**Syllabus**

**PLCY 85H**

**Reforming America’s Schools**

**Instructor**

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**Course meeting time and location:**Graham Memorial 0213

**Course Description and Goal**

This seminar will examine the role of schools and other institutions play in determining life chances, which educational interventions work well for economically and academically disadvantaged students, and what to do when institutions cease to work well. Students will learn how to analyze complex educational public policy problems while exploring questions of effectiveness, inequality, resource management, and politics.

The goal of the course is to encourage students to develop and apply their public policy analysis skills to the topic of school reform. By the end of the course, students will be able to analyze public policy problems in the field of school reform, critically evaluate social science evidence and claims, and interpret and critique educational policy research about school reform.

**Key Questions**

* How much of the educational reform problem lies within and outside the schoolhouse door? Can schools overcome the disadvantages of growing up poor in America, having inadequate health care, no pre-kindergarten experiences, etc.?
* What is the relationship between social inequality and the perception of the need for school reform? In a highly unequal society such as the U.S., will we always perceive the need for school reform given the large differences in where kids begin and end up?
* Who are the school reform actors and what do they control? Who are the stakeholders and what are their interests?
* What school reforms have worked well and which have not? Do school reforms generally work well or do they generally fail? How do we know if something worked or not? Do school reforms work well with some populations but not others?
* Is school reform possible in all cases? What should happen to schools that prove impervious to reform?

**Course Sakai Site**

The course Sakai site has a schedule of topics and links to selected readings. Please consult this regularly. Important notices about schedule changes and other operational details will be posted on Sakai. You are responsible for all information on the Sakai and will submit all assignments to it, so please check it several times a week throughout the semester.

**Course Expectations**

This course is designed to introduce students to policy analytic concepts and skills and then to practice applying them to educational policy issues. Students will have opportunities to practice each method through in-class discussions and writing assignments.

*Writing assignments* (**40** *points total)*

* **Personal Response Essay to Rich Hill Documentary (1,000 word limit, ~4 pages, double spaced) – Due January 21, to Sakai AND hard copy in class. (15 *points*)**
* **Research Paper on what is known about the effectiveness of a school reform approach (3,000 word limit, double spaced. ~12 pages) – Due April 19 to Sakai AND hard copy in class. (25 *points*)**
  + - **Optional: you may turn in a two-page topic statement and bibliography April 5. This will give you some feedback before writing the final paper.**

*Presentation of research papers* (**10** *points*)

* Students will be grouped by topic and will present during the final class sessions. Depending on the degree of overlap of projects, an additional class session may be necessary to fit in all presentations before the end of the term.

An in-class debate (**10** *points*)

* Teams of students will debate a controversial school reform issue. Using a debate scoring rubric, points will be awarded to each team based on instructor and student evaluation.

Research project (**20** *points*)

* Teams of students will undertake descriptive analysis of one of two topics:
  + Research project 2: Report on the types of charter schools, sources of financial support, and locations. Results presented to the class on March 8.
  + Research project 1: Report on trends in charter school achievement and percentage of poor, black, and white students. Results presented to the class on March 10.
* Within each project, small groups of students will tackle a small piece of the analysis (i.e., trends in students demographics). The results of each piece of analysis will be compiled into one complete research report.

*Professor discretion –* (**20** *points*)

* Attendance and in-class discussion quantity and quality.
* Students who do not attend the vast majority of class sessions will not receive a high grade in the class.
* We will create norms of discussion during the first week of class. A list of simple dos and don’ts we will try our best to follow during our time together.

**Required Books**

The course has two required books that you may purchase online or at UNC Student Stores. All other readings will be provided to you in pdf form.

Duncan, G. J., & Murnane, R. J. (2014). *Restoring opportunity: The crisis of inequality and the challenge for American education*. Harvard Education Press.

Mehta, J., Schwartz, R. B., & Hess, F. M. (2012). *The futures of school reform*. Harvard Education Press.

**Debate Days**

Some classes are designated as “Debate Days” with a specific debate question. You must sign up for one debate via a wiki page. On these days your team must prepare both sides of a debate question. Sides of the debate will be assigned by coin toss at the beginning of class. Debate teams must be no fewer than three students and no more than four students. Your grade for this assignment will be determined by three factors: a) student audience evaluation of debate performance, b) professor evaluation of debate performance, and c) group member peer evaluations of your contribution to your team's preparation for the debate.

