

**SUBSTANTIVE AREA: Sociology of Education**

**AUTHORED BY: SOE Committee**  
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## **OVERALL SCOPE OF AND EXPECTATIONS FOR THE EXAM**

Sociologists of education are fundamentally interested in how education functions as an institution within and across societies. Below are some broad questions that researchers in this area seek to answer with theories and empirical research:

- What effects do schools and classrooms have on individuals and the society as a whole?
- Why are the historical and systemic causes of school expansion? What implications does school expansion have for society?
- Why do some students learn more and go further in school than others?
- How are school resources (as related to learning opportunities) allocated to students? Which school resources affect student achievement and attainment?
- How does the socio-demographic and academic composition of the school affect (a) the learning opportunities that students receive and (b) student achievement and attainment?
- How do peers and friendships affect student outcomes?
- How do families affect student outcomes?
- How do ascriptive factors such as race and gender affect students' learning opportunities, achievement, and attainment?
- How does the educational system sort individuals into different places in the labor market? How does schooling affect labor market outcomes?
- How do schools work as organizations and with what consequences for students, teachers, and school administrators?

Students will be expected to be familiar with key issues and the dominant theoretical perspectives and the latest empirical research in the field that inform these issues. Many of the issues are presented and discussed in the three Sociology of Education graduate seminars. If students have not taken these classes, they should know the themes and theoretical and empirical literature covered on the syllabi.

Researchers from other fields (e.g., economics, anthropology, psychology, education policy) focus on many of the same questions that sociologists of education study. This exam focuses on *sociological* perspectives and research on education. However, while students are not expected to master the relevant literature in these fields, they should be familiar with research from other disciplines when it clearly intersects with the research of sociologists. Finally, students should understand important methodological innovations and debates within our field of study. Examples includes: debates about the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to studying the same questions; debates about internal validity; debates about external validity; debates about measurement; etc.

## **EXAM PREPARATION**

### *USE OF READING LISTS*

The committee provides a general reading guide for students interested in taking this area. (See attached at the end of this document.)

### *REQUIRED/RECOMMENDED COURSES*

The department offers three courses that provide an overview of the sociology of education (Sociology of Education I, Sociology of Education II, and SOC 63281 Sociology of Higher Education). While the committee does not require that students take these three courses before taking the exam, students will be responsible for the material covered by these three courses, specifically the required and recommended readings on the course syllabi, which will lay the foundation for the exam.

### *EXAM FORMAT*

The exam consists of two days of questions to test students' knowledge of the field. The questions will require longer essay questions requiring you to provide a well-elaborated essay in which you demonstrate knowledge of both abstract sociological principles as well as concrete examples of research. Questions from past exams may appear again on future exams (perhaps with modifications), in addition to new questions. Students will not be asked to write possible exam questions.

On the first day, student will be asked to answer ONE REQUIRED long essay question on day one. The other section of day one will include essay questions with some choices, although

there will likely be a question that requires students to write an essay about the various methodologies and statistics for examining particular educational issues. For day two, students will be asked to select and answer TWO of three or four possible long essays.

#### *EXAM SCHEDULING*

The committee will write and offer ONLY ONE EXAM per semester. If students fail the exam, they must wait until the next semester before they may retake this exam.

#### *EXPECTATIONS REGARDING CITATIONS*

The committee prefers that students follow ASA guidelines regarding citations: author(s) and year of publication are preferable. Students need not memorize the titles of articles, but citing book titles is recommended.

#### *MISCELLANEOUS*

N/A

## **EXAM RESULTS**

#### *POLICIES REGARDING RE-WRITES*

Students will be assigned one of three grades for their exam: pass with distinction, pass, or fail. Students will **not** be allowed to rewrite parts of their exams in order to change a failing grade to a passing one.

#### *FEEDBACK*

After the committee renders its decision, the student will be notified of the results by e-mail. The student will then be asked to schedule a meeting with the committee chair to discuss both strengths and weaknesses of the students' performance. This meeting will be scheduled for all students, regardless of whether they pass or fail the exam. Other committee members may provide written feedback to each student, or they may set up a separate meeting to discuss the students' exam performance. This decision will be left at the discretion of faculty on the committee.

