

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

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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 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 outcomes (e.g., 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.

These issues are presented and discussed in the Sociology of Education graduate seminar. Students must take this class in preparation of the area exam.

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. This research is covered in the Sociology of Education and CREO graduate seminars. 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, about selection bias, and about internal validity, external validity, and measurement.

EXAM PREPARATION

Required Resources

Students should focus on three 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.
- (2) Students should have completed advanced graduate classes related to the sociology of education. The department offers the Sociology of Education graduate seminar (CRN 63239-01). Students must take this course.
- (3) Students should read all articles from the foundations list. Among the books on the list, student should choose 5 books to read as they fit most closely with the student's area of specialization within Sociology of Education
- (4) Students should choose 4 subtopics from the list below as areas of concentration. After these areas are chosen, students will meet with the exam chair and then develop a reading list of around 15 articles for each subtopic in consultation with and to be approved by the exam chair.

Subtopic list (choose 4)

Discipline/school-to-prison pipeline
School choice
Testing/accountability
Policy
Sociodemographic inequality
School effects
Early childhood
School segregation
Neighborhood effects
Sociology of Teaching
Teacher Effects
School Organization
Peer effects
Tracking and ability grouping
Parent Involvement
Seasonal Learning
Sociology of High Education
Educational Expansion

Exam Format

The duration of the exam will be **six hours** (two three-hour blocks with a one-hour break in between). The questions will require four 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 be allowed to bring a **reading list** and **approved notes** to the exam. Students are permitted in the exam two pages of approved student-authored notes. These notes may be single spaced, but no smaller than 11-point font. Attempting to pre-draft an exam answer in these notes violates the spirit of the exam. Therefore, notes will not include full paragraphs or essay outlines. Any notes must be approved by the respective area exam committees one week in advance of the exam. Approved lists and notes will be given to the Graduate Studies Coordinator, who will print out these materials for the student to have on the day of the exam.

Although students will have a choice concerning the questions they answer within each section of the exam, students should **expect to be required to answer one** essay about the various methodologies and statistics for examining particular educational issues.

EXAM RESULTS

Overall, exams will be assessed as pass or fail. If students fail the exam, they may retake the area exam in its entirety at the next exam date. Students who fail should meet with the committee members to discuss ways to improve, and double their efforts to better understand the sociology of education.

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.