EC 195
Political Economy of Education
University of Vermont
Spring 2016

Tuesday/Thursday
2:50-4:05pm
Waterman 427

Instructor: Anastasia Wilson
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Office Hours: 11:30am-12:30pm Tu/Th or by Appointment (Tuesday/Thursday)
Old Mill 236

Prerequisites: EC 11 and EC 12

Course Description

This course will explore and critique the role of education in modern capitalist economies through the lenses of public finance, labor economics, and political economy. We will discuss the economics of education at both the K-12 level and higher education. The course will begin with a basic overview of human capital theory and its critiques, from Beckerian models of human capital to heterodox approaches. We will examine the history of education in the United States, and how compulsory schooling and investment in higher education played key roles in changing labor markets and working life. We will then look at contemporary issues in education such as privatization, issues of inequality, for-profit institutions, and rising student indebtedness.

Academic Honesty

All students will be expected to follow UVM’s Code of Academic Integrity. Please review the policy: https://www.uvm.edu/policies/student/acadintegrity.pdf

Accommodations

If you need special accommodations for this course, please let the instructor know. We will arrange note taking for those requiring this, and students needed test taking accommodations are asked to arrange this with the Exam Proctoring Center. Further information is available on the ACCESS website: http://www.uvm.edu/aspprogs

Required Materials

Blackboard

I will post articles and resources for the course on Blackboard. There will also be required discussion posts on Blackboard each week for the required readings.
Suggested Books

While I will post all of our required readings on Blackboard, I would suggest purchasing the following books, if you are inclined to do so. We will be reading select chapters, so any edition should work:

- Claudia Goldin & Lawrence Katz, *The Race Between Education and Technology*
- Samuel Bowles & Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America*
- Suzanne Mettler, *Degrees of Inequality*
- Nancy Folbre, *Saving State U*
- Anya Kamenetz, *Generation Debt*

Requirements & Grading

We will have a combination of an exam, a research paper, Blackboard discussions, and in-class participation as the graded requirements.

*In-Class Midterm Exam 30%*
- We will have one in-class midterm exam, for which you will be allowed one sheet of handwritten notes. Study questions will be provided beforehand. The format of the exam will be short essay questions, to be completed in one class period (75 minutes).

*Blackboard Discussion Posts 20%*
- You will be required each week to both write one discussion post, and respond to one of your classmate’s posts on Blackboard before we meet on Tuesdays (i.e. due each Monday, a post and response). Your post will be a response, comments, or question regarding that week’s readings. Some week’s discussions will have a specific prompt on Blackboard.

*Research Paper Outline 20%*
- In lieu of an exam, you will be required to write a 10-page final research project on a relative topic of your choice (or assigned, if you wish). An outline of your research paper will be due 2/3 of the way through the semester, which should include your topic, thesis idea, and relevant resources you will be using the write the paper (journal articles, research reports, etc.) and be about 2-3 pages.

*Final Research Paper 20%*
- A final 10-page paper will be due on the last day of class.

*In-Class Participation 10%*
- Participation in our class discussions will be required. Please use the discussion posts a way to prepare for participation in our classroom. Come prepared to ask questions, respond to other students, and comment on the course materials.
The Political Economy Approach to Understanding Education

Week 1

1/19 Intro to Political Economy: Understanding Class, Race, & Gender

   Watch: Professor Rick Wolff on How Class Works: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=euH3pAuLuko

1/21 Introduction to Schooling in Capitalist America

   Guest Lecture: Adam Wright on Achievement Gaps

   Reading: Bowles & Gintis, Chapter 1, Beyond the Educational Frontier: The Great American Dream Freeze in Schooling in Capitalist America

Week 2

1/26 Schooling in Capitalist America

   Reading: Bowles & Gintis, Chapter 3, At the Root of the Problem: The Capitalist Economy in Schooling in Capitalist America

1/28 Schooling in Capitalist America and The Hidden Curriculum

   Reading: Bowles & Gintis, Chapter 3, Continued

    (Optional) Bowles & Gintis, Chapter 5, Education and Personal Development: The Long Shadow of Work in Schooling in Capitalist America

Labor Economics & Human Capital Theory

Week 3

2/2 Human Capital Theory


2/4 What Does Human Capital Do? Signalling, Filtering, & Skills

Week 4

2/9 Empirical Labor Economics: Micro and Macro Perspectives

*Choose One:*


2/11 Human Capital Theory from Heterodox Perspectives


Week 5

2/16 Review for Exam 1, One Page (Front/Back) of Notes

2/18 Exam 1 in class

*Early Childhood, Primary, and Secondary Schooling: Historical, Theoretical, and Empirical Approaches*

Week 6
2/23 Historical Context for Mass Schooling


2/25 Productivity and Returns on Investment in Education


Week 7

3/1 Town Meeting Day

3/3 Empirical Labor Economics and Recent Economic Trends, Continued


Week 8

3/15 Inequality & K-12: Achievement Gaps, Peer Effects, & Identity


3/17 Inequality & K-12 Continued


**Week 10**

3/22 Vouchers & Privatization


3/24 Vouchers & Privatization Continued

Watch: *Waiting for Superman* and Write Short Response

**Higher Education: The Golden Age of Human Capital, to Neoliberalism, For-Profits, and Student Debt**

**Week 11**

3/29 Intro to Higher Ed Issues


3/31 Higher Education in Historical Perspective


(Optional) Bowles and Gintis, Chapter 8, *The Transformation of Higher Education and the Emerging White-Collar Proletariat* in Schooling in Capitalist America

**Week 12**

4/5 Higher Education & Labor Market Outcomes
Is College Worth It? *The Economist*, April 2014:  


4/7 Labor Market Outcomes Continued

Reading: Disadvantaged Students Reap the Most Financial Return From College, Study Finds. *Science Daily*, 2010:  

http://www.asanet.org/images/journals/docs/pdf/asr/Apr10ASRFeature.pdf

Week 13
4/12 Public Higher Education

Mettler, Chapter 4, *From Pioneer to Slacker: The Rise and Decline of American Public Higher Education* in Degrees on Inequality

Folbre, Chapter 7, *Fiscal Hell* in Saving State U

4/14 Public Higher Education, Continued

Folbre, Chapter 6, *The Business Model* in Saving State U

Aaron Bady and Mike Konzcal. The Slow Death of Public Higher Education, *Dissent*, Fall 2012:  

Week 14

4/19 Student Debt

Reading: Kevin Carey, The Student Debt Crisis is Worse Than You Think, *NYTimes Upshot* Blog, October 2015:  
Anya Kamenetz, Chapter 2, *College on Credit* in Generation Debt

(Optional) Anya Kamenetz, Chapter 1, *Why Generation Debt?* in Generation Debt


4/21 Student Debt & Inequality


Week 15

4/26 For-Profit Higher Education

Reading: Mettler, Chapter 3, “Unscrupulous Profiteers”: The Struggle to Reform the For-Profit Colleges in Degrees of Inequality


(Optional) Mettler, Chapter 6, *How Many Talks: Political Influence in the Struggle to Regulate the For-Profits* in Degrees of Inequality

4/28 Student Loan Documentary

Watch: *Default- The Student Loan Documentary* and Short Written Response

Week 16

5/3 Course Wrap Up & Final Paper Due