OBJECTIVES
This course gives students a critical introduction to the public institution they know best – the American school. You have already spent at least twelve years “studying” schools from the inside, though you have probably only considered a small piece of the broader education system. Public schools are one of the most important public policy levers for shaping society. We will examine the history and structure of public education in America. We will also study myriad topics related to creating “better schools”: recruiting and training teachers; charter schools and related institutional innovations; testing and accountability; school funding; racial and economic segregation. Overall, the course will explore how public education can contribute to a more informed, prosperous, and fair society.

The course will have four overlapping objectives:

1. Explore and discuss big social questions related to education.

2. Understand and appreciate the research methodologies for answering important empirical questions related to the topics in the course.

3. Engage policy experts in a way that elicits important information on our topics of study.

4. Integrate your views into a cogent, succinct policy memo.

Given the broad scope of the course, students should expect a heavy reading load.

CANVAS
There is a Canvas site for the course where announcements, readings, grades and other material related to the course will be posted.

READING
The required texts are available at Wheelock Books. All other readings will be posted on the Canvas site. You are responsible for doing all readings before the class for which they are assigned. Please note that for copyright reasons, you will only be able to access readings posted on Canvas from a computer recognized as part of the Dartmouth community.
RWIT
Since writing is an important part of the class, students are welcome to make use of RWIT in preparing memos and rewrites.

LAPTOPS
Laptops and other electronic devices will NOT be allowed in class or the discussion groups. If you have a disability that requires the use of a laptop, please see me and we will make an appropriate accommodation.

Required Texts:

James Clavell. The Children’s Story, Dell.


Paul Tough. Whatever It Takes: Geoffrey Canada’s Quest to Change Harlem and America, Mariner Books.


Kevin Carey. The End of College: Creating the Future of Learning and the University of Everywhere, Riverhead Books.


MEMOS
There are five memos to be completed during the course. Each individual memo has a maximum word limit of 1,000 words. The group memos have a limit of 1,500 words. This is a binding limit. The first two individual memos may be rewritten. The grade for the assignment is the average of the first and second drafts.

1. What is education? Evaluate your formal schooling so far, including your time at Dartmouth, and analyze situations in which that schooling has succeeded or failed based on your definition of education.

2. (Group Memo) Agree or Disagree: The American education system is fundamentally fair. If you disagree, explain why an unfair system persists.

3. Accountability: Explain the role that standardized tests should play in evaluating the performance of students (and therefore of teachers and schools).
4. Teachers: Evaluate how we recruit, hire, train, and pay public school teachers in America and propose a change in that process.

5. (Group Memo) Reform: Write a white paper directed to a district, a state, or the federal government proposing a specific education reform.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

- Quizzes (20%): There will be weekly quizzes on the assigned readings. The quizzes may or may not be announced in advance. The quizzes will be based on all reading since the last quiz was given.

- Class participation/attendance (20%): This is a class that depends on the informed participation of a broad swath of class members. Each student will be assigned to a discussion group. There will be a class participation grade based in part on the evaluations of your fellow group members.

- Memos (60%): The five policy memos will be the most important assignments in the class. This is the vehicle for incorporating the important ideas in the class into a meaningful and persuasive essay.

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1: WHAT IS EDUCATION?

Tuesday, January 5th
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.
INTRODUCTION

Reading:

Wednesday, January 6th
3:00 p.m. – 4:15 p.m.
Reading for discussion:

Thursday, January 7th
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.
GUEST: MICHELE TINE

Reading:
James Clavell. A Children’s Story

7:00 p.m. Film night: “Most Likely to Succeed” (Make up time: 3:00 p.m. on Friday, room TBD)

WEEK 2
THE AMERICAN SYSTEM

• 5:00 p.m., Monday, January 11th: Memo #1: What is education?

Tuesday, January 12th
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.

Reading:

Thursday, January 14th
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.

Reading:
Robert Putnam. Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis

WEEK 3
RACE AND SEGREGATION

Tuesday, January 19th
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.
GUEST: BRUCE SACERDOTE

Reading:

Wednesday, January 20th
3:00 p.m. – 4:15 p.m.

