct and performance are applied.

If you are experiencing harassment or discrimination, you can seek assistance and file a report through the Report and Response Coordinators (see contact info at safe.unc.edu) or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#), or online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>.

Learning Center

The UNC Learning Center is a great resource both for students who are struggling in their courses and for those who want to be proactive and develop sound study practices to prevent falling behind. They offer individual consultations, peer tutoring, academic coaching, test prep programming, study skills workshops, and peer study groups. If you think you might benefit from their services, please visit them in SASB North or visit their website to set up an appointment: <http://learningcenter.unc.edu>.

Writing Center

The Writing Center is located in the Student and Academic Services Building and offers personalized writing consultations as well as a variety of other resources. This could be a wonderful resource to help with your writing assignments in this course (and any assignments in your other courses). You do not need a complete draft of your assignment to visit; they can help you at any stage! You can chat with someone in the writing center or set up an appointment on their website: <http://writingcenter.unc.edu>.