

**SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION
AREA EXAM
Spring 2018**

COMMITTEE:
Mark Berends (Chair)
Bill Carbonaro
Amy Langenkamp

DAY ONE

Part I (Two Hours): REQUIRED QUESTION

Please answer parts (a) through (c) of the following question:

Selectivity is a problem that plagues social scientific efforts to make valid causal inferences about educational outcomes and processes.

- A. Select TWO of the following four areas of educational research that illustrate the problem of selectivity bias: preschool, class size, school sector, ability grouping/tracking. Use research in the two areas to illustrate the fundamental challenge of making valid causal inferences in the sociology of education. Be sure to focus on both theoretical and empirical issues.
- B. Describe at least THREE methodological strategies that researchers have employed to address the problem of selectivity. For each strategy that you identify, select one sociological study that uses this approach to deal with selection bias. Evaluate whether, in your judgment, the author(s) of each paper were successful in dealing the selectivity problem.
- C. Return to part (A) of your essay. Choose ONE of the topics that you selected and design a new study that would make an important substantive contribution to research in that area. Your proposed study may involve new data collection efforts, but *restrict yourself to research designs that are plausible* (e.g., randomly re-assigning children to different families should be off the table!). Explain how the design of your study would allow you to make valid causal inferences, and describe the potential contribution of this research to the field in question.

Part II (Two Hours)

Select **THREE** concepts from **LIST A** and **THREE** concepts from **LIST B** below (for **six total**). Be sure to define the concept, discuss its theoretical significance in the sociology of education, how it has been operationalized, and describe key studies and findings that support its relevance to the field.

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).

LIST A (Pick THREE)

1. Bubble kids
2. Hidden curriculum
3. Common school effect
4. Value-added achievement models
5. Effectively maintained inequality

LIST B (Pick THREE)

1. Loose coupling
2. Oppositional culture
3. Correspondence principle
4. Summer learning loss
5. Track mobility

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DAY TWO

Part I (Two Hours): Select and answer ONE of the following two questions.

Question One

In a recent retrospective on the 50th Anniversary of the Coleman Report, Downey and Condrón (SOE, 2016) argue that schools act as "refractors" of inequality. They argue strongly in favor of the premise that schools are *compensatory* in relation to achievement outcomes.

Based on the research literature, do you agree with this conclusion?

In your response, be sure to focus on inequalities associated with (1) family background (socioeconomic status) and (2) race-ethnicity.

Question Two

Many people see schools as both the source and remedy of the problem of inequality in achievement outcomes. In contrast, many social scientists are more skeptical that schools play a key role in creating educational inequalities, and are pessimistic that schools can reduce achievement gaps.

- A. Distinguish between "school effects" and the "effects of schooling." Why is this an important theoretical distinction, and what are the implications for our understanding of educational inequality?
- B. Describe the major contours of research in the area of school effects. What have social scientists learned about the role of schools in creating and/or increasing inequality in achievement outcomes? Be sure to highlight important differences between schools that scholars have studied as potential drivers of inequality in achievement.
- C. Based on the research on school effects, should policy makers look elsewhere to address inequality in achievement outcomes? Explain.

Part II (Two Hours): Select and answer ONE of the following three questions.

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.

Question Four

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 the 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 is known regarding gender inequality in students' choices regarding majors and career paths in postsecondary schooling? What theories have been proposed to explain these gender differences, and which theory seems to have strongest empirical support?

Question Five:

In the last several years, research on exclusionary school discipline policies in America's schools has proliferated.

- A. Discuss the broader policy context that has given rise to these school discipline policies.
- B. Describe the patterns revealed by the data in terms of which students are more likely to experience exclusionary discipline, for what reasons, and under what circumstances.
- C. What does research reveal regarding the short-term and long-term effects of exclusionary discipline on students outcomes?