Rules: Team members must meet together to prepare. All members of the team must participate in the debate. You are strongly encouraged to do outside research to buttress your arguments. At the end of each class a secret ballot will determine who wins the debate and who wins best debater award. Two extra credit points will be awarded for the student who is deemed by the students and the professor as the best debater. In the case of a tie, one extra credit point will be awarded to each student. Points will be awarded to teams based on student votes and professor judgment. **Deadline for signing up for a debate team: TBA.**

For those not participating in the debate, think about which side of the debate you find most persuasive and why. At the end of the debate, you will handwrite answers to the following questions: 1) what was your view before the debate (the side you argued in your paper) 2) what is your view now (did you change your mind), 3) which team you think won the debate, and 4) which student should win the best debater award?

**Grading**

The following definitions of grades were adopted by the University Faculty and are the official basis for assigning and interpreting undergraduate grades. Note that they are based on performance, not on effort or on individual improvement:

**A** - Mastery of course content at the highest level of attainment that can reasonably be expected of students at a given stage of development. The A grade states clearly that the student has shown such outstanding promise in the aspect of the discipline under study that he/she may be strongly encouraged to continue.

**B** - Strong performance demonstrating a high level of attainment for a student at a given stage of development. The B grade states that the student has shown solid promise in the aspect of the discipline under study.

**C** - A totally acceptable performance demonstrating an adequate level of attainment for a student at a given stage of development. The C grade states that, while not yet showing any unusual promise, the student may continue to study in the discipline with reasonable hope of intellectual development.

**D** - A marginal performance in the required exercises demonstrating a minimal passing level of attainment for a student at a given stage of development. The D grade states that the student has given no evidence of prospective growth in the discipline; an accumulation of D grades should be taken to mean that the student would be well advised not to continue in the academic field.

**F** - For whatever reasons, an unacceptable performance. The F grade indicates that the student's performance in the required exercises has revealed almost no understanding of the course content. A grade of F should warrant an adviser's questioning whether the student may suitably register for further study in the discipline before remedial work is undertaken.

**Grade Appeal Policy**

I take the evaluation and grading of your work very seriously because I know that most of you take the preparation and writing of your work very seriously. If you think you deserve a higher grade on a non-revisable paper or exam, you may write a letter and explain why you would like to appeal the grade.  Before making an appeal, you should review the grading criteria and grading comments and re-read your paper/exam with these in mind.  After I receive your letter, I will re-read your paper/exam.  Depending on my re-reading, your grade may stay the same, be raised, or be lowered. This system is designed to minimize frivolous grade appeals and to ensure that you have carefully examined and reflected on the quality of your work before deciding to initiate a grade appeal.

**Late Assignments and Extensions**

Points will be subtracted from late assignments at a rate of ten percent of total point value per day. All assignments will submitted to sakai for a “date and time stamp” and then also in class in hard copy. The late assignment policy will apply to the date and time on which an assignment was received by sakai. If technical problems prevent you from submitting your first assignment to sakai, you will receive an automatic grace period of 24 hours provided you also submit documentation that your technical problem was genuine (e.g., a tech support “help ticket.”). No such grace periods will apply to assignments subsequent to the first. You are expected to verify that your assignments have been properly submitted.

If personal or extenuating circumstances prevent you from turning in an assignment on time, please contact me as soon as possible *in advance* of the deadline. Extensions will be handled on a case-by-case basis, but job interviews, work commitments, extracurricular activities, weddings, travel plans, and academic workload issues will not be considered valid reasons for extensions. These types of events are foreseeable, as are the assignment deadlines, so plan accordingly. Serious medical emergencies and other unexpected events, with documented proof, may be grounds for an extension.

