

**SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION
AREA EXAM
FALL 2015**

Day 1:

Part I (Two Hours)

Quantitative-Qualitative Research Methods in Education

Quantitative and qualitative research methods each have both strengths and weaknesses. Select **ONE** of the following areas of research within the sociology of education and describe how researchers have approached this topic from different methodological perspectives.

- Socioeconomic inequalities in academic achievement
- Parent involvement and student outcomes
- Effects of curricular tracking and ability grouping
- Student attendance and persistence in higher education

Be sure to highlight multiple studies in each methodological tradition for each approach on your chosen topic.

- a) Describe the distinctive contributions that each research methodology has made to the topic that you selected.
- b) Describe the major limitations of each approach in studying the topic that you selected.
- c) What do these different types of studies tell us about the topic that you selected? Are the results from these different methodological studies complementary and reconcilable, or are they incommensurate and conflicting? Explain, and describe any important lessons for future research in this area.

Part II (Two Hours)

For **THREE** of the concepts below, define the concept and go on to discuss its theoretical significance in the sociology of education, how it has been operationalized, and key studies and findings that support its relevance.

1. Summer learning loss
2. Concerted cultivation
3. Tournament mobility
4. Measures of Effective Teaching Project
5. Effectively maintained inequality (EMI)

For **THREE** of the concepts below, define the concept and go on to discuss its theoretical significance in the sociology of education, how it has been operationalized, and key studies and findings that support its relevance.

1. "New" Institutionalism
2. Oppositional culture
3. Common school effect
4. Wisconsin model of status attainment
5. Test-based accountability

Remember, you have 2 hours to write 2-3 solid paragraphs for each of the six concepts you select (that comes out to about 20 minutes per concept).

DAY 2:

Select and answer **TWO** of the following three questions: (TWO HOURS for each answer)

Question ONE

Sociologists of education have a long history of looking at school effects on student achievement. Many sociologists have looked at the organizational structures and processes—both formal and informal—to help explain the impact of schools and schooling on student achievement.

- a) How have sociologists conceptualized and examined school effects over time? How have they addressed issues of selection bias?
- b) Which key studies have examined school effects on student achievement? What are the major theoretical and methodological contributions of these studies?
- c) What are the strengths and weaknesses of these studies? Which studies are able to provide evidence to make causal claims?
- d) Looking to the future, how might studies be designed to examine school effects on student achievement in ways that allow sociologists to make causal claims, but also highlight the important formal and informal processes of schooling?

Question TWO

Gender inequality in post-secondary education has drawn increasing scrutiny by researchers in the last decade.

- a) Describe the overall magnitude and trend in gender inequality in post-secondary education in the U.S. Describe gender inequality in terms of both access and degree attainment. Also, please be sure to describe gender inequality at different levels of stratified post-secondary system in the U.S.
- b) Describe some of the most prominent theories of gender inequality in post-secondary education that scholars have proposed to explain the patterns described in part a). Based on the evidence, which theory seems to have the strongest support?
- c) What do we know about differences in men and women's performance and experiences in college? What is known about gender inequality in students' choices about majors and career paths in postsecondary schooling?
- d) Describe some of the most prominent theories of gender inequality in post-secondary education that scholars have proposed to explain the patterns described in part c). Based on the evidence, which theory seems to have the strongest support?

Question THREE

Schools and parents each contribute to the process by which socioeconomic status is transmitted from parents to children. Discuss the mechanisms by which socioeconomic status is transmitted through the school and family using at least three theoretical perspectives. Bolster your discussion by synthesizing the empirical evidence.