Reading for discussion:
This American Life #562 and #563: The Problem We All Live With, parts 1 and 2
Thursday, January 21st
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.

Reading:
Whatever It Takes: Geoffrey Canada’s Quest to Change Harlem and America

7:00 p.m. Film Night: “American Promise” (Make up screening Friday, 3:00 p.m., room TBD)

WEEK 4
SCHOOL READINESS AND INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS

• **5:00 P.M., MONDAY, JANUARY 25TH: MEMO #2: AGREE OR DISAGREE: THE AMERICAN EDUCATION SYSTEM IS FUNDAMENTALLY FAIR.**

Tuesday, January 26th
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.

Reading:
James J. Heckman. Giving Kids a Fair Chance (A Strategy that Works)

Wednesday, January 27th
3:00 p.m.—4:15 p.m.

Reading for Discussion:
“Back to School,” This American Life #474, September 14, 2012.

Thursday, January 28th
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 p.m.

Reading:
Amanda Ripley. The Smartest Kids in the World and How They Got That Way.

WEEK 5
ACCOUNTABILITY AND FUNDING

Tuesday, February 2nd
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.
Reading:
“No Child Left Behind Gets Left Behind,” The Economist, December 12, 2015.

Wednesday, February 3rd
3:00 p.m. – 4:15 p.m.

Reading for discussion:

Thursday, February 4th
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.
GUEST: REBECCA HOLCOMBE

Reading:
Hochschild and Scovronick. “School Finance Reform” in The American Dream and the Public Schools.

WEEK 6
TEACHERS

- 5:00 P.M., MONDAY, FEBRUARY 8th: MEMO #3: ACCOUNTABILITY: EXPLAIN THE ROLE THAT STANDARDIZED TESTS SHOULD PLAY IN EVALUATING THE PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS (AND THEREFORE OF TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS).

Tuesday, February 9th
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.

Reading:
Wednesday, February 10th
3:00 p.m. – 4:15 p.m.

Reading for discussion:

Thursday, February 11th
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.

GUEST: DOUG STAIGER

Reading:
Elizabeth Green. Building a Better Teacher.
“Ensuring Fair & Reliable Measures of Effective Teaching,” Policy and Practice Brief,

WEEK 7
THE FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

• 5:00 P.M., MONDAY, FEBRUARY 15TH: MEMO #4: TEACHERS: EVALUATE HOW WE RECRUIT, HIRE, TRAIN, AND PAY PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS IN AMERICA AND PROPOSE A CHANGE IN THAT PROCESS.

Tuesday, February 16th
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.

GUEST: PHIL HANLON

Reading:
Kevin Carey. The End of College: Creating the Future of Learning and the University of Everywhere.

Wednesday, February 17th
3:00 p.m. – 4:15 p.m.

Reading for discussion:

Thursday, February 18th
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.

Reading:
WEEK 8
SCHOOL CHOICE

Tuesday, February 23rd
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.

Reading:

Thursday, February 25th
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.
Film: “The Education of Michelle Rhee”

WEEK 9
POLITICS OF REFORM AND CHARTER SCHOOLS

Tuesday, March 1st
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.
GUEST: ROBIN STEANS

Reading:

Wednesday, March 2nd
3:00 p.m. – 4:15 p.m.

Reading for discussion:
“Two Steps Back,” This American Life #275, October 15, 2004.

Thursday, March 3rd
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.
GUEST: JULIA BOWEN

Reading:
• 5:00 p.m., Monday, March 7th: Memo #5: Reform: Write a white paper directed to a district, a state, or the federal government proposing a specific education reform.

Tuesday, March 8th
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.

Reading:
Fareed Zakaria. In Defense of a Liberal Education.

Wednesday, March 9th
3:00 p.m. – 4:15 p.m.

Bonus Memo and Discussion: In no more than 500 words, propose and explain a change to the Dartmouth curriculum (broadly construed) that would improve our liberal arts education.