**Staying Current**

To help improve the quality of discussion in class, I encourage you to form study groups and follow debates regarding current policy issues. To follow current policy debates:

1. Read Education Week, the trade publication for education leaders, researchers, and policymakers. [www.edweek.org](http://www.edweek.org/). Back issues available through the electronic resources of the UNC library’s website: <http://eresources.lib.unc.edu/ejournal/>.
2. Read EdNC, a new nonpartisan news and information site covering North Carolina education and links to national stories. [www.ednc.org](http://www.ednc.org)
3. Read education policy blogs. Here are some decent ones:
   1. <http://voices.washingtonpost.com/class-struggle/>
   2. <http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/Bridging-Differences/>
   3. <http://dianeravitch.net/category/education-reform/>
   4. <http://educationpolicy.air.org/blog/>
   5. <http://www.ncpolicywatch.com/>
   6. <https://www.nccivitas.org/category/publications/jwpci-newspaper/>
   7. <https://larrycuban.wordpress.com/>
4. Read the newspaper. Consider subscribing to The New York Times. They offer significantly reduced subscription rates for students. The New York Times ([http://www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com/)), and Washington Post (<http://washpost.com/index.shtml>) can be read on-line.  In some cases, you can even set things up so that articles will be sent directly to your e-mail account.
5. Review the Congressional Quarterly available in the library and at www.cq.com. CQ Weekly provides weekly updates and analysis of current legislative initiatives.
6. Examine congressional hearings and reports on a topic by using Thomas at <http://thomas.loc.gov/>.
7. Get to know what Congressional representatives and senators work on specific topics by reviewing their websites on <http://www.senate.gov/>, <http://www.house.gov/>).
8. Get to know the President’s viewpoint and the viewpoints of the President’s cabinet by visiting  <http://www.whitehouse.gov/>.

**Norms of academic behavior**

A primary purpose of class time is to enhance your understanding of material covered in the course reading. To state the obvious, to get the most out of these experiences you must come to class prepared and on time, get enough sleep the night before, and avoid any distractions that might hinder your learning. Failing to read outside of class, coming to class late, falling asleep and/or text messaging during class wastes your time, my time, and insults your fellow students. **During class time, please refrain from using electronic devices (phones, MP3 players, and laptops).** Anyone caught using an electronic device for an inappropriate use during lecture will have the device confiscated for the class period or asked to leave. Anyone caught twice for such an infraction will face further disciplinary action including low marks for class participation.

**Honor Code**

The honor code is on effect in this class and all others at the University. We treat Honor Code violations seriously and urge all students to become familiar with its terms set out at http://instrument.unc.edu. If you have questions, it is your responsibility to ask us about the Code’s application. It is assumed that all exams, written work and assignments submitted by you are in compliance with the requirements of the Honor Code.

**Academic Integrity/Plagiarism**

In order to ensure effective functioning of the Honor System at Carolina, all students are expected to:

a. Conduct all academic work within the letter and spirit of the Honor Code, which prohibits the giving or receiving of unauthorized aid in all academic processes. If unsure about the limits of group work versus individual work on papers and projects, ask the instructor. Do not guess.

b. Consult with faculty and other sources to clarify the meaning of plagiarism; to learn the recognized techniques of proper attribution of sources used in written work; and to identify allowable resource materials or aids to be used during completion of any graded work.

c. Sign a pledge on all graded academic work certifying that no unauthorized assistance has been received or given in the completion of the work.

d. Treat all members of the University community with respect and fairness.

e. Report any instance in which reasonable grounds exist to believe that a student has given or received unauthorized aid in graded work or in other respects violated the Honor Code. Reports should be made to the office of the Student Attorney General.

At UNC, plagiarism is defined as "the deliberate or reckless representation of another's words, thoughts, or ideas as one's own without attribution in connection with submission of academic work, whether graded or otherwise." ([*Instrument of Student Judicial Governance*](http://instrument.unc.edu/)*,* Section II.B.1.). Because it is considered a form of cheating, the Office of the Dean of Students can punish students who plagiarize with course failure and suspension. Full information can be found on the [UNC Honor System](http://honor.unc.edu/) page UNC Writing Center Handout: <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/resources/handouts-demos/citation/plagiarism>)

**Discrimination and Harassment**

Any form of violence or harassment, including sexual assault, relationship violence, and stalking is unwelcome at the University*.* If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can find the appropriate UNC resources at <http://sexualassaultanddiscriminationpolicy.unc.edu/>.

**Accessibility Resources & Service**

The Office of Accessibility Resources & Service provides services and reasonable accommodations to currently enrolled undergraduate and graduate/professional students with disabilities. Their mission is to provide students with disabilities equal access to the services, programs and activities of the University so that they may, as independently as possible, meet the demands of University life. ARS determines reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, to provide students with disabilities with equal access to the opportunities available to them at Carolina as independently as possible. ARA can be reached at SASB (Student and Academic Services Building), Suite 2126, 450 Ridge Road, 919-962-8300 or [accessibility@unc.edu](mailto:accessibility@unc.edu). For more information, see <https://accessibility.unc.edu/>.