## STUDY GUIDE FOR THE SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION AREA EXAM

### COURSES

Know the issues, theoretical and empirical readings (required and optional) from the following three courses:

- *Sociology of Education I—Family and Ascriptive Issues*  
(recently taught by A. Langenkamp)
- *Sociology of Education II—School and Classroom Effects*  
(recently taught by M. Berends)
- *Sociology of Higher Education*  
(recently taught by M. Andrew)

### BOOKS

In addition to the books covered on the syllabi for the above courses, students should be familiar with the following books as they prepare for the area exam:

Arum, Richard, and Josipa Roksa. 2011. *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Bowles, Samuel and Herbert Gintis. 1976. *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life*. New York: Basic Books.

Collins, Randall. 1979. *The Credential Society: An Historical Sociology of Education and Stratification*. New York: Academic Press.

Coleman, James S. 1961. *The Adolescent Society: The Social Life of the Teenager and Its Impact on Education*. New York: Free Press of Glencoe.

Coleman, James S., and Thomas Hoffer. 1987. *Public and Private High Schools: The Impact of Communities*. New York: Basic Books.

Cuban, Larry. 1993. *How Teachers' Taught: Constancy and Change in American Classrooms 1890-1990*. Teachers College Press.

DiPrite, Thomas A., and Claudia Buchman. 2013. *The Growing Gender Gap in Education and What It Means for American Schools*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Dreeben, Robert. 1968/2002. *On What is Learned in School*. Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co.

Duncan, Greg J., and Richard J. Murnane (Eds.). (2011). *Whither Opportunity? Rising Inequality, Schools, and Children's Life Chances*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Durkheim, Emile. 1961. *Moral Education: A Study in the Theory and Application of the Sociology of Education*. New York: Free Press of Glencoe.

Fischer, Claude, Michael Hout, Martin Sánchez-Jankowski, Samuel R. Lucas, Ann Swidler, and Kim Voss. 1996. *Inequality by Design: Cracking the Bell Curve Myth*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Jencks, Christopher and Meredith Phillips. Eds. 1998. *The Black-White Test Score Gap*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press.

Jencks, Christopher. 1972. *Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America*. New York: Harper & Row.

Kerckhoff, Alan. 1993. *Diverging Pathways: Social Structure and Career Deflections*. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press.

Labaree, David F. 1988. *The Making of an American High School: The Credentials Market and the Central High School of Philadelphia, 1838-1939*.

Lortie, Dan C. 1975. *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Magnuson, Katherine A., and Jane Waldfogel. 2008. (Editors). *Steady Gains and Stalled Progress: Inequality and the Black-White Test Score Gap*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Rosenbaum, James. 2004. *Beyond College for All: Career Paths for the Forgotten Half*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation

Tyack, David B. 1974. *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

## **AUTHORS**

*Although students will no longer be required to write about the scholarly contributions specific authors on the exam, being able to cite the publication and author(s) will provide more detailed answers.*

## **JOURNALS**

### ***Required (1975-Present)***

Students should become intimately familiar with the studies published in the following journals. Although we do not expect students to know every detail in every article, students should be able to identify the most influential articles and be familiar with the main arguments and findings to recognize how a body of research on a given topic develops over time (e.g., since the 1966 Coleman report, how have the various studies on school effects related to and built on one another over time?). The SOE courses should also be helpful in identifying such articles.

*Sociology of Education*

*American Sociological Review\**

*American Journal of Sociology\**

*Annual Review of Sociology\**

*Social Forces\**

(\* Education related articles only)

### ***Suggested (1985-Present)***

These journals are not sociology journals, but sociologists of education, and other scholars who examine questions related to our subfield, often publish in them. While most of what is published is beyond the ken required for the exam, students will still find many relevant articles worth reading and citing.

*American Journal of Education*

*American Education Research Journal*

*Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*

*Review of Educational Research*

*Teachers College Record*