

# Educational Studies 308: Cities, Suburbs, and Schools

Trinity College      Fall 2005  
W 1:15-3:55pm      LSC 138  
<http://www.trincoll.edu/depts/educ>

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## Theme for Fall 2005: Who Chooses Schools and Why?

### Description:

How did city dwellers' dreams of better schooling, along with public policy decisions in housing and transportation, contribute to the rise of suburbia in the twentieth century? How do city-suburban disparities affect teaching and learning in classrooms today? What promise do *Sheff v O'Neill* remedies for racial isolation, such as magnet schools at the Learning Corridor, hold for the future? Students will investigate these questions while developing their skills in oral history, ethnographic fieldwork, and geographical information system (GIS) software. Community learning experiences will be integrated with seminar readings and research projects.

Prerequisite: Ed 200 or Psyc 225 or the Cities Program or permission of instructor.

### Objectives:

This upper-level undergraduate course is partly a reading seminar and partly a research workshop. One week, we closely examine a noteworthy text on the historical or contemporary dimensions of cities, suburbs, and schools. During the following weeks, students plan and conduct small-scale group research projects to test the author's claims in the metropolitan Hartford area. By merging together these two halves of the course, advanced undergraduates become better prepared to propose and conduct an independent research project in their senior year. For examples of student research projects that have emerged from this course, see the Cities, Suburbs, and Schools research project website (<http://www.trincoll.edu/depts/educ/css>).

### Readings:

Will be made available in seminar

### **Projects and Assessment:**

Students will participate in two group research projects to test claims from syllabus readings to the metropolitan Hartford area on the common theme, "Who Chooses Schools and Why?"

#### **Project 1: Quantitative Analysis -- Who Chooses Schools and Why?**

Janelle Scott's edited volume, *School Choice and Diversity: What the Evidence Says* (2005), includes several empirically-based chapters that investigate whether public and private school choice programs (such as vouchers, charters, magnet schools, etc.) increase or decrease student diversity. Using basic quantitative methods (Excel and ArcGIS software; no statistics background required), we will investigate the demographics of school choice program participants in the metropolitan Hartford region and how they compare to the population at large.

Seminar discussion facilitators (assigned to individuals or pairs for specific readings/tasks)	5
Research method exercises (using local data and building on methods taught in seminar)	10
Paper #1 (a 5-to-7 page paper that addresses the research question based on syllabus readings and data collected in metro Hartford)	20
Participation in "Who Chooses Schools & Why?" conference Tuesday, October 11th (noon - 3pm) Trinity Days	10

#### **Project 2: Qualitative Analysis -- Who Chooses Schools and Why?**

Courtney Bell, an assistant professor of education at the University of Connecticut, has conducted in-depth interviews with parents in the Detroit area to explore which school choices they do -- and do not -- consider, and why. Using basic qualitative methods, we will conduct a set of parallel interviews to learn whether or not similar patterns exist in the metropolitan Hartford region, by conducting interviews with prospective parents applying to private schools through Mayor Eddie Perez's independent schools initiative.

Seminar discussion facilitators (assigned to individuals or pairs for specific readings/tasks)	5
Research method exercises (using local evidence and building on methods taught in seminar)	10
Paper #2 (a 5-to-7 page paper that addresses the research question based on syllabus readings and data collected in metro Hartford)	20

## **Final Project:**

20

Students must declare their choices about the final project in mid-semester

Option X: Design and carry out a plan for a **public research presentation** drawn from one of our seminar projects. For example, you may arrange an off-campus oral presentation with a school, administrative team, parent organization, community group, etc. Or you may write and submit an essay to a local school newsletter, Trinity Tripod, Hartford Courant, etc. Students who choose this option must submit a 5-page paper that includes the text of your presentation/essay, the decisions you made in designing it, and reflections on how audiences responded to it.

Option Y: Design and carry out a **community outreach project** that expands upon one of the topics from our seminar. For example, you could provide user-friendly data for a school or community organization, volunteer with a city-suburb regionalization group, or organize a political protest. Students who choose this option must submit a 5-page paper that describes the outreach project, reflects on its lessons, and links this experience to at least one of our seminar readings.

Option Z: Design and write a **research proposal** for a senior-level project on any topic related to this seminar. Students who choose this option must submit a 5-page research proposal that identifies a specific research question and the most appropriate qualitative, quantitative, and/or historical research methods and primary source materials to answer it. This option is not open to current seniors.

In all cases, students will give informal presentations of their final projects at the last seminar meeting and submit their final papers shortly thereafter.

## **General:**

Be advised that adequate work earns a C, good work earns a B, and outstanding work earns an A in this class. Students are expected to engage in academic honesty in all forms of work for this course. If this is unclear to you, ask me for clarification.

The penalty for overdue assignments will be 10% for every 12-hour period beyond the deadline, with exceptions granted only for documented medical or family emergencies. Please notify me during the first week if you require any special accommodations.