**Course Schedule, Reading Selections, and Other Assigned Material**

T 1/12 Course Introduction

**Sources of Inequality in Educational Outcomes**

Th 1/14 Duncan, G. J., & Murnane, R. J. (2014). *Restoring opportunity: The crisis of inequality and the challenge for American education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press. Chapters 1 & 2.

T 1/19 Duncan & Murnane (2014), Chapter 3.

Reardon, S. F. (2011). Chapter 5: The widening academic achievement gap between the rich and the poor: New evidence and possible explanations. In G.J. Duncan & R. J. Murnane, G. J. (Eds.), *Whither Opportunity* (pp. 91 - 116). New York, NY: Russel Sage Foundation.

Th 1/21 (Discussion of) Rich Hill Documentary ( <http://amzn.to/1TPN5uK> )

T 1/26 Duncan & Murnane (2014), Chapters 4 and 5.

Th 1/28 Henig, J., Malone, H. J. & Reville, P. (2012). Chapter 5: Addressing the Disadvantages of Poverty: Why Ignore the Most Important Challenge of the Post-Standards Era? In J. Mehta, R.B. Schwartz & F.M. Hess (Eds.), *The futures of school reform* (pp. 119 - 149). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Curto et al (2011). Chapter 23: It May Not Take a Village: Increasing Achievement Among the Poor. In G.J. Duncan & R. J. Murnane, G. J. (Eds.), *Whither Opportunity* (pp. 483 - 500). New York, NY: Russel Sage Foundation.

**Debate Day**

Question: “Is it possible to make significant progress on school reform by focusing on students’ in-school experiences alone?”

**Structural Reform and the Technical Core of Teaching and Learning**

T 2/2 Elmore, R. F. (2004). Chapter 1: Getting to Scale with Good Educational Practice.In *School reform from the inside out: Policy, practice, and performance* (pp. 7 - 39). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Elmore, R. F. (2004). Chapter 6: Change and Improvement in Educational Reform.In *School reform from the inside out: Policy, practice, and performance* (pp. 211 - 226). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Th 2/4 Cuban, L. (2013). Chapter 5: Structural changes and reforming teaching practices. In *Inside the black box of classroom practice: Change without reform in American education* (pp. 121 - 151). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Cuban, L. (2013). Chapter 6: Why so many structural changes in schools and so little reform in teacher practice? In *Inside the black box of classroom practice: Change without reform in American education* (pp. 155 - 187). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

T 2/9 Kennedy, M. M. (2005). Chapter 1: How teachers think about their practices? In *Inside teaching* (pp. 1 - 30). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Kennedy, M. M. (2005). Chapter 8: The problem of reform. In *Inside teaching* (pp. 225 - 235). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Th 2/11 Reports on Student Interviews/Observations of Teachers

**Comprehensive School Reform**

T 2/16 Duncan & Murnane (2014), Chapters 6 and 7.

Th 2/18 Borman, G. D., Hewes, G. M., Overman, L. T., & Brown, S. (2003). Comprehensive school reform and achievement: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, *73*(2), 125–230.

T 2/23 Hollands, F., Bowden, A. B., Belfield, C., Levin, H. M., Cheng, H., Shand, R., … Hanisch-Cerda, B. (2014). Cost-Effectiveness Analysis in Practice: Interventions to Improve High School Completion. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *36*(3), 307–326. http://doi.org/10.3102/0162373713511850

**Turning Around Chronically Low Performing Schools**

Th 2/25 Elmore, R. F. (2004). Chapter 7: Doing the Right Thing, Knowing the Right Thing to Do. In *School reform from the inside out: Policy, practice, and performance* (pp. 227 - 258). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

T 3/1 Herman, R., Dawson, P., Dee, T., Greene, J., Maynard, R., Redding, S., & Darwin, M. (2008). Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools. IES Practice Guide. NCEE 2008-4020. National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED501241>

De la Torre, M., Allensworth, E., Jagesic, S., Sebastian, J., Salmonowicz, M., Meyers, C., & Gerdeman, R. D. (2013). Turning around Low-Performing Schools in Chicago: Research Report*.* ERIC. Retrieved from http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED542565

**Debate Day**

Question: “Should policymakers attempt to reform chronically low performing schools or simply close them?”

