

SUBSTANTIVE AREA: **Sociology of Education Area Exam Study Guide**

AUTHORED BY: **SOE Committee**
 Mark Berends (chair), Amy Langenkamp, Joel Mittleman

CC: **Bill Carbonaro**

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OVERALL EXPECTATIONS FOR EXAM

After the exam, students should be able to conduct rigorous research and teach both undergraduate and graduate level courses in the area of the sociology of education. 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/ethnicity 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, 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 Sociology of Education graduate seminar (i.e., Amy Langenkamp's spring 2019 syllabus). If students have not taken this class, 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, although 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 include: debates about the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to studying the same questions and debates about internal validity, external validity, and measurement.

EXAM PREPARATION

Required Resources

Although there are reading lists floating around the department, we encourage students to focus on four sets of resources as they prepare for the sociology of education area exam, including:

- (1) Students should get copies of previous SOE area exams to see the types of questions, issues, and terms that the committee considers important to prepare graduate students to teach a sociology of education course to undergraduate and graduate students. See <https://sociology.nd.edu/graduate-program/program-of-study/area-exam-information/past-exams/>
- (2) The department offers the Sociology of Education graduate seminar (CRN 63239-01), most recently taught by Amy Langenkamp in spring 2019. Although the committee does not require that students take this course before taking the exam, students will be responsible for the material covered in this course, specifically the required and recommended readings on the course syllabi, which will lay the foundation for the exam.
- (3) Students should also be familiar with the [*Handbook of Sociology of Education*](#), edited by Barbara Schneider (Springer, 2018). There is a copy of this *Handbook* in the CREO library and table of contents is in link above.
- (4) Students should be familiar with the sociology of education articles over the last five years in the *Sociology of Education*, *American Sociological Review*, and the *American Journal of Sociology*. (*ASR* and *AJS* do not publish a large number of sociology of education papers.)

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.

On the first day, student will be asked to answer ONE REQUIRED long essay question requiring students to write an essay about the various methodologies and statistics for examining particular educational issues. The second section of day one will include short answer questions about concepts (e.g., concerted cultivation, hidden curriculum, effectively maintained inequality); there will be some choice from which students write 2-3 solid paragraphs. 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 authors is recommended.

Recommended 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. The Sociology of Education Seminar (Langenkamp spring 2019) should be helpful in identifying such articles.

Other journals (last 5 years) may also be helpful for laying out key issues in the sociology of education and providing empirical results, including:

*Annual Review of Sociology**

*Social Forces**

American Journal of Education

American Education Research Journal

Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis

Review of Educational Research

(* Education related articles only)

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.