Your classmates and I expect your regular and prompt attendance at every session, since we rely upon our collective efforts to succeed in this project-based seminar.

**Seminar schedule:**

IMPORTANT NOTE: Since this is a project-based research seminar involving various community partners and resources, the instructor may revise the schedule at any time.

**Sept 7th                      Project #1 - Quantitative Research**

In seminar:

Introduction to syllabus and project #1

Introduction to TA Naralys Estevez and school choice data analysis project

What do we currently know about metro Hartford public and private school choice?

**Sept 14th**

Read:

Scott, Janelle T., ed. *School Choice And Diversity: What The Evidence Says*. Teachers College Press, 2005, selected chapters:

a) Janelle Scott, "Introduction: The Context of School Choice and Student Diversity," facilitated by the instructor

b) Hamilton Lankford and James Wyckoff, "Chapter 1: Why Are Schools Racially Segregated? Implications for School Choice Policies," facilitated by \_\_\_\_\_

c) Amy Stuart Wells and Robert L. Crain, "Chapter 4: Where School Desegregation and School Choice Policies Collide: Voluntary Transfer Plans and Controlled Choice," facilitated by \_\_\_\_\_

Joel Best, *More Damned Lies and Statistics: How Numbers Confuse Public Issues* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), chapter 2.

Mark Monmonier. *How to Lie with Maps, second edition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, chapter 3 excerpts.

In seminar:

Introduction to Excel and Geographical Information System (ArcGIS) software

Distribute Excel and GIS research method exercise (part 1), DUE at next seminar

Distribute Project #1 Guidelines

**Sept 21st**

Read:

Selected articles on school choice from the *Hartford Courant*, including:

Robert Frahm, "Whites Mostly Shun City [Magnet] Schools," *Hartford Courant*, May 1, 2004.

Rachel Gottlieb, "Magnet Schools Attract Many," *Hartford Courant*, October 23, 2004.

. . . and more to come. . .

Discussion with Rachel Gottlieb, *Hartford Courant* journalist, facilitated by \_\_\_\_\_

In seminar:

Distribute Excel and GIS research method exercise (part 2), DUE at next seminar

**Sept 28th**

Read:

background material (TBA) on Children's Educational Opportunity Foundation and Mayor Eddie Perez's Independent Schools Initiative

Discussion with Don Wilson and Lucielle Nickerson, CEO Foundation, facilitated by \_\_\_\_\_

Barbara Q. Beaudin, "Interdistrict Magnet Schools and Magnet Programs in Connecticut: An Evaluation Report," Division of Evaluation and Research, Connecticut State Department of Education, March 2003; excerpts; downloaded from <http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/der/cmip/magnet.htm>, facilitated by \_\_\_\_\_

In seminar:

Continuation of Excel and GIS data analysis

**Oct 5th**

Paper #1 due at 10am; also bring hard copy to class

In seminar:

Discussion with Bruce Douglas, executive director, Capitol Region Education Council (CREC), and his colleagues

**Oct 11th (Trinity Day)**

"Who Chooses Schools and Why?" conference, noon - 3pm at Mather

**October 12th            Project #2 -- Qualitative Research**

In seminar:

Reflections on the conference

Preparations for qualitative interviews and research project #2

**October 19th**

Read:

Courtney Bell, "All Choices Created Equal?: How Good Parents Select 'Failing' Schools," unpublished journal article manuscript, September 2005.

Courtney Bell is an assistant professor of curriculum and instruction at the Neag School of Education at the University of Connecticut. She received her bachelor's degree in chemistry at Dartmouth College and her doctorate in the curriculum, teaching, and educational policy program at Michigan State University. Bell's research investigates how and why parents choose schools among the varying public, private, and religious educational institutions that are available to them. Based on interviews she conducted in Detroit, parents' preferences are deeply influenced by their cultural understandings of their children, schools, and communities.

Discussion with Courtney Bell, facilitated by \_\_\_\_\_

**October 26th**

Readings, guests, facilitators, and qualitative methods exercises TBA

**November 2nd**

Readings, guests, facilitators, and qualitative methods exercises TBA

**November 9th**

Readings, guests, facilitators, and qualitative methods exercises TBA

**November 16th**

Readings, guests, facilitators, and qualitative methods exercises TBA

Paper #2 due before Thanksgiving break

**Thanksgiving break -- no class on Nov 23rd**

**November 30th**

Read:

Jennifer Jellison Holme. "Buying Homes, Buying Schools: School Choice in the Social Construction of School Quality." *Harvard Educational Review* 72 (Summer 2002): 177-205.

In seminar:

Brainstorming about future research projects and proposals

**Dec 7th**

Last Seminar: Presentation of Final Projects-in-Progress

**Dec 9th**

Final paper DUE