**Market Competition and Evidence on Charter Schools**

Th 3/3 Moe, T. M. & Hill, P.T. (2012). Chapter 3: Moving to a Mixed Model: Without an Appropriate Role for the Market, the Education Sector Will Stagnate. In J. Mehta, R.B. Schwartz & F.M. Hess (Eds.), *The futures of school reform* (pp. 65 - 94). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

CREDO. (2013). National Charter School Study Executive Summary. Research Report. Stanford, CA: Stanford University.

**Charter Schools in North Carolina**

T 3/8 Student reports on the types of charter schools, sources of financial support, and locations

Th 3/10 Student reports on trends in charter school achievement and percentage of poor, black, and white students

**Spring Break March 14-18**

T 3/22 Tuttle, C. C., Gill, B., Gleason, P., Knechtel, V., Nichols-Barrer, I., & Resch, A. (2013). KIPP Middle Schools: Impacts on Achievement and Other Outcomes. Final Report. Mathematica Policy Research, Inc*.* Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED540912>. Executive summary only, pp. xiii-xx.

Lauen, D. L., Fuller, B., & Dauter, L. (2015). Positioning Charter Schools in Los Angeles: Diversity of Form and Homogeneity of Effects. *American Journal of Education*, *121*(2), 213–239. http://doi.org/10.1086/679391

Th 3/24 Arce-Trigatti, P., Harris, D. N., Jabbar, H., & Lincove, J. A. (2015). Many Options in New Orleans Choice System. *Education Next*, *15*(4).

Harris, D. "Good News for New Orleans." *Education Next* 15, no. 4 (2015).

Optional

Harris, D. (2013). The Post Katrina New Orleans School Reforms: Implications for National School Reform and Role of Government. Remarks delivered at University of Michigan Ford School of Public Policy. October 4, 2013.

Buerger, C., & Harris, D. (2015). How can decentralized systems solve system-level problems? An analysis of market-driven New Orleans school reforms. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *59*(10), 1246–1262.

**Debate Day**

Question: “Should state and district policymakers encourage charter school expansion?”

**Early College High Schools in North Carolina**

T 3/29 Edmunds, J. A., Willse, J., Arshavsky, N., & Dallas, A. (2013). Mandated Engagement: The Impact of Early College High Schools. *Teachers College Record*, *115*(7), 1 - 31.

North Carolina New Schools. Changing the World through Early College High Schools. October 21, 2013. (Intervention and Research Summary from NC New Schools)

http://ncnewschools.org/testimonials/video/nc-new-schools-overview-video/

Th 3/31 Lauen, D., Barrett, N., Fuller, S., Janda, L. (2015). Early Colleges at Scale: Impacts on Secondary and Postsecondary Outcomes. Working paper.

U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, What Works Clearinghouse. (2014, March). *WWC review of the report: Early college, early success: Early College High School Initiative impact study.* Retrieved from <http://whatworks.ed.gov>.

T 4/5 TBA

**Summary Assessments of the Current State of School Reform**

Th 4/7 City, E.A., Elmore, R. F. & Lynch, D. (2012). Chapter 6: Redefining Education. In J. Mehta, R.B. Schwartz & F.M. Hess (Eds.), *The futures of school reform* (pp. 151 - 176). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Hess, F.M. & Meeks, O. (2012). Chapter 4: “Unbundling” Schools and Schooling: Let’s Think More Flexibly About How to Structure Institutions and Jobs. In J. Mehta, R.B. Schwartz & F.M. Hess (Eds.), *The futures of school reform* (pp. 95 - 118). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

T 4/12 Mehta, J. (2012). Chapter 7: The Courage to Achieve Our Ambitions: Five Pathways for the Future. In J. Mehta, R.B. Schwartz & F.M. Hess (Eds.), *The futures of school reform* (pp. 177 - 210). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Th 4/14 Duncan & Murnane (2014), Chapter 9.

T 4/19 Discussion of

Waiting for Superman <http://amzn.to/1PiWRln> and

Education, Inc. Documentaries <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/educationinc>

**Student Projects and Presentations**

Th 4/21 Student project presentations

T 4/26 Student project presentations

Reading days: 4/28, 5/4