

UCSC EDUCATION 263
Perspectives on Educational Reform
Spring 2004

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Introduction:

The general purpose of this course is to provide students with analytic perspectives from which they can examine important educational issues. Specifically, this course employs the new institutionalism in organization theory as a framework for exploring how social institutions—as developed historically and reflected in contemporary reform policies—shape the structure of formal and informal learning settings. The new institutionalism explains that organizations, such as schools and museum, change structures to reflect dominant social values in order gain social legitimacy. The values are enacted primarily by professions and the state and over-time become “taken-for-granted”; that is, they become institutionalized.

From the perspective provided by this framework, we will review the history of schooling and museums in the U.S., seeking to identify the values that have been built into the structure of schools and museums. We will then examine current educational reform strategies—including vouchers, charter schools, small schools and accountability systems—and museum reform to explore how institutions shape our efforts to improve both formal and informal learning settings. Finally, we will explore the intersection between the new institutionalism and theories of learning to reveal what it reveals about the relationship between the socio-cultural context and learning and teaching.

Guiding Questions:

Through this course, we will seek to answer the following questions:

1. What features of educational organizations does the new institutionalism emphasize?
2. What dominant values guided the development of public education in the U.S. and how were they institutionalized in the structure of the educational system?
3. How do historically derived educational institutions shape current approaches to educational reform?
4. What does the intersection of institutional theory and learning theory reveal about the socio-cultural dimension in learning and teaching?

Assignments:

1. For most class sessions, a team of 2 students will lead discussions on assigned readings. In consultation with the course instructor, each student team will be responsible for developing questions or propositions to guide the discussion.
2. Three short papers (2-3 pages):
 - a. In the first short paper, students will outline the major propositions that lie at the core of the new institutionalism in organization theory, producing a series of questions that this perspective raises about education.
 - b. In the second short paper, students will identify core, social values that contributed to the development of the education system in the U.S. and describe how they have been institutionalized in the structure of that system.
 - c. In the third short paper, students will explain how historically derived institutions shaped current approaches to educational reform in the U.S.
3. Final paper (10-15 pages):

Each student will produce a final paper in which s/he discusses how the ideas covered in this course expand their conceptualization of and thus their approach to studying the topic on which their dissertation will focus. In writing this paper, the student will:

 - a. Describe the topic on which his/her research will focus.
 - b. Explain the theoretical framework that they will use in studying this topic and state the questions s/he will seek to answer.
 - c. Explain the new institutionalism.
 - d. Discuss how the new institutionalism expands the view of his/her research topic and state new questions that might be pursued regarding this topic.

Grading:

Each student's overall grade for the course will be calculated on the following:

1. Leading and participating in class discussions: 20 percent
2. Each short paper: 10 percent (total of 30 percent)
3. Final paper: 50 percent

Course Schedule:

Week 1

March 30: Course Introduction

April 1: How humans draw inferences: Implications for how we study education
Readings: Nisbett and Ross

Week 2

April 6: The new institutionalism: A theoretical perspective on the influence of social values on the formal structure of organizations
Readings: North; Rowan & Miskel; Scott

April 8 The new institutionalism: Its implications for studying education
Readings: Meyer, Scott & Deal; Ogawa; Rowan

Week 3

No class meetings/ American Educational Research Association

Week 4

April 20: History of American Education
Reading: Tyack (Parts I-III)

April 22: History of American Education: The later agenda and actors
Reading: Tyack (Parts IV and V)
First short paper due

Week 5

April 27: History of Museums
Reading:

April 29: Educational Reform: Its purposes and strategies
Readings: Nation at Risk; Lee; Fuhrman; Elmore; Rowan

Week 6

May 4: Educational Reform: Markets versus the State
Readings: Chubb & Moe; Witte; Riley; Wolfe

May 6: Specific market strategies: Vouchers and Charters
Readings: McEwan; Schneider & Buckley; Henig et al.
Second short paper due

Week 7

May 11 Specific state strategies: Small Schools and Accountability
Readings: Darling-Hammond; Raywid; Richards; Smith & O'Day;
Swanson & Stevenson; Malen et al.

May 13 Museum Reform
Readings:

Week 8

May 17 The new institutionalism and theories of learning: Exploring the intersection
Third short paper due

May 20 No class meeting: Rod at Deans and Directors

Week 9

May 25 The new institutionalism and theories of learning: Exploring the intersection

May 27: The new institutionalism and theories of learning: Exploring the intersection

Week 10

June 1 Review drafts of final paper

June 3 Review drafts of final paper

Finals

June 8: **Final paper due**

SUMMER